

Lim, Swee Hong talks with Holy Trinity Thornhill about “Who is our Messiah? What is our expectation of a Messiah?”

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Waiting is hard. It gets particularly hard when we are dealing with a difficult predicament where good news means our problems are solved while bad news means things will remain bad or gets worse. This was the motivation behind John the Baptist's question conveyed through his disciples to Jesus when John asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Can there be another Messiah? For those of us who are Christians, we are taught to link the idea of Messiah to the person of Jesus, so this question by John the Baptist to question the Messiahship of Jesus seems rather odd. After all, he was the one who baptized Jesus in the river Jordan and when the baptising ritual was done, the heaven opened, the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Jesus. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17) So why this question from John the Baptist to Jesus?

Before we criticize John, we might need to understand the concept of Messiah. For the Jewish people, the Messiah is a liberator who would make things right, a deliverer who changes situational paradigm, a hero who fulfills the hope of Israel's restoration and bring about a global kingdom of God where justice and peace prevails. This expectation has not been lacking in Israel's history. In the situation where the Israelites are oppressed, the Messiah would somehow appear and free them. Consider Moses who challenged and defeated the Pharaoh of Egypt. David the shepherd who defeated Goliath the giant Philistine warrior. How about others like Samson who brought the temple roof down on Israel's oppressor, the Philistines. Then about two hundred years before Jesus was born, there was Judas Maccabeus. Judas was a Jewish priest who rose up in revolt against the Macedonian Seleucid Empire that had banned Jewish public worship and defiled Jewish temple with Greek gods and goddesses. The Jewish people in Jesus' time considered Judas Maccabeus a Messiah and long for a day where Messiah comes again.

Who is our Messiah? What is our expectation of a Messiah? One thing is clear – the Messiah brings forth dramatic changes to the lives of the people and their reality. Consider Moses and the others. By their action, the lives of the people are momentarily changed for the better. But it is Jesus where the change has dramatic impact on their being and living. He said to John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me." Indeed, people who encountered Jesus will never be the same again. That is God's understanding of Messiah. The impact of the Messiah is not just liberator or deliverer or hero but saviour. It is not short-term gain in the people's lifetime but a long-term yield from the present to eternity. Jesus does not address our needs for the present time but prepares

us for the time when we will join him as part of the kingdom of God. Jesus said to those who were there with him that day, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." We who accept Jesus as our Saviour and Messiah are now members of the kingdom of heaven. We are greater than John the Baptist.

Who is our Messiah? What is our expectation of a Messiah? What is God's expectation for those of us who follow the Messiah?

Christmas that is fast approaching is often associated with gift giving. Often, we practice this ritual with our loved ones. We are equally touched when our gifts are accepted with heartfelt thanks, or when we receive gifts. Yet, we must not forget that God has also given to us his gift of Jesus. Emmanuel, God with us. Are we grateful? How are we expressing our gratitude to God? I suggest to you, God would want us to make a difference in the lives of others as messengers of God's love so that these words by New Zealander hymnwriter Shirley Murray become true for our neighbourhood and community beyond Holy Trinity. She wrote,

*This year, this year,
let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!*

<Teach the refrain>

Now as we watch the video, may I invite you to sing the refrain when you hear it.

<Play the video>

<Stop the video when it ends>

Let us sing the refrain one more time.

*This year, this year,
let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!*

{For the words and music, see <https://youtu.be/IV7CArRZay0?si=sfowFdlqyw5lx2Lr> }

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you for your love. Our hearts are grateful for your gift of eternal life through your son Jesus Christ. Help us to reflect your gift through our action of loving of our neighbors and community. Give us grace and strength to be your hands and feet, to play our part in helping others experience your liberating love. Speak to each one of us that we may exercise our ministry in your name for your glory, honour and praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.