

Question: What do these three people have in common: the expectant mother who is past her due date, the traveler who is almost late for his flight and stuck in the security lines with the new procedures at the airport, and me? The answer: Waiting. Waiting Expectantly! You see the theme for the sermon in the bulletin there. Waiting Expectantly. Anyone here know anything about that? This past week, two different people commented on the graying of my cranial covering. Sometimes, I'm not so much a fan of "waiting". But sometimes, that's all we can do.

We've been waiting for our permits and permission to proceed with our building, haven't we? We submitted our first set of site plans to the County on August 10th. I don't remember the date our building plans were submitted, but they were approved on October 14th. After a couple of revisions on the site plans, on December 23rd, we were told to expect our answer and signature (if approved) on December 24th. That didn't happen. So we waited. We were told to hope for an answer the week between Christmas and New Year's. That didn't happen. Each day I've talked to someone, they hoped the next day would be the one that produced results. When I was writing this – I was in my 3rd hour of waiting for a return phone call from the person whose secretary told me she'd have him call me in an hour. Now I'm in my 120th. I'm not always such a fan of waiting.

How about you? Whether you like to wait or not – ultimately, that is what our life as Christians is about – waiting expectantly – isn't it? You look at our text and it's right out there in front. In the Greek, it's the first word to catch our attention.

Just like us, those Israelites were "waiting expectantly". And look at what they found out. First, it becomes pretty obvious that **waiting expectantly is tough to do**. There John the Baptist was, preaching and baptizing, and look at what the text says. **"The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ."** You almost feel sorry for them, don't you? We know what it is like to wait for a few months – and we're pulling our hair out. They had been waiting for something promised to them for hundreds, even

thousands of years for some of those promises. You think the term “Waiting expectantly” would fit?

Absolutely – and it is tough to do. It’s tough because it is so easy to get distracted, misled, to lose focus. People have suggested to me that maybe the next step in the permit process is a lawsuit or giving up or just banging my head into a wall. It’s tough to wait expectantly. Look at how the Israelites were getting distracted. They saw John, and he sure looked different. He sounded different, he worked differently from anyone they had seen before – and God certainly seemed to be with him. But, they were a little off on who they were waiting for.

But that makes sense too, because, hearing what John had been saying to these people shows just how distracted they had been. He had to tell them to start living God’s love, helping people who needed help. He had to tell them to stop cheating people, taking advantage of them to help themselves. He had to tell them to stop trying to keep up with the Joneses and be content. John came and, really called them back to God’s way – so it was natural to wonder if he was the One, the One who had been promised.

The people had been distracted. And we can understand that. They had been waiting so long, and the things of this world are right there, and money is nice, and the forbidden fruit seems so tasty, and... we get that, don’t we?

Earlier I said that waiting expectantly is the life of the Christian. We are waiting for Christ to return. We are waiting for him to keep his promises of protecting and prospering us. But while we wait – it’s natural to find something else to do to pass the time. In your living room, maybe that’s reading a book, turning on the TV, or breaking out the Wii. But in life, what is it that distracts you? Maybe it’s your job, with all its demands and stresses and pressures to spend more and more time there and be less and less there for family and your neighborhood and your church. It’s easy to forget why you have a job in the first place, isn’t it?

Or maybe it is the hobby that distracts you, and you schedule life around that, or the TV schedule, or your kids’ extracurriculars, and time studying God’s promises is only if there’s a rerun or there’s an off day. It might even be your pride that distracts you and you start to focus more and more on...you.

Think of how the Israelites had turned what they were waiting for into someone who would make their life better now.

They had been promised a Savior to rescue them from the bondage of sin and eternal death, and after all this waiting, all they were looking for was for someone to rescue them from the things that hindered their distractions, and give them power over the Romans.

So John pointed them back to what they were really waiting for. John reminds us who we are really waiting for. Look at what he said: **“One more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** John pointed them to the one who controls eternity. He reminded them to be waiting expectantly.

He told them to “Repent and believe.” And his message still stands for us today. As we wait expectantly – we need to “Repent and Believe” because we’ve fallen so many times since waiting expectantly is so tough to do. But we can repent and believe because **the waiting ends in Christ**.

You know that all this waiting God is making us do for our permits – one day we’ll look back at this and stand in awe of what God was doing through it. We’re waiting expectantly now, but ten years from now, if we’re enjoying the beautiful building that comes out of this, will we even remember the delays? We’ll have no reason to – because we see what all of this is for – or more accurately, who all of this is for.

Look at our text: **“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”**

They had been distracted. They had been promised this Savior, this substitute. Isaiah had recorded God’s promise about His Savior 700 years earlier, the one who would free us from the captivity of sin and restore our sight of who God is. He said this: **“I will put my Spirit on him.”** Then, when John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the **“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”**, he said, **“I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the spirit come down and remain is he who**

will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” Realize what they were seeing here.

Peter is recorded in Acts 10, talking about how, here in our text, Jesus was **“anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.”** In this baptism that Jesus didn’t need for himself, we see what we’ve been waiting for. We see the one who kept his focus on what all of life is about. We see the one who didn’t get distracted by all the world’s distractions. We see the one who stepped in to our world, to our baptism, to our sins – and paid them for us. Realize what you are seeing in this Baptism. Jesus steps in our place, **“to fulfill all righteousness”** he says. And as he does, he put his righteousness in our Baptism and he took our sins that our baptisms washed away – he took them on himself. And he carried them on from there.

We wait expectantly for rescue from the things we call problems – but he came to rescue us from our sin, from ourselves – and to give us life. The waiting ends in Christ. Because from that Baptism, he went out and fulfilled the Father’s will perfectly, he went out in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the Father’s blessing, anointed for the job of being the One the whole world has been waiting for.

And he did what he came for. Since he took our sins in the water of Baptism, he had to pay for them. And you know...he did. Jesus came up from that water and became the water of life by giving his life for ours. That’s why the Father was well pleased with him. He kept all those promises we’ve been waiting for – and he still will keep them.

In these past weeks, we’ve seen what those people at the Jordan saw. We’ve seen heaven open and God’s Word declare Jesus’ work. We’ve seen the Holy Spirit descend on God’s people. We’ve seen the baptisms of Jaylen and Jarrell, Cooper and Victor, and now today – Lyra. And as we see it, we remember the promises God made to each of us in our baptisms. God has claimed us. God has entered our hearts. And now, we wait expectantly for the time when we get to enter His eternal home.

When we remember what we’re waiting for and who we’re waiting for – waiting isn’t that bad. In fact, it’s heavenly.

In Christ,
Amen.