

A PURPOSE TO OUR HOLIDAYS 1: INTO CHRISTMAS

“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (Luke 1:45, NIV)

RAISED EXPECTATIONS ARE RARELY A GOOD THING FOR A GOLFER. Only yesterday, coach and teacher Aimee Neff wrote about the performance anxiety that comes for golfers who can’t quite achieve what their mind tells them is perfection. There’s always a gap between what we want and what we accomplish, and if we can’t bridge that gap with realistic expectations, we will soon leave the game and move on to something less stressful. May I suggest gardening?

The conundrum in all this is that as people of faith, when it comes to God our expectations are often far too low. We pray cautiously, fearing disappointment. We worship timidly, afraid something “powerful” might happen. And we serve timidly, worried that the God of all knowledge and strength might next call us to something bigger than our capacity. Like the servant who buried his master’s portion rather than putting it to work, we act in small ways. But worst of all is the smallness of our faith.

I don’t know how you picture Mary, the mother of Jesus. But let’s consider simple genes. She lived in the first century, was of Middle Eastern descent, a female, and a teenager. Mary may have been an exception, but each of these things typically points to one who is smaller than others. Put them all together and she almost certainly was a slight thing, impressing no one with her bearing.

Yet look at her faith! When she went to Elizabeth, Mary’s relative and the mother of John the Baptist, the older woman recognized something beautiful in Mary. Of course there was the child she was carrying, Jesus. But Elizabeth’s blessing is based on an attribute of Mary: her faith. This young woman of obscurity and now public suspicion actually believed what God had said and that it would come to fruition. This child in her, conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, would save his people.

Oh friends, why are we the weak ones, the timid, the paralyzed? We are the men and women whose God is the Lord! We are those who have every reason to believe and whose belief is placed in the one who has come in humility, served in obedience, died in sacrifice, risen in splendor, and ascended to glory. In this glory, he will come again. Let us believe as Mary did—with unflagging expectation in the one great God. Let us believe and be blessed.

Opening questions Would you say your golf expectations are too high, too low, or just right? • How do your Christmas expectations compare with others in your family: spouse, parents, children, grandchildren?

READING Luke 1:39-55; Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:13-18

Expectation and faith (Luke 1)

How do Mary’s words demonstrate her expectant faith in God? In what way does she connect his past faithfulness with his present trustworthiness?

Misplaced trust (Jeremiah 17)

What is the difference between trusting in man and trusting in God? How much of this is about our faith and how much is it about God’s character?

Our own great expectations (1 Thessalonians 5)

This passage addresses Christ’s return. What expectations can we have for that day? How is this hope encouraging to you?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/Mq4Lcxn3HKo>