

Waiting¹

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

December 24, 2023

Scripture: (1) Isaiah 7:13-14, 9:6-7
(2) Luke 1:26-38
(3) Psalm 27:1-3, 13-14
(4) Luke 1:67-75

Purpose: To help us recognize that we are all waiting for something. In the wait, we can rest assured we are in the perfect plan of God. In our waiting, we should serve God through serving others.

1) Waiting...

Waiting is not a popular activity; it is not something most people enjoy; it is not something most people respond positively to. For most people waiting is an uncomfortable place between where they are and where they want to be. It is a desert, a wasteland; for most, it is a waste of time. Most of us, myself included, do not like waiting; and most of us are driven to get out of the wait; most of us are driven to do something, do *anything*, except wait.



There is a song we often sing at Christmas called: *“Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and with fear and trembling stand; ponder nothing earthly minded...”* I suspect that, just as we are not very good at waiting, we are equally inept at silence. Silence is for most

of us an uncomfortable place as well, for often silence is for us just something else to wait through. We want to fill silence with sound, and sometimes that sound is our complaint, our lament over the wait.

But what if it turns out that waiting is exactly the place God has called us to dwell? What if the wait is God-ordained? Surely Advent is about waiting. During Advent we remember God's remarkable self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son, and we look forward to his coming again. There is a sense of waiting for the promise of Christ's Second Advent.



As we look to the story of Christ's first Advent, it is significant to notice that all the major figures are waiting. Zechariah and Elizabeth are waiting. Mary is waiting. Simeon and Anna, at the temple when Jesus is brought in, are waiting. Surely, the nation of Israel has been waiting as well for the promised



Messiah. The whole opening of Luke's gospel is filled with waiting.



But, waiting, as we see it in the opening of Luke's gospel is not an empty waiting. It is not the waiting on a hamburger which will only satisfy for a few moments. It is not waiting on an unpleasant doctor's appointment. It is not impatient waiting for something insignificant. Rather, waiting as we see it here in Scripture is waiting with a sense of promise.

Each of these people are waiting on something significant. They have received a promise that allows them to wait. They have received something that is at work in them, a seed which has begun to grow.



You see, the only way we can really wait is if what we are waiting for has already begun for us. Waiting on God is not a movement from nothing to something; instead, it is a movement from something to something more, something greater. Zechariah, Mary, and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna were living with a promise which nurtured them, fed them, and made them able to stay where they were. You see, waiting on God, is waiting with a promise, an expectation, which allows us to be able to wait and to wait in silent expectation for what God would bring, to wait knowing that he is going to reveal himself to us and for us.

(2) Waiting...

What a flood of emotions Mary must have experienced after hearing this news from the angel. There must have been joy at the prospect of having a child. There must have been fear at the prospect of having a child. Surely Mary was full of excitement, yet haunted by feelings of inadequacy. Perhaps she had questions- Can Joseph and I handle this? Why us/me? What lies ahead for this baby? Maybe she felt a calming reverence in light of what has just transpired. Mary must have known a sense of expectation, a hope for the future.





We do know her response, as we read that Mary offered herself – *"Here am I; Here am I, your maidservant- let it be!* What a beautiful response for a young

woman in the face of something eternally significant! And in the wake of this news, she waited for the birth of the Son of God. The means of the Messiah's coming into the world would be as a baby. Mary would have to wait as the child grew within her.

Waiting...Mary realized the power of what was to come and, in her waiting, she was active. I like that idea. While the details may have been out of her control (isn't that a frightening thought to not be in control!), she knew a seed had been planted and that something had begun. In her waiting, Mary was creating a space for God to fill, to act. She was allowing God to work in her life – not just in anticipation of the end result, but what would occur in the waiting. She was present in the moment – living actively in the present. She was waiting.

There is a glimpse in scripture of Mary's waiting...the canticle she exclaims during her visit with Elizabeth. (Luke 1:46-55) And Mary said,

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*



*For He who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is His name.
And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has put down the might from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,
As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.*

In that beautiful song, Mary worships. She exalts God, the Mighty One who has bestowed this honor upon her. Mary recognizes her role as servant. She does not lift herself as the great one chosen for this role in a prideful way, but in recognition of who God is and, in his faithfulness, to fulfill his covenant with the people of Israel. And just as God demonstrated His faithfulness, Mary demonstrated hers. In waiting, she entered into an intimate communion with God.

Waiting...it is a necessary part of our relationship with God. The Psalmist says, *"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope, my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who wait for the morning."* As we cry to God from the depths of our souls and as our souls wait upon the grace of God, let us engage in active waiting. The promise is there; do not be afraid, the



Lord is with you. Let us respond as Mary did. Let us worship, let us offer ourselves as servants, let us be silent and listen, let us respond in faithfulness. Let us be active in our waiting.

(3) Waiting...

The portrait of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is beautiful. They spent three months together waiting. Elizabeth was to give birth to the forerunner of the Messiah. Mary was to give birth to the Messiah, the very Son of God. These two women waited together. They created space for each other to wait. They demonstrated the power of community. We too can learn a lot from these two about waiting in community.

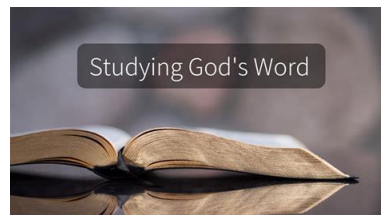


Waiting together...in joy, in grief, in the day-to-day experiences of life is a celebration of God's love, mercy, and grace expressed. As community, we gather around a promise, the promise of God's presence in our lives. Waiting in community is the realization that God has been working, God is at work, and God will continue to work in our lives and in the world to fulfill his promises.



(4) Waiting...

We wait in community. We wait together for the fulfillment of God's promise, and this promise is shaped by an alertness to God's Holy Word...This is why God's book – the Bible – is always in the midst of those who gather. We read the



Word so that the Word can penetrate our spirit and create a whole new life in us. And as the written Word becomes flesh in us, we learn one more thing about waiting. Until this moment we have talked about waiting upon God in one sense. If we consulted the dictionary up until this moment, we have been talking about waiting on God in the sense of the definition: *"to look forward to eagerly,"*



But this morning as we think about community, I want to propose that we also talk about waiting on God in one other sense, that of the definition which is: *"to be an attendant or servant for"*

You see, as we wait in community upon God, as we allow the scriptures to speak to our lives, we are able to answer God in our waiting as Mary did, *"I am the Lord's servant."* Our waiting in community becomes opportunity to wait upon our God together in service to one another and to the world. Amazingly, sometimes waiting is the place where we begin to serve out of our own emptiness and allow God to do His greatest work through us.

I have been thinking lately, do we have room for Jesus in our life, family, in our home? The story of Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem was met by an Innkeeper who had no room for them or Jesus in their life or community. I would like to close with this story on Christmas Eve.



NO ROOM IN THE INN, except...²

Wally was nine years old and in the second grade, though he should have been in the fourth. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind, but well-liked by the other children in class, all of whom were smaller than he. At times the boys did have trouble hiding their irritation when the uncoordinated Wally would ask to play ball with them. He would stand by



- not sulking, but hoping - always a helpful boy, willing and smiling, the natural protector of any child he felt was being mistreated.

As Christmas time approached, plans were made for the annual school pageant. Children were being assigned their parts - angels, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph. Wally stood by expectantly - then suddenly his joy knew no bounds, for he heard the teacher say, "Wally, I want you to be the Innkeeper." (Not many lines to learn, she reasoned - and his size would make his refusal of lodging to Joseph even more forceful.) Little did that teacher dream the lesson that such a tenderhearted boy would teach to all who would attend that program!

Then came rehearsals - the shepherd staffs and manger, beards, crowns, halos, and a stage full of squeaky voices. The person that was most caught up

in the magic of the night was Wally. He would stand in the wings, watch the performance with fascination; his teacher had to make sure he did not wander on stage before his cue.

Then it became Wally's turn. He stood, holding a lantern, by the door of the Inn, watching as the children who portrayed Mary and Joseph came near him. "What do you want?" Wally asked with a brusque gesture.



"We seek lodging." Said Joseph.

"Seek it elsewhere - the inn is filled."

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are very weary."

"There is no room in this inn for you." Wally looked properly stern.



"Please, good Innkeeper, this is my wife. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Now, for the first time, the Innkeeper relaxed his stiff stance and looked down at Mary. With that there was a long pause - the audience became a bit tense.

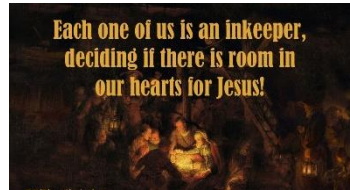
"No! Begone!" the prompter whispered from the wings.

"*No! Begone!*" Wally repeated automatically.

Joseph sadly placed his arms around Mary, and Mary laid her head upon her husband's shoulder, and the two of them started to move away. The Innkeeper did not return inside his Inn, however. Wally stood there in the doorway, watching the forlorn couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling unmistakably with tears.

And suddenly - this Christmas pageant became different from all others.

"*Don't go, Joseph*", Wally called out. "*Bring Mary back.*" You could see Wally's face grew into a bright smile. "*You can have my room!*"



A burst of laughter - then silence - then tears flowed freely as the message came through to the listeners. Wally, the boy considered "slow", had made room for Jesus. He could not turn Mary and Joseph away - God's only begotten Son would be welcomed by him! His tender heart had made room for the Savior.

We gather to celebrate Christmas Day tomorrow. That Christmas morning long ago in Bethlehem, there was no room for Jesus. You need to make sure there is room for Him in your heart – every day!



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ This service and devotion is based upon a chapel service held at Campbell University Divinity School on December 7, 2004. The leaders for the Chapel service were Faith Beam and Mary Keltner.

² Micky's Funnies, An Inn "Funny," December 20, 2019.