

New Year's Day

With the birth of Jesus, the prophecies of Isaiah happened. Remember those words of Isaiah: "A child has been born for us, a son given to us; and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. He will have vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom." And: "The Lord's spirit will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD." But what Isaiah spoke of and what the people expected didn't match up to the Jesus being born in a stable with the first birth announcement given to shepherds.

Today I retire for the 6th time. For 8 years retirement has been a beginning and ending process. But then beginnings and endings have been true my whole life. When one thinks back on his or her life, what comes to mind are events such as high school, college, marriage, parenting, empty nester, and a profession. Each of these had a beginning and also an ending. For example, the end has come of my time here at FoC. Thank you! This has been a delightful and pleasurable time. You have been most welcoming, appreciative, and accepting of me. As I am in the habit of saying, it is much more enjoyable to say hello than goodbye.

It is true that beginnings and endings come with all sorts of baggage. It was true for Jesus and true for us. School, marriage, children, even retirement come with their joys, as well as their expectations, and even disappointments. If you are married, what were your expectations of being a spouse or of your spouse? What caught you by surprise about children, or your work and profession? For me, a good example is being a pastor. I needed to make some adjustments in my expectations. I had my own ideas of what a pastor was to be. So I have been a different kind of pastor.

It is not always easy to be one's own person in most any situation when expectations don't meet with reality.

Well, FoC is about to have a beginning to an ending and this ending will result in a new beginning. God always works this way with us. You have had Senior Pastors Castens, Wahl, DeFor twice. All have a beginning and an ending. Now Pastor Nelson will have a beginning. Though it will be his second beginning at Family of Christ, it will be his first as senior pastor. What are you to do with this exciting new beginning? As I have said beginnings bring with them expectations.

This is, in particular, true with Pastor Josh Nelson. Some of you knew Pastor Josh from before, others didn't, and some are left with an impression of expectations from what has already been said about him. Needless to say, the expectations are pretty high. Over and over we have heard, "When Pastor Josh gets here such things as budgets and giving will be improved." As the result of

conversations some have already had with him, we have heard, "Pastor Josh will want to do this or that." His calendar is already filling up. The mold has in part already been made for what will and will not happen. Keep in mind -- things have changed over the past 12 years here at Family of Christ and for Pastor Josh. This is a new beginning for all of you and for Pastor Josh. There is a difference between being an associate pastor and a senior pastor. As an associate, you can often get away with a lot more craziness than when one is where the buck stops.

So what are you to do with this new beginning? Let God lead you. Let God lay out the path and the agenda. Let God continue to transform you and your leadership. Expect the surprises and interruptions of God.

In the Christmas story, shepherds were changed. It was a foretaste of what was to come for all who followed Jesus. And "The shepherds returned home (Did you catch this? It doesn't say to their fields.), glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told." The voiceless had been given a voice by God. The shepherds who represented a poor and low class, 80% to 90% of the world's people, were given a new beginning, new life, and new hope. Their status and position didn't change. But God had given them each a new image they apparently took to heart. This is the expectation we can take away from this story for each of us. God has given us a new heart even for this new beginning that is coming for you.

The expectations for Jesus were that he would be King of the Jews, and bring a new heaven and new earth. He did, but according to God's design, not ours. This in large part led him from a birth to a crucifixion. But remember -- he was named Jesus. Reading the birth story both in Matthew and Luke we hear what this means. "You shall call his name 'Savior' because he will save." From what: sins, death, the dark side of beginnings and endings, and of life. And the Savior saves us from ourselves; from our expectations that might be our will and not God's. God will continue to bless you with the peace of hope, love, and faith in Jesus the Savior.