



***The Expected One***  
**A Christmas Message from**  
**Bishop Bruce R. Ough**  
**Dakotas-Minnesota Area of**  
**The United Methodist Church**

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*Dear friends, may your Christmas celebration be filled with the holy expectation that Christ will be born to reign in you forever. This is my prayer for you, your congregation and the world, in the precious and powerful name of Jesus, the Expected One. Amen.*

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I am Bishop Bruce Ough, and I am pleased to bring you greetings in the name and spirit of Emmanuel.

One of my favorite hymns is Charles Wesley's, *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (#196 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*). The first stanza reads:

“Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.”

Joseph P. Lash tells a wonderful story about Eleanor Roosevelt in his biography of the great stateswoman. She was advanced in years and not well; but, she continued to fulfill a busy schedule of appointments. She had agreed to address a meeting in Harlem and it would have been understood if she failed to appear. When she arrived at the hall where she was to speak, the hostess met her at curbside with the words, “I didn't think you would come.” Mrs. Roosevelt looked at her and replied, “I had to come; I was expected.”

Jesus had to come that first Christmas because he was expected. The People of God were expecting a Messiah. And, God wanted to make God's unconditional love for us known through human flesh and blood.

Jesus continues to come to the world in every time, place and circumstance where the people are expecting him. Christ continues to come to us whenever we open our expectant, hungry hearts to his presence.

Sometimes Jesus comes to us in forms and persons we expect. Sometimes Jesus comes to us in shapes and surprises we do not expect. Sometimes we glimpse the new heaven and the new earth Jesus' coming makes known. Sometimes our ideas about God and God's reign are as imperfect as the ancient expectation that the Messiah would come as a military leader to overthrow Rome.

When the Messiah came on that first Christmas, his birth and subsequent life and death were so unlike what was expected that even devout persons missed the point. We, also, are in danger of doing the same if our understanding of God's reign is so tightly bound, so narrowly defined, so limited, so exclusive that we give Jesus no room to startle us with his extravagant love and grace.

Christmas is no time to say to Jesus, “I didn't think you would come!”

To those who do expect him, Jesus comes in all the manifold ways that our diverse world, holy imaginations and spirit-wombs provide. To those who do expect him, Jesus comes in life-changing ways. To those who do expect him, Jesus comes with remarkable frequency and astonishing vulnerability.

This is the Christmas story. God so loves the world, he has to come. He is expected!

Charles Wesley's hymn continues:

“Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.”

Dear friends, may your Christmas celebration be filled with the holy expectation that Christ will be born to reign in you forever. This is my prayer for you, your congregation and the world, in the precious and powerful name of Jesus, the Expected One.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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