

1 Sermon, December 23, 2012

Texts: Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 4:18-21

Title: "Expect a Miracle"

What makes a miracle?

We talk about the Christmas miracle, Christ being born in human form, among us.

I'd like to look at what makes a miracle.

1. Waiting

I could go home today and make a sandwich with luncheon meat and miracle whip – but I wouldn't be making a miracle, or even a whip. I'd be making a sandwich.

If, however, I was starving, with no food in sight, and sandwiches fell from the sky – that would be a miracle.

For a miracle to happen, it has to be something we yearn for, something we need but don't have – something we're *waiting* for.

I think that the human body is little short of miraculous, how everything works together in such a wondrous way. But we normally don't look at our hands and say, "Isn't it amazing what I can do with my hand?"

No, it's a miracle when I get into an accident and my hand no longer can function, and even the doctors doubt they can get it to work, but following surgery, with God's healing, I can play guitar again.

It's a miracle because something that I was yearning for happened, when I didn't think it would.

2. God's grace

A miracle is also something that God does.

It's not a miracle if it is simply something that can be fixed by human effort. We wouldn't say, "Oh, it's a miracle!" when someone puts the chain back on our bike and we can ride again.

When it's a miracle, God does it.

Forgiveness can be a miracle. I know a family where two brothers were estranged from each other. There were lots of complications about

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the family business. But one finally decided to let God heal his heart, and let go of the hurtful stuff. They came together and found healing. That's a miracle.

3. Usually - a Miracle Worker

When something is a miracle, there is usually a miracle-worker. In the Bible it was Moses or the prophets or Jesus.

When blind and deaf Helen Keller learned to communicate, she was patiently taught over years by miracle worker, Anne Sullivan. Certainly God's grace played a huge part in giving both Anne Sullivan and her student the patience it needed for Helen Keller to become the leader she became.

When East Germany shook off its Soviet control, and the Berlin Wall came down, it was because of faithful church leaders who believed that Christ gave freedom. East German leaders had believed the church was obsolete, but the churches became a sanctuary for everyone who yearned to be free: environmentalists, feminists, punk rockers, and peace activists. The church organized non-violent protests, and brought about the end of Communism in East Germany.

Relief in places like Darfur and Haiti has been brought about by miracle workers – aid workers who have made the difference between life and death for many.

You may be a miracle worker. You have probably already made a holy difference to someone in need. You have probably already been a bringer of the grace of God to someone who was longing for something better.

You may have provided words that helped somebody find the way out of a dilemma. You may have given money that helped someone to a new life. You may have been a healing presence when someone just needed somebody to lean on.

4. Something being put right

The last aspect of miracles is that they put things right. When a miracle occurs, it means something that was hurt becomes healed, something that was broken becomes whole, something that was unjust gets resolved.

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We see that in the miracles of Jesus. Jesus not only performed miraculous healings of people's bodies. He also was the prince of peace, who Isaiah said would: "establish and uphold [the kingdom] with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore."

Jesus came to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. And Jesus comes to put things right. For some, right now, this may mean healing. For some, it may mean eternal life. For others, it could be a new birth of freedom. For still more people, it could mean an understanding of God's love in the world that puts things into place.

As you celebrate Christmas, I hope you discover miracles. I hope you see in Jesus' birth a long-awaited promise, given by God's grace. I hope you see him as the one who puts things right.

And I hope you discover the miracle-worker in yourself.

Amen.

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14, NRSV.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. . . .

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." Isaiah 9:2-7, NRSV.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:18-21, NRSV.