



# CNI

---

## FAITH FOCUS -

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

**While we wait for Christmas, it's useful to remember that the symbol of our faith isn't Santa Claus. It's not candy canes or mistletoe. It's not even the Christmas crèche. It is the cross.**

Advent reminds us that we live in expectation of eternal happiness. But we must travel the way of the cross to get there. John the Baptist lived in expectation. But he wound up in jail. He answered God's call to prepare the way of the Lord. And he got locked up for it. You'd think he'd learn his lesson and find some other line of work. But no: from the depths of Herod's dungeon he keeps expecting. He

keeps calling out... and in this gospel Jesus answers him.

John stands on the divide between the old and the new covenants. He is the last in the line of messianic prophets. He is the first to know that all the prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus: The blind see. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor have the good news preached to them. And yet John goes right on rotting in jail until the executioner comes for him. Is that what he expected? Is that fair? Didn't he, haven't we, waited long enough? What's all this endless waiting and expecting about?

It is the way of the cross. Individually and collectively as the Body of Christ we live in expectation... in hope, not in fear. Christ has already done the hard part for us. Our salvation has long been bought and paid for. In faith we have a free ride all the way home. But we must take that ride. We must make the leap of faith. And every day we

must take up our cross and follow him. That's what he expects. That's what we must embrace.

The Christian way is either easy or it is impossible. It is easy if we do things God's way. It is impossible if we do things our way... the what's-in-it-for-me way... always on the lookout for the big payoff... always in full transaction mode, ready to trade our good deeds for God's blessings. We forget that God has expectations, too. He doesn't want or need us to throw him a bone. He wants it all. He doesn't want scraps from our table. He wants us.

In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis spelled out God's expectations for us: "I have not come to torture your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. Hand over your whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours."

That is what John the Baptist did. He gave his will to God. That is why the only truly joyful place in Herod's whole palace was deep down in the dungeon.

Where is the truly joyful place in your life this Advent season? Is it in expectation of family and friends getting together? Is it anticipation of Christmas cheer? Nothing wrong with that... unless it exists in a vacuum of faith. Faith is the difference between pursuing happiness and embracing the joy that is God's Christmas gift to us. That's why there is Advent... to spiritually bring us home for Christmas... to focus our faith on the coming of Christ... to align our expectations with those of the Father.

Like John, we find fulfillment when we find what God expects of us. Ask him and ask him again. Seek his will every day. As God's expectations become clearer, take a really hard, honest look at the way you live. Then get to work putting your expectations

in line with his... getting your life right with God. And what better time to do it than now. This is Advent. This is the season of great expectations.