

Expecting God in Unexpected Places

Christmas Eve service

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Message

[Peter enters. He is wearing worn out carpenter jeans, a carpenter's belt and carrying some lumber. He stomps in swinging the board around, looking to see if he hit anybody, those near duck out of his way. Then Peter places the piece of lumber on the stage where other stuff is – like a ladder and tools, and more wood. He is grunting with the effort. He then proceeds to speak in a New York, Jewish, tough guy accent.]

Mazel tov! I'm your speaker for the Christmas Eve service. Sorry. . . Maybe I'm not what you expected. I'm a builder (a carpenter to be more exact). I ran a family business in Nazareth. Nobody expected anything good come out of Nazareth. My name is Joe Bar David, or how you *goyim* say it, "Davidson." "Bar" in Hebrew means "son of." So, for instance, "Bar Rabbi" is like "son of the Rabbi." In fact, the Barabbas kids lived nearby (very religious, very patriotic). I was "Bar David," "Joseph of the house and lineage of David," (King David). Actually, it didn't mean much (there were a lot of us "Davidsons"), and even though I was a "Davidson," I didn't feel like no son of David. I felt forsaken. . . We all did.

It'd been 1000 years David was king. Then Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians and, for the last 60 years we've been overrun by the worst of all—Romans. I didn't see God anywhere: "God was not with us." I figured "God is not Savior," it seemed God the Father was missing.

I know it's different in your day . . . But in my day, if you didn't know who your Father was, you didn't know who you was. They had an ugly name for it. And if you felt like one, you lived like one—like you had to prove yourself, justify yourself, and create yourself.

See? I felt like a bastard.
We all did.

Like a good Jew, I'd pray to God every day, but in my heart, I was screaming, "God, why have you forsaken me?" More than once, Roman soldiers burst into my shop screaming, "Jew, make a cross for a Jew!" (They could've done it. It's just two timbers, but they made me, just to humiliate me.) As I prepared the timbers, I trembled with rage, wondering if it would be someone I knew.

Just to get through it, I'd picture a Roman centurion. [Joseph Bar David (aka Peter) begins to pound nails in order to build a cross.] I'd picture the Messiah (that means Christ—the prophesied son of David who would come and save his people). I would picture the Messiah nailing Romans to crosses. He would show the Roman terrorists what crosses were for! The Torah is clear, "Cursed is the man that hangs on a tree." I brought this one to show ya. [Joseph Bar David (aka Peter) holds up the cross he has just built.]

Those were dark times and Israel was a dark place in a very dark world. BUT...I had a light . . . or maybe a lighthouse, I'm talking about Mary. "There was just something about Mary." We were already betrothed. In my culture, that's basically married, but no sex! Believe me on that: Mary was a saint. I love Mary, but her in-laws...*Meshugener* -nuts!

One day, Mary came to see me at work. She seemed troubled— like she was pondering something in her heart. She told me that she was leaving for Judea to visit her crazy, old, barren Aunt Elizabeth. She mumbled something about Aunt Elizabeth being pregnant. I laughed out loud! Mary left. I felt forsaken. . .

Three months later, when Mary returned to Nazareth, I was just so glad to see her, and yet something was different. . . I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist. I said, "Mary, what's going on? Why the trip? And, uh, why the unexpected weight gain?" It was then that I heard the two words that would change my life forever: "I'm pregnant" (she fell apart, weeping). I mumbled, "Who?" It was then that I heard the one word that would end my life as I knew it. She said, "God." And I said, "No way!" And she said, "Yah-weh." And I said, "No way." And she said, "Yah-weh." "No way!" "Yahweh."

The name "Yahweh" is so holy that we didn't even say it, and now, I'm asked to believe that a 14-year-old peasant girl from hick town Galilee has been impregnated by Yahweh -the Consuming Fire?? *Meshugah!* Crazy! That's not just adultery, not just blasphemy, that's insanity. I was hurt and so angry.

The law prescribes public stoning for adultery, but I couldn't harm Mary. She was so sincere, and she told me about the angel that said, "Mary, nothing shall be impossible for God." But in my mind, the two words "bastard" and "Messiah" just did not go together—impossible!

I decided to divorce her quietly, but my heart wasn't quiet—it was screaming, alone in my own darkness: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me—your bastard boy—Joseph?"

But then, I had a visit from an angel in the dream. It said, "Joseph Davidson, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall call him Jesus, for He will save His people from their *sins*." Wow! Wow! Wow! But even as he said it, I thought: "You must mean you'll save us from *Romans* (the terrorists), not 'our sins'".

Well, it was a small thought, and I soon forgot it. I remembered Isaiah chapter 7. King Ahaz needed to be saved from Syria, and Isaiah prophesied, "*A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.*" That's the Messiah—the great light "*...and of his government. . . There will be no end*" (Isaiah 9). Emmanuel "God with us."

I jumped out of bed and ran to where Mary was staying. I begged her forgiveness and despite all the ridicule, and the kibitzing in Nazareth, I took her home.

The Angel thing had said I should name him "Jesus". "Yeshua" is how you'd say it in my language, from *Yehoshua*, meaning "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh saves."

It was a common name. Some of your ancient manuscripts still attest to the fact that one of the Barrabas kids was named Jesus. So there was a Jesus Barrabas and now Jesus Bar David or Bar Yahweh—Emmanuel—"God with us"—Messiah. . ."Messiah." I pictured Romans down dropping to their knees in terror before my boy confessing: "You are the son of God, King Jesus Bar David." [Joseph Bar David (aka Peter) laughs in sheer glee at the thought!] We didn't know what it all meant, but we were sure of this: God was in it. And since God was in it, it would be smooth sailing from here on out—health, wealth, and no more crosses for Jews (Romans maybe, not Jews). That's what we expected.

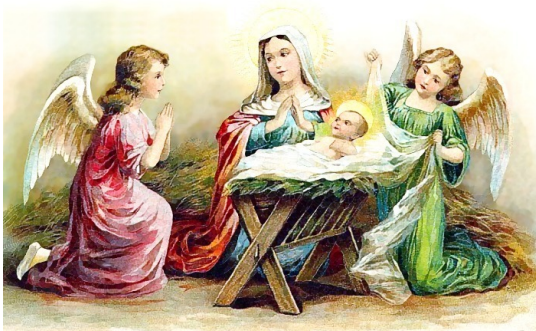
Well, it was about then, that the Romans announced the census. They didn't mail the form to you. No. They made you schlep your way to them, in the town of your origin. That was Bethlehem, the "City of David." "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread." (And I always wondered, "What bread??") Well, it was a four-day journey, and Mary was heavy with child. "Oh Little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. . ." You're joking right? It was the census, *Meshugah!* It was insane. And Mary's pains had started. I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist!!

We went to an inn, and the inn was full. I said to the innkeeper: "Look, she's pregnant!" The innkeeper says, "Well, that's not my fault!" And I shouted, "It's not my fault neither!" A stable was the best we could find. Mary was in anguish. I was in anguish: "Did I screw up Christmas?" What a Schlemiel. I thought God was with us, and leading us, but this made no sense—the pain—the dark—the flies—the smell—the crap! And I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist!

Mary screamed! There was no time to think! The baby was coming (let me rephrase)—The Messiah was coming—God was coming!!!! But what a way to meet him! And what a place to meet him -Oy veh! Keep in mind that I was not only being introduced to Yahweh, I was being introduced to the nether regions of the female anatomy, and in our religion, menstruation, body fluids, and all that lady *schmutz*, it was all unclean. This place was the very place Eve covered in the garden in shame! And this place was the place God appeared to me.

Church people say, "When and where did you find Jesus?" Well, that's when and where—kind of funny, I know. . . and kind of profound! The very place we all covered in shame—that's where I met Him. "And what did he look like?" You ask? He looked like a booger covered in *schmutz*. You ever seen a newborn baby???

He didn't look like this:



And he didn't look like this:



And he sure didn't look like this:



That's just creepy.

"Radiant beams from thy Holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace."

Who writes this schlock? No. It wasn't like that. It was 1000 years of failure, confusion, pain, shame, and darkness. And then an eight-pound, naked baby, covered in *schmutz*, crying!

That's "God with us."

NOT WHAT I EXPECTED!

But that is where I met God. I suppose that's where a lot of men my age meet God. The baby is breath of God, and very little dust, very little flesh, naked, weakness: nothing but breath of God covered in bruises, blood, *schmutz*.

Mary screamed. And suddenly I was holding Him and He cried and cried and cried. And then I said, "Yeshua" and immediately, He stopped—shalom. He knew my voice!

For several months, whenever I spoke, everything in that world vibrated with my voice, and He knew it—he knew me and then...I knew Him.

I cut his cord with a rusty knife. Mary washed him as best. She swaddled him and rags and then held him to her breasts. He suckled, and Mary acted as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

I said "Mary, oh my God, Mary, Mary, Mary, do you really think it's HIM?" And she said, "Quiet, Joe. Let him nurse. Let him sleep." So I wondered. Actually, "I wondered as I wondered." I wondered:

What if this was God somehow?
Had God ever been held like this?
Was this what God wanted all along—a kiss—a touch—communion?
To be loved when he was good for nothing,
Just good because a baby is good for nothing, just good?

Such incredible thoughts filled my brain and my heart. Maybe God was so much more than Creator and Unquenchable Fire. Maybe "the Burning" was just the edge of this. Maybe this was the center. Maybe God was and always is Unquenchable Love? I had always feared God, and so honored God, but for a moment, I thought, "Hey! I kind of like God."

That night, I dropped to my knees in front of the baby held to my wife's bosom. That night God conquered my heart with naked weakness covered in nothing but bruises, blood, spit—The Son of God.

The baby was asleep now. I whispered, "Mary, Mary, could he be HIM? Could this be the incarnate essence of Yahweh, the ground of all being, seeking some sort of existential communion with all humanity through this kenotic manifestation of his essential beingness?" Mary gazed into my eyes and whispered, "Shut up, Joe. The baby is sleeping."

We placed Him in a common manger, made of wood (like this—pointing to the cross that was built earlier) . As we did, all those amazing ideas seemed to evaporate—or maybe the ideas were hidden or wrapped, wrapped in common swaddling clothes- in a common manger, in a common stable: Logos—idea wrapped in a common baby, born to a common carpenter and a poor, unwed, teenage, peasant girl.

People passed by, and snickered at the pitiful sight. I would've too—maybe you still do—because nobody expects the King of glory in a place like that. Nobody! Well, except shepherds. And that's because an entire multitude of warrior angels appeared to them and told them! Why did God tell a bunch of lowlife shepherds and not Caesar Augustus, or King Herod, or at least the manager of the Holiday Inn? I thought: "*Meshugener!* God is insane."

But we had a party. They held Yeshua and sang to baby Yeshua, and then they were gone, and I thought maybe I was insane—*meshugener!* Know what I mean? It's like God

gives you just enough to keep going, but you're still poor, still confused, still sitting in a stable, in the dark, covered in *schmutz*.

Well, you know the stories:

Simeon prophesied: Yeshua was set "for the rise and fall of many,"

And how "a sword would pierce Mary's heart as well."

You heard how the pagan wizards showed up later.

You heard how I had another dream and we fled to Egypt.

You heard how Herod massacred the toddlers in Bethlehem.

You heard how we moved back to Nazareth,

And Yeshua grew and became strong and wise.

And let me tell you, I fell in love with my boy Yeshua. At first, it really stressed me out—being His dad. I went to the Great Dad's seminar at our synagogue, but they really had nothing on raising the Messiah. You should've seen me trying to explain the facts of life.

When He was twelve, we accidentally left him at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. We were already a day's journey from Jerusalem to Nazareth when I realized, "I lost the Messiah," "Oy vey!" - That's bad. I found him in the temple and He said, "Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's House?" Sounds kind of like a smart-alecky as I tell it now, but he never disrespected me, as if I wasn't his dad. In fact, it was like he expected to see God The Father in Joe Davidson—His dad. So, it didn't take from me, but gave everything *to* me. And I taught Him stuff, and God the Father taught Him, through me. And he was a carpenter because of me.

One day, I got a splinter in my eye. He tried to help and gouged my eye. "Jesus Christ!" I yelled. I looked at him with my good eye, and I saw a big chunk of wood in His eye. I laughed and said, "Yeshua! Never go taking planks out of other folks' eyes when you've got a log in your own eye."

I taught him how to make yoke for oxen. He became famous for yokes so easy on the oxen that almost any burden would seem light.

One day, we were building a table and Yeshua got his finger caught. It was broken and bleeding and I could tell he wanted to cry. I said, "Yeshua, it will heal. And it's good. Look at me: to make anything good, you got it put your flesh and blood into it. That's what it means to be a builder -a creator!

See? God the Father, fathered the Messiah through me - "the Word of God" in me. I never expected that!

The rumors persisted and I did expect that!

The other kids would tease him (especially the Barabbas kids). They called him, "Jesus Bar-a-Who?" Son of who? Son of none—no one.¹

¹ Ironically Joshua is "son of Nun." Exodus 33:11

They called him "bastard," and technically they had a point. Now, I use that word, because if you've ever been called that word, I want you to know: You're in good company.

They called him "bastard"- but no one has ever acted less like a bastard than Jesus—less forsaken than Jesus.

The kids would tease, and Jesus wept; he wept for them as if they didn't know who their Father was.

In Jesus there was no fear, no doubt, no shame, no need to hide himself, or justify himself. It was like everything in his world (the light- the dark- the pleasant -the painful- the good, and even what we call "bad"). It all vibrated to the sound of the Father's voice. And this is what God the Father was saying: "*Behold this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*" It didn't make Him proud, but just the opposite, as if He knew everything is a gift.

Several times, I found Him dancing and laughing all by Himself. I'd say, "Yeshua, what are you doing?" And He'd say, "Abba, my, Abba, is just so fond of Me, and daddy, He is so fond of you too. He is *your* Abba." He loved because He knew He was loved!

He was a walking party. No matter who you was or what you done. . . in Yeshua's eyes, your mere existence was reason to party. It made me and Mary nervous because it seems to make Yeshua vulnerable.

Love does make you vulnerable to pain.
And believe me, Yeshua felt pain.
It wasn't that He didn't feel pain; it was how He bore it.
"Love bears all things" - "endures all things."
Yeshua's yoke was easy—not because there was no burden,
But because of how He bore it.
He bore each moment in perfect faith.
Faith that each experience, each breath was like a cup handed to Him by His Father
And so He drank each moment with abandon.
He lived every moment losing His life and finding it.
He had faith!

And that's what all of humanity is missing. On some level, we each believe that we are bastards. We each believe that we have been forsaken by God - who is love. We have very little faith in Love. But not Jesus, He is who we all are meant to be. And so people either surrendered to Him and his walking party, or they wanted to kill him as the ultimate insult to their ego and all their desperate striving.

Yeshua never judged a soul, yet His very existence (like light in the darkness) is the judgment of this world. Just like old Simeon said, "*He is set for the rise and fall of many - a sign- that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" Jesus Bar David is the judgment of God. Jesus Barabbas is like my judgment. He led a violent rebellion - It was what I expected. He fought for his kingdom, which was of this world. He set out to

terrorize the terrorists and crucified the crucifiers. At the Passover feast, terrified by Yeshua's freedom and courage, He said, "Would you have Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Bar David?" In other words, what kind of Jesus - what kind of "God-saves," what kind of Yehoshua do you want? The one that came to save you from Romans? Or the one that came to save you from your sins? The one that crucified, or the one that is crucified...for all?

My people chanted for Jesus Barabbas. And so, our father handed Yeshua a cup and he drank it to the last drop. It was a yoke (a cross beam) fit for Him from the foundation of the world. I was no longer present in your age. Yet I did see (like the prophet said, *"Every eye will see him - everyone who pierced Him."* (Revelation 1:7)

They nailed Yeshua to a cross—my cross! I don't know if it was a cross I made, but it belongs to me. Maybe you can help me. I'd like to set it up to show everyone (A member from the congregation helps set up the cross for all to see.)

Well, like I was saying: they nailed my Yeshua to a cross and it belonged to me. It belongs to me, for as Yeshua hung there, the sky grew black; he lifted his head and cried, *"My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"* That was my line! That was my curse! And that was the first line of Psalm 22 written by King David. It starts like that and ends with the conquest of death. Yeshua cried, *"My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"* That was like faith—spoken from a place of faithlessness—my place of faithlessness and shame. That was Yeshua praying to God the Father on my behalf, praying out loud to God the Father what I had only grumbled to myself in my own heart. That was Yeshua (the Word of God) having descended into my fear, my shame, my forsakenness, my hell, and interceding for me. Yeshua—in me!

When you find wonderful things in unexpected places you love them all that much more. Why else would you wrap all your presents for Christmas morning? Maybe all creation is like wrapping paper containing the burning heart of God given to you!

I never expected God in Mary.

I never expected God in a manger.

I never expected God on the cross.

And I sure as hell, never expected God to show up in hell, . . .

Especially my hell!

But you see? The light shines in the darkness!

Maybe all the darkness is just wrapping paper to help you fall in love with The Light!

Yeshua cried, *"Father forgive them."* He descended into darkness and the darkness could not contain Him. Then He cried, *"It is finished"* and delivered up His Spirit. It was at that moment the Roman centurion, and the *goyim* with him, dropped to their knees before Yeshua and confessed - confessed, but not in terror like I expected, but in faith—that means trust. They said, *"Surely this was the son of God."* I expected God to conquer Rome, but not like that. Not with the Spirit of Yeshua falling on Romans. Not with Christmas in ROME!

Well, Yeshua was hanging there naked as the day he was born—naked weakness, covered in nothing but bruises, blood, and spit. And then I saw Mary, but now there were several Marys. They gathered around Yeshua. They took down: (body broken and blood shed). They held him. They washed him. They kissed him. I realized: "I seen this before—that night in Bethlehem when God conquered me, with naked weakness—covered in nothing but bruises, blood, and spit."

You know, Yeshua was born into this world in Bethlehem. And he was born out of this age in Jerusalem. Like the prophet said, "*He is firstborn from the dead,*" "*firstborn of all creation.*" It's His Spirit that cries, "Abba father" in you. That's how God completes you in His own image. Faith in you is the Spirit of Yeshua in you!

The prophets say that one day Yahweh will fill all things. See? The manger is how it begins (Jesus is "the Beginning"). A new heaven and earth is how it ends (Jesus is "the End"). Like the angel said to the shepherds: "*Good news of GREAT joy that will be for ALL the people.*"

Communion

The night Yeshua was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, "*This is my body given for you. Take and eat.*" And he took the cup saying, "*This is the covenant in my blood poured out for many. Drink of it, all of you.*"

Yeshua fills you with Himself. He is the faith, hope, love we each are missing.

If you reject Him, (the word of the Builder—the Creator), you choose nowhere, nothing, darkness, death, and hell. But when you surrender to him, it is Christmas in you—the Word becomes flesh in you.

And one day, like me, I think you will say:

I never expected God in a teenage peasant girl!
I never expected God in a manger (covered in *schmutz*).
I never expected God on the cross of my shame,
I never expected God in hell,
I never expected God - in ALL things - filling ALL things with Himself,
But most of all, I never, ever, ever, ever, ever expected God in Me.

Understand? You are not a bastard!

It's Christmas. How do you explain all the pain, shame, suffering, the fear? Because it's Christmas! And God is in the business of showing you just how NOT forsaken you truly are! The light shines in the darkness. When you see Him, you will trust Him, and you will love Him, and then all things—all creation with Him.

Pray with me: Father, in the name of Jesus, I surrender myself to you. I surrender to Love. Be born in me; make your, home in me, inhabit me Lord Jesus.

[Peter pulls away swaddling clothes in a manger to reveal the communion bread and wine. He then tears the bread. He dips a piece of bread into the wine.]

Jesus wants communion with you. He invites you to tear off a piece of the bread and dip it in the cup. It is bruised flesh, bruises, blood, [Peter touches the communion bread and wine to his lips] and spit. It's Christmas! Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.