

Isaiah 9:1-7
Luke 2:1-7

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It's A Boy!

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Both our sons had a lot of green and yellow newborn clothes! Few dared to buy anything pink or blue in case they were wrong in their predictions as to whether it would be a boy or a girl. I suppose we could have known but ultra sound and other testing were just not in vogue in those days or they were reserved only for those instances where difficulties were expected. I have a high school friend whose middle name is Lester. Her mother says it was a struggle not to have Lester as her first name. Her father wanted a son and his child was going to have a boy's name regardless. Even her first name can be applied to a boy or a girl, depending on how it is spelled!

There was no wondering for Elizabeth and Zechariah or for Mary and Joseph. They can go ahead and paint the nursery blue. They can even have the birth announcements printed in advance—with the child's name. The front banner can read, "It's a BOY!"

I wonder, have you thought about the pressure on these two baby boys? They come with great expectations on them. Much rests upon their shoulders as they grow and take their place in the world. John is spoken of in Malachi 4:5-6. *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."* He will be great in the sight of God and the spirit of God will rest upon him. He will be dedicated to live the lifestyle of a Nazirite. He will be like Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Testament. He will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

And, he will be a little weird! In a world looking for perfect children who fit and blend in...John stands out. He will never have his haircut, he will wear non-traditional clothing, he will not drink beer or wine and his diet will be locust and wild honey. Can you see Zechariah with his arm around John introducing him to the other priests in the Temple? Unshaved, dressed in camel's hair clothing – having lived his life in the desert – not exactly how we expect the preacher's son to look and act like. He comes with great responsibility upon his shoulders.

Jesus comes in the servant image of God. The authority of God rests fully upon his shoulders. He comes with all the authority of God.

*He speaks and the winds are stilled.

*He speaks and the blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life.

*He speaks and traditions fall.

*His very presence causes all the evil of this world to shudder.

Any description of him is inadequate. Even those found here in our text in Isaiah fall short of describing who he really is: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. All of these images, all of the hopes and dreams of creation now lie in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem. His authority continues to grow as we go into all the world in his name.

A simple contrast between Jesus and John shows how different they were. People rush out to see John, this strange looking prophet in the wilderness. Jesus blends in and walks, talks, eats and drinks with the people. John's diet is strict and Jesus loves a party. (Who would you rather invite to your next party, Jesus or John?) John is a voice

crying out in the wilderness. Jesus is a life lived in our very midst. Two men, two very different men on whom the power of God rests.

What do we expect from God? Not really an easy question. What are expectations of God?

- Do we see a cosmic Santa who is there to answer all our wants and desires?
- Do we see a 911 emergency responder who will come and rescue us when we are in trouble?
- Do we have an image of a great watchmaker who made the world, wound it up and who has now gone off to a great vacation until time winds down?
- Or do we see a friend, a companion, a guide who walks with us and beside us who enjoys our company and wants to be with us?

Each of these images brings a different set of expectations of who we think God is.

Advent is a reminder of God's humanity. It's a boy! A child is born. God is now living in our world. A cry is heard in the night. He is treated as any newborn child. The strips of cloth wrapped around his tiny body are the same strips of cloth wound (probably tightly) around any newborn of his day. He is placed in a simple manger bed and Mary and Joseph are as anxious as any newborn parents. They have not been given any "newborn" instructions. (Elizabeth and Zechariah have only been given diet information for John.) No matter how much you have been around children it is always different when they are your own. Especially the first born! We wonder at each sound, we are concerned about each movement, is this what is supposed to be happening? I mean, second born children are almost left on their own—we now know how newborn children act and what fascinated us with the first born is now second place. With all the weight of history on his shoulders a child is born in a stable in Bethlehem. God now sleeps in a manger.

What do we expect from God? I can't answer that for you and some days have a hard time answering it for myself. As we come to this third week of Advent we are again confronted with God, Incarnate; God in our midst; God in our lives; God in our hopes; God in our dreams; God listening to and calling to us; A God who wants to be a part of our lives. It's a boy. God is with us—for to us a child is born, a son is given.

There is a wonderful story in the first *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, by Dan Millman.

Soon after her brother was born, little Sachi began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that like most four-year-olds, she might feel jealous and want to hit or shake him, so they said no. But she showed no signs of jealousy. She treated the baby with kindness and her "Please" to be left alone with him became more urgent. They decided to allow it.

Elated, she went into the baby's room and shut the door, but it opened a crack—enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Sachi walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his and say quietly, "Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget."

Advent is our reminder of God coming near – lest we forget.

Canfield, Jack & Hansen, Mark Victor, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Heath Communications, FL, 1993 (Dan Millman, p. 290).