Sunday, November 30, 1980
LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES
Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44

To say that life is full of surprises is another way of saying that we do not know all there is to know or that we cannot always predict what is going to happen and when.

Not all of us like surprises. Some people want to have all things routine and predictable with nothing happening that is out of the ordinary.

I once knew a husband whose wife prepared for him and the family the same menu every week. On Monday night it was meatloaf with peas; on Tuesday, ham and string beans; Wednesday, fish; Thursday, hamburger; Friday, pork chops, and on it went. It was the same menu on the same day for each week. He didn't like surprises. Thus, each evening when he came home from work, he knew exactly what to expect and he was never disappointed. He felt safe and secure. He knew what he could count on.

We all want things we can count on, but at the same time hopefully we also want surprises, particularly those which bring good news and not bad news. But some people don't want any surprises at all.

There are other people who don't expect any surprises. They are sure that the future is entirely predictable. They also believe that people are predictable. Since they don't expect any surprises, they don't get very many because they do not recognize them when they occur. Their mind is already made up.

In religion, such individuals already know who is going to heaven and who is not. They know who the bad guys are and who the good guys are. They know whose prayers God hears and whose prayers God does not hear. Such people would've missed the first Christmas, because like the religious know-it-alls in the first century, who didn't expect the Messiah to be born in a manger to an unwed mother, such people today would not expect that to happen either.

In all fields, such people cannot feel safe in an open-ended world, so they have to bustle about closing doors and locking windows in the human mind. The famous French Chemist, Berthelot, said in 1887, "From now on there is no mystery about the Universe. In 1895, Lord Kelvin announced, "Heavier than air flying machines are impossible." At the same time Professor Lippman told one of his pupils that "Physics is a subject that is exhausted....you had better turn your attention to something else." The pupil's name was Heilbronner, who became a famous modern physicist.

The list could go on and on of people who said, "now we know it all."

I like people who are not afraid of surprises and who believe that many surprises are yet to come. I like the man who when asked if after his death he wanted to be buried in Lincoln Memorial Park or Wyuka Cemetery, and he replied, "Surprise me."

The people who are open and expectant are those to whom the good surprises happen. They experience things about God and the world that many others miss. Because such people know they can never know all there is to know about God and about the universe, they are always open to receiving and experiencing new knowledge and having new ex- per1ences.

There is a mysteriousness and awe to God that is always beyond us. Too often we make the mistake of making God over in our own image, of shrinking God to our size. We then think that God is going to judge people the way we judge people.

The testimony of our faith is as Isaiah put it, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways, your ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

God is a surprising God. God comes in unexpected ways! The message of Advent as we prepare for Christmas is--Watch, be ready, be open, you may find God in places you never imagined: God in a manger in a stable, God on a cross! God in a simple ceremony involving bread and wine. God in our joys, and God in our sorrows.

Watch! Be ready! The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.