

“Expecting Love”

1. The teenager was on pins and needles. She impatiently awaited news
 - a. She had applied to a number of colleges, but she had her heart set on this one specific one.
 - i. It was a bold move: a prestigious university... notoriously hard to get into
 - ii. But she is a bold kind of teenager, and though her parents encouraged her not to put all her eggs in one basket, the teenager had applied to other schools almost just to appease her parents
 - b. This, her dream University, had emailed her that news on her application would be shared in early January
 - c. But then, unexpectedly, the University sent a follow up message. No, not January. This coming Friday. You will receive an email THIS FRIDAY to tell you whether you were admitted or not.
 - d. The week dragged on as she waited for the end of the week. For Friday.
 - e. It was hard to stay focused on schoolwork (not only senioritis but just the excitement of getting into this University)
 - f. But what if she didn't get in?
 - g. But what if she DID?
 - h. The teenager, who doesn't lack in confidence, but who is otherwise not someone who draws attention to herself, opted for a current trend on social media: recording herself on video to capture her reaction to receiving the news from her Dream School.
 - i. Look it up. It's a thing.
 - j. That's a lot of pressure, if you ask me
 - k. The teenager prepared for the email, and for the recording.
 - l. Her parents, skeptical, questioned her about the idea of recording this on video.
 - m. It's fine, she told them. If it's bad news we'll just delete it.
 - n. Delete it from the phone, that is. I imagine that feeling would be hard to delete from her heart.
 - o. Friday came. They were ready. The angle of the phone video looks up, as if a phone is propped up on a dining room table.
 - p. Teen and parents are on screen, indeed seated at their dining room table. The teen is holding her own phone scrolling for the email she knows has just arrived.
 - q. Yes, I've seen her video, which of course tells you how this story will turn out.
 - r. She opens the email, starts reading, her hand goes to her mouth, she bursts into tears, she stands up from the table, briefly jumps up and down, and hugs her parents.
 - s. She goes back to her phone. To make sure.
 - t. Yep. She got in.
 - u. It was good news.
 - v. Never a doubt.

2. Long ago another teenager also waited on pins and needles. But for her, she waited for the birth of her first child.
 - a. The Gospel story tells us of an angel coming and sharing the news of this birth to be conceived by the Holy Spirit, inviting this teenager, Mary, to say yes, which she did.
 - b. But for young Mary, who wasn't yet married, a pregnancy would have a severe social and cultural impact, which, I wonder, is partly why she goes to see her relative Elizabeth right after the angel appeared to Mary.
 - c. Elizabeth, the Gospel also tells us, had become pregnant (the traditional way, albeit very late in life)
 - i. The angel had mentioned to Mary that her relative Elizabeth was six months along in her pregnancy
 - ii. So Mary may have wanted to check in with her relative to compare notes about their unexpected turn of events (and the mysterious and spiritual conditions surrounding them)
 - d. When Mary arrived, Elizabeth's child leaped in her womb as Mary greeted her.
 - e. That was an unrehearsed reaction
 - f. And so was Mary's reaction to this encounter.
 - g. We just read the poetic reaction of Mary,
 - i. who was face to face with her miraculously pregnant relative,
 - ii. who was feeling the movement of the Spirit not only in her life,
 - iii. but she now clearly saw how the Spirit would move in her community, her world.
 - iv. Mary knew this child she was expecting would be life-changing for the world.
 - h. Mary sang a song of God's power setting things right,
 - i. A song of the proud being brought down to size,
 - ii. of the humble being finally lifted up,
 - iii. of an upside down reality which would bring her and all others who had been pushed to the sidelines, to the center of blessings.
 - iv. But what if it didn't happen?
 - v. But what if it DID?
 - i. Mary was focused with certainty that it would be so, just as the angel had promised.
 - i. But for her there was still much time to wait.
 - j. And she in fact stayed with Elizabeth, probably helping her much older and very pregnant relative around the house.
 - i. And they probably pondered together what was coming to each of them, as they were simultaneously expecting at the beginning and at the end of their lives.
 - ii. They were expecting that God's promise would be fulfilled.
 - iii. They were expecting good news
 - iv. And they were expecting that changes were about to come, in such a way as to make them and everyone else reset their understanding of what God is up to in God's relationship with people
 - k. The news would be good, but it would mean a realignment back to God

- i. Because the people had strayed, were straying, continued to wander from God's love and justice and peace and grace.
 - ii. Especially the powerful, the ones calling the shots.
- 3. Maybe we too should be on pins and needles
 - a. Advent tells us to expect God's love – a kind of love that will still catch the world by surprise
 - b. This birth of Jesus which we await, this arrival of God embodied,
 - i. has all the feelings of an ancient story,
 - ii. the strange details of a faraway culture and time,
 - iii. and a message which makes us wonder if we need to take it with a grain of salt.
 - iv. Call it faith.
 - c. But that's it, isn't it? By faith we draw closer and closer to Christmas
 - d. And I wonder if our anticipation really connects us with the anticipation Mary and Elizabeth had
 - e. Afterall, maybe we need to be honest with ourselves that we are on pins and needles about other things.
 - i. About our own health problems or employment insecurity,
 - ii. about the wellbeing of children in our town going to bed hungry or having no other option but to sleep on someone's borrowed couch,
 - iii. about the future of that student who sits next to us in Algebra class, who arrived last year and still struggles with speaking English and fitting in.
 - f. Maybe those things put us on pins and needles because what if Jesus' birth doesn't solve them?
 - i. What if the news of a Savior born doesn't draw people to compassion?
 - ii. What if the story of God-with-us doesn't bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly?
 - iii. But what if it does?
 - iv. What if we are part of the movement of the spirit which helps usher in a little or a lot of God's grace, and justice, and love, just as Mary and Elizabeth had played key roles of their own.
 - v. What if God's love really does come for all?
- 4. We will take sightings of God's love where we can get them, and embrace our role in embodying and sharing that love, so that the people who are waiting will get to experience God's good news. For the birth of Jesus means love has come. But what if it didn't? But what if it did?