

CREW Bible Study

Youth XP3 Message Series – Christmas Lights

Week 1 - Expectations

- **BOTTOM LINE:** God is with us.
- **GOAL:** To help students understand and celebrate that God made the first move toward humanity and toward them when He came to earth as a baby.
- **SCRIPTURE:**
 - *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). – Matthew 1:21-23*

MESSAGE

It’s the start of the Christmas season and here’s a question for you – are you more likely to keep your expectations low at the holidays, or set them high?

Some people say that the healthiest and happiest people are those whose expectations meet reality. Basically, it means that if you keep your expectations low, you are more likely to have them met. And when that happens, you’re more likely to be happy – or at least less likely to be disappointed.

But the holidays are one time when we tend to amp up our optimism. We want to have, *all* the food, *all* the decorations, *all* the friends and family, *all* the holiday movies, *all* the traditions, *all* the things on our wish list, *all* the *stuff* that this season could possibly offer. Something about Christmas makes us dream big, raise our expectations, and imagine having the best Christmas EVER!

And not to be a downer, but the reality is, our expectations are hardly ever met. Something is bound to disappoint us at the holidays, whether it’s a person, a place or a thing. And because we expect so much, the disappointment hurts that much more. This can happen in any year, but Christmas 2020 may be more so. Maybe you’re already feeling disappointment because of COVID. Chances are, COVID has probably already lowered your expectations for the holidays– or at least changed them. Have you lowered your expectations so that if things do end up happening like you wish they would, it’ll be an awesome surprise? But you’re not counting on it?

You know, sometimes we do this same thing in our relationship with God. Because God doesn’t always do what we expect Him to do. And when that happens over and over, we stop expecting so much. We lower our expectations so that then, if God does answer our prayer, if He does do what we ask Him to do, GREAT! It’s an awesome surprise.

I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound like something to celebrate at Christmas.

But what if we've got God all wrong? What if we're completely missing the point He wanted to make that very first Christmas?

Here's some truth – we aren't the first ones to have expectations *of* God and *for* God, and have Him not meet them. In fact, 2000 years ago, people were in no way imagining or expecting God sending His son into the world the way He did.

Mary was a young, pregnant, teenager, not yet married. She and her fiancé Joseph didn't have a lot of money. And they had to make a trip to the town where they were originally from to be counted in a census report. They made the long trip and when they finally arrived in Bethlehem, all the hotels were full. Mary was super tired, super pregnant and super uncomfortable, and now there was nowhere for them to sleep. And then, Mary went into labor. The baby was coming and they were here, far away from home, with no bed to sleep in or have a baby in. I'm sure this did not meet their expectations!

Now, yes things were different 2000 years ago, but regardless of the era, this situation is less than ideal. It stinks. And in Joseph's desperation to find a place for Mary to have this baby, the only thing he could find, was a barn. And that's where they ended up. And that's where Mary had her first child. Away from her family. Away from her home. Away from anything comfortable. Just she and Joseph, alone.

Not what they expected. Not what anyone expected. What would *you* have thought? If I were Mary or Joseph, having heard from the angel Gabriel and having committed myself to this, I would have been likely to think:

- God is mad at us.
- God has forgotten us.
- God is punishing us.
- God has abandoned us.
- Where *is* God?
- Is there really a God?

Because if God doesn't do what we think He should, if God doesn't behave like we expect Him to, then it makes sense to assume we've done something wrong, or that God isn't what we thought He was.

In fact, there were a lot of people who already thought these things about God long before He sent Jesus into the world in a barn. People had expectations about God that weren't met. But it wasn't that God had let them down. It was that they expected something completely different than what God had in mind. They expected a warrior, a ruler, a punisher of enemies, a king, someone to take charge.

And who was God? What was God like? The angel Gabriel had told Joseph exactly what God would be like when He arrived. In Matthew chapter 1, verses 21-23 we hear this.....

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

This wasn't what the people expected, but they got something far better. They got a God who was with them. Not in a palace, but in a barn. He wasn't an out-of-reach ruler. He was an accessible, reachable, relatable God. Someone like them. Someone *with* them.

"God with us" means that no matter what, we are never alone. No matter the choices we make in life. No matter our good days or our bad days. No matter our family situation or financial status. No matter what we've done that we are proud of or embarrassed about.

So, what I want you to remember is this: No matter what, God is with us. God is with you. You can expect Him to be there. It started with that very first Christmas, and it continues to be true. It means that no matter your reality, COVID Christmas 2020 or not, God is with you in it.

Here's two things to think about this week.....

1. **Remind yourself every day that God is with you.** You aren't in this life alone. You weren't brought into this world to figure it all out on your own. Through the good stuff, the bad stuff, the scary stuff, the annoying stuff – through all the *stuff*, God is with you and wants to hear from you.
2. **Remember that God's plan is bigger than your plan.** Whether your expectations for God are low or hyped up, what God sees and what God does can often catch us by surprise. If God doesn't do what you expect Him to do, don't turn away from Him. Turn your attention towards Him even more. Know that He is with you to show you the way.

When you know God is with you and you know He's promised never to leave you, it's far more difficult to be disappointed in God. That's the reality of Christmas. And it's good!

FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are you naturally more likely to keep your expectations low or hype them up? In general? What about during the holiday season?
2. What are some areas of your life where you try to keep your expectations low? (family, school, sports, clubs, friends?)

3. What might cause you to change your expectations of someone or something? Describe a time when this was the case. Did you increase your expectations or lower them?
4. Is changing what you expect from someone or something easy for you or is it difficult?
5. Do you think most people have higher expectations or lower expectations when it comes to God?
6. What does the phrase "God with us" mean to you?
7. What does it mean to have a "close" relationship with someone? Do you think a "close" relationship with God is a realistic expectation? Why or why not?
8. God made the first move toward being close with us by coming to Earth. That's why we celebrate Christmas. What is one way you might move closer to Him this Christmas season?