

## Sunday before Christmas 2017

### The anticipation of Christmas

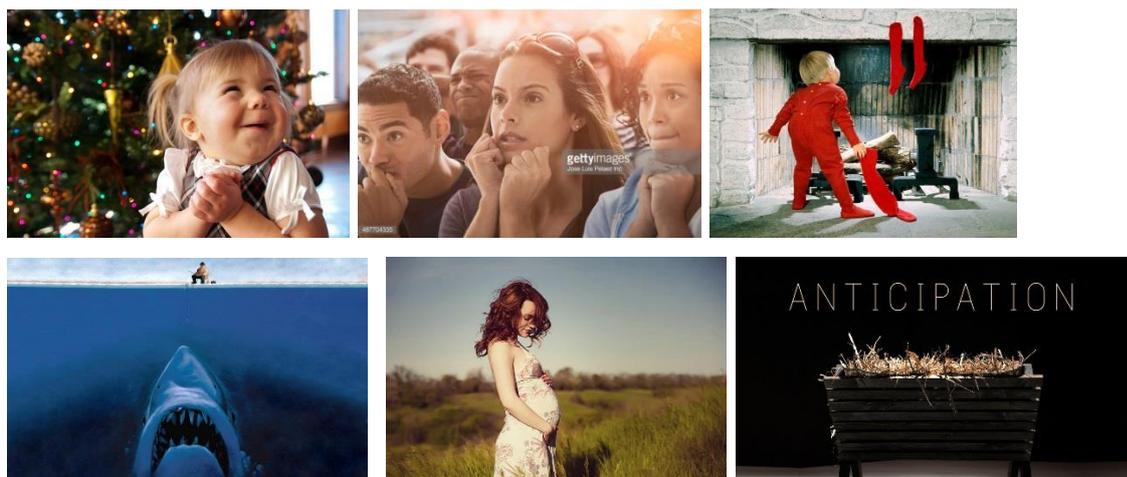
#### Couple of songs

Waiting is often the curse of our existence—waiting in an endless line, waiting while caught in traffic, waiting on hold on the telephone, waiting while someone gets ready.

Waiting, however, with a touch of anticipation brings spice to our lives—waiting to open Christmas gifts, waiting to go on a trip or holiday, waiting for the birth of a child.

God has blessed us with a wonderful gift—the miracle of anticipation.

We all know what it feels like to anticipate something special. Look at these photos, there is positive anticipation and negative anticipation



Anticipation is generally considered to be a good thing, it gives us something to look forward to, to hope for. That is why I love planning holidays. In June when the weather is cold and dreary, Gay and I plan for a holiday in September and then as soon as we get back from that we plan our summer holidays and in a few weeks' time we will take off to Waihi Beach for a break where our kids and grandchildren will join us, I can't wait.

Anticipation is the reason we are not allowed to tell our three year old grandson that Gran and Poppa will be visiting, because his anticipation is such that he doesn't sleep and he keeps on asking when, so we are only allowed to tell him a few hours before it actually happens. Kids are so much fun!

Anticipation is a big part of Christmas. The retail stores use anticipation big time. People have a love/hate relationship with the build up to Christmas. Obviously the busyness and traffic isn't good, but I quite like the anticipation, I quite like the decorations, but I don't like putting them up; I love the tree, the lights, and I actually quite enjoy looking for gifts, as long as I know what I am looking for, like a typical male, get in there, achieve the goal, get a bargain and get out again.

Today is the last Sunday of advent and advent is all about anticipating the arrival of Christmas. Some of you will have the advent tree we distributed this year, smaller versions of the one there, as you count down to December 25.

### **Advent thought?**

#### **Offering**

#### **Songs**

Advent is a season of anticipation and hope. They go together. Anticipation and hope are brother and sister. And our God is a God of hope. Hope for the here, and hope for the hereafter.

For centuries the Jewish people were bullied and pushed around by super powers like Babylon and Greece and Rome. And all that time they held on to this hope and anticipation that one day a Saviour would come, a liberator, a hero, a leader, a Messiah who would deliver them, like Moses who delivered his people out of Egypt.

They clung with white knuckled faith to passages like **Isaiah 9:6-7**,

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.*

Expecting that one day Israel would be a super power, led by a super leader. But the Jewish people were in for a BIG surprise.

What I want to do today is to try and put ourselves into the shoes of a number of biblical characters, characters based around the Christmas story and consider what they might have been anticipating.

*I have the characters scrambled on the screen I want you to guess the order they appear in the story (some feature more than once so the order is where they first appear)*

*When we identify the correct character, I want you guys to tell me how they are part of the story and what they might have been anticipating.*

- Zac and Liz - Luke 1:5ff
  - Zechariah was a priest and married to Elizabeth, they were old and had no children, until an angel appeared.
  - Zac was told Liz would have a baby and to name him John. And he couldn't speak until John was born.
  - When Liz visited Mary, John leapt in the womb
  - Born John the Baptist
  - What were they anticipating?
- Angels –
  - Luke 1:11ff with Zac
  - 1:26ff, with Mary
  - Matt 1:20ff, with Joseph
  - Luke 2:8ff, with shepherds

They spent most of their time saying don't be afraid!

  - What were they anticipating?
- Mary - Luke 1:26ff, Matt 1:18ff
  - She was engaged to Joseph
  - Angel came
  - She was confused by what the angel said
  - Despite her confusion she said I am the Lords servant, let it happen as you have said.
  - **Song Lyrics - Mary did you know.**
- Joseph – Luke 1:27, Matt 1:18ff
  - We are told he was a good man – he decided to sensitively call the wedding off
  - Until he met the angel
  - What was he anticipating
- Shepherds – Luke 2:8ff
  - Just minding their sheep and their own business
  - Then the angels
  - Don't be afraid
  - Told about baby Jesus
  - More angels

- Shepherds went to the manger and told the story
- Mary is still confused v19 “wondering what it all meant”
- What were they anticipating?
- Simeon and Anna – Luke 2:25ff
  - Both were old, not married
  - Simeon was just a good bloke and had been told he would die until he had seen the messiah
  - Anna was a widow, and a prophet, she served in the temple. Probably means she had no children at least no boys.
  - What were they anticipating?
- Wise men – Matt 2:1ff
  - Who knows how many
  - They saw a star and followed it for up to two years
  - What were they anticipating?

As I said before, advent is a season of anticipation and hope. They go together. Our God is a God of hope. Hope for the here and hope for the hereafter.

The birth of Jesus is called the first advent. The return of Jesus is called the Second Advent. The word advent simply means "coming." And meeting the Lord in the future one day is all because of Christmas and the hope that Jesus brings.

But as followers of Jesus, we don't just have hope for life after the grave. Believe it or not as far as the bible is concerned, it's not all about heaven or hell. We have hope for life right here and now. Most of us have lived long enough to realize that life can be tough, life can be messy. The journey of life is full of pot holes and detours, U-turns and dead ends. It doesn't always make a whole lot of sense to us. Imagine what Joseph and Mary experienced as they began life together.

The confusion we face in life can sometimes steal our hope. The hope that our lives really matter. The hope that our lives are going somewhere and counting for something.

But the God of hope wants us to know that our life does matter, that our life does count, and that every detail of our lives, good and bad, has one goal in mind ... to make us more like the baby born in Bethlehem, more like Jesus.

That's what the Apostle Paul states so forcefully in **Romans 8:28-29**,

*28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

The baby born in a manger on that first Christmas Day wants to have a family who share his values. And the events of our life, both positive and negative, are intended for good for those who love God and are meant to make us more like Jesus, all because of Christmas. That we can anticipate.

God wants to make you and me more loving, more giving, more humble, more joyful, more peaceful, more faithful, more gentle, more compassionate, more self-controlled. And 'life' is his curriculum to accomplish that. So the pot holes and the detours, the U-turns and the dead ends of life all have meaning for those who love God, even though we may not see it.

A few years ago at Christmas, you might remember, we asked people to give names and addresses of people who they felt needed to be blessed. They might have had a rough year, been overly busy, struggling financially, or whatever, so we delivered a box of Christmas goodies to them. I went to a home that I knew nothing about the situation of the people, the names had just been given, I didn't even know by whom. I knocked on their door and stood there with this huge box of food and chocolate. They didn't anticipate this, they were just doing life the best they could, they cried, I cried, as normal. She keep saying over and over, "Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Thank you so much." And I didn't know what to say.

Life is full of surprises, some of them good and some of them not so good? Life is full of things that we can't anticipate. We never know what a day holds do we? But if we love God, we know who holds the day.

And because of Christ, we can anticipate that 'the God who was born in the manger' is coming again and we will see him face to face. And when we do, he will dry every tear from our eyes and we will be with him forever.

But in the meantime, we can also anticipate that he uses the stuff of every day, some trivial and some tragic, to do his good work in our lives to make us more like the baby born in the manger.

## **Song**