

3RD SUNDAY MESSIAH

A lonely bachelor decided he needed a pet to bring some cheer to his quiet life, and so he went to the local pet store. “I’ve got just the thing you need,” the shop owner said. He brought out a cage with a brightly colored parakeet singing a beautiful song.

The man loved the parakeet, so he bought it. For days, the man smiled enjoyed every note that the little bird warbled. Then, the man noticed something he’d missed: his parakeet was missing one leg. Even though the parakeet sang just as beautifully as before, the man began to fume at the idea that the shop owner had sold him a defective bird.

The next day, the man returned the parakeet to the store. “You sold me a bird with one leg,” he complained to the owner. To which the owner shrugged his shoulders and said, “You want a bird that can sing or a bird that can dance?”

For two weeks, we have considered how a baby born in the manger met the people’s expectations for Lord and Shepherd. The title that most challenged the people’s expectations is the one we consider today for the Third Sunday of Advent. Who is this baby? Messiah.

The word “Messiah” in Hebrew is the same as the Greek word “Christ.” They both mean “God’s Anointed One.” The Old Testament records three different types of people that were anointed. In Leviticus, the people referred to the priest as “the anointed one.” Second, the prophet Samuel anointed Saul and then David as king of Israel. Finally, in the Book of Kings, God instructs Elijah to anoint other men for the office of prophet.

When Jesus was born, the Jews expected three things of the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One: he would be the ultimate priest, king and prophet.

But Jesus wasn't born in the Temple, where the priests served. The religious authorities therefore scoffed because he did not have the education of a priest.

Jesus wasn't born in the palace where the king reigned. When the wise men came looking for Jesus, the palace of Jerusalem was their natural first stop. But King Herod assured them there was no successor born to him there.

And Jesus was not born in the wilderness. The authorities considered John the Baptist in today's scripture because John looked like a prophet, lived like a prophet and sounded like a prophet. Yet John told them while he was a prophet, he was not the Messiah.

In addition to these three strikes, there was one final unmet expectation: The Jews believed the sole purpose for the Messiah upon coming to earth was to bring the Day of the Lord: to bring judgment upon the earth. And in their minds, this meant a final restoration of Israel, elevating the Jews above all other people.

Jesus associated with sinners, with Samaritans, with non-Jews, with women – all persons considered unworthy of God's attention. For these reasons, the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. And the Jews were wrong.

Jesus was priest. Instead of being a priest who accepted the sacrifices brought by the people, Jesus would himself become the sacrifice, eliminating the need for anyone to mediate between God and us.

Jesus was king. What the wise men recognized at his birth, Pilate recognized from Jesus' conduct at his trial. Because of this, the charge placed on the cross over Jesus' head was not, "This man said he was King of the Jews." It was "The King of the Jews."

December 11, 2011: 3rd Sunday of Advent

Jesus was prophet. Long before his arrest and trial, Jesus made clear the kind of death he would experience: death on a cross. But he did this to demonstrate what kind of Messiah he was. He did not come to wear priestly robes, a royal crown, or even the camelhair linen of a prophet. Jesus came to wear stripes on his back, to demonstrate to the world a God who put aside all of his power and authority for the sake of those he loved.

Who did Jesus believe he was as God's anointed one? He said it best himself when he told Nicodemus. "For God so loved the world" – not just the Jews, but the entire world – "that God gave His one and only Son, that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life."

May we this week humbly prepare to receive the Messiah that doesn't meet our expectations, because our expectations might also be set excessively low. Instead, let us receive the Messiah who exceeds them.