

Anticipation of the Unexpected

Emmanuel, God with us. That has always been the heart of God. From the Garden of Eden to the nation of Israel; from Jesus on Earth to the hearts of humanity. God has always wanted to be with us. That message was communicated and promised from the very beginning. God promised Abraham his descendants would be a nation with whom he would dwell... Abraham looked forward to the realization of that truth. God promised the prophets a Messiah would come... they eagerly anticipated the birth of Christ. Jesus promised his disciples the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and they waited in expectation for that day. So, we see a repetition of God's promises followed by people's expectation and anticipation.

Do you remember the old Heinz Ketchup commercial? "Anticipation, it's making me wait." *The ads depicted kids or families eagerly waiting for the thick, slow-pouring ketchup to emerge from the bottle, with the tagline "It's slow... good." It emphasized the quality of the product... that it was worth the wait.*

Anticipation is woven into the Christmas story. For generations, God's people waited for the promise of a Messiah... a Savior, the One who would bring light into a dark world. And then—in a quiet town, in an unexpected place, to unexpected people—the promise arrived. No one expected the Messiah to come as a baby, to be born in a stable, and announced first to shepherds in the fields. God's greatest gift arrived in the most surprising way.

Christmas teaches us to look beyond what we see and trust what God has spoken. And the unexpected arrival of Jesus reminds us that God's timing is perfect, even when it surprises us. But the Christmas story doesn't only look backward... it points us forward. The **first** coming of Christ teaches us how to anticipate the **second**. Jesus Himself said, "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him" (**Matthew 24:44**). Just as the world was caught off guard in Bethlehem, Jesus warns us not to be caught off guard when He returns. He calls us to wait with anticipation.

So how do we wait well? With **enduring hope**, like the prophets who held onto God's promise. With **willing humility**, like Mary, who said, "Let it be to me according to Your word." And with **joy**, like the shepherds whose ordinary night was interrupted by glory. Anticipation isn't passive. It's **staying awake** in a sleepy world. It's **living expectantly** in an age of distraction. It's **trusting** that the God who kept His promises before will keep them again. Christmas is more than a memory; it's a reminder. **The God who came unexpectedly is coming again.** And in our waiting... our anticipation and hoping... we are shaped into people ready to meet Him.

Days of Elijah