

An Unexpected Surprise December 2 2018 Luke 1:26-38

Intro: A Jewish lady named Mrs. Rosenberg, many years ago was stranded late one night at a fashionable resort - **one that didn't admit Jews.** The desk clerk looked down at his register and said, "Sorry, no rooms. The hotel is full."

The Jewish lady said, "But your sign says that you have vacancies." The desk clerk stammered and then said curtly, "You know that we don't admit Jews. Now if you'll just try the other side of town..."

Mrs. Rosenberg stiffened noticeably and said, "I'll have you know I converted to your religion." The desk clerk said, "Oh, yeah, let me give you a little test. How was Jesus born?"

Mrs. Rosenberg replied, "He was born to a virgin named Mary in a little town called Bethlehem." "Very good," replied the hotel clerk. "Tell me more." Mrs. Rosenberg replied, "He was born in a manger."

"That's right," said the hotel clerk. **"And why was he born in a manger?"** Mrs. Rosenberg said loudly, "Because a turkey like you in the hotel, wouldn't give a Jewish lady a room for the night!"

Christmas is full of surprises! Gifts are tightly wrapped in multi-coloured paper, so you don't know what's inside until you open them (**Unless, you peeked!**).

We get "surprise gifts" ...

Like that tie that you'll never wear.

Like the underwear you got as a child ... when you wanted a pony!

Like the Christmas card that arrived just before Christmas, from that person you thought you'd lost track of.

The first Christmas was full of surprises, as well. Since God doesn't do things the same way we would (Thank God!), He often surprises us.

The first Christmas brought some surprises to;

Elizabeth – She never expected to have a baby in her old age. John the Baptist came as a complete surprise. John's message of repentance also came as a surprise to the world. His mission was to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus, the Messiah.

The first Christmas brought some surprises to;

Mary – Mary had witnessed the surprise of her cousin Elisabeth ... then ... she had a surprise of her own! She was chosen to be the mother of God's Son. Jesus was **“The heavenly son of an earthly mother ... the earthly Son of a Heavenly Father.”**

The first Christmas brought some surprises to;

Joseph – Since Joseph knew he wasn't the father of Mary's child, her pregnancy came as a big surprise to him! It started out as a tragedy. but ... when Joseph understood God's plan, he accepted his part in the unfolding of the first Christmas.

The First Christmas Brought Some Surprises to;

Jews – They weren't expecting their Messiah to be born like this ... to lowly parents ... in a stable. They were looking for a king. but ... there was no crown ... no palace ... no royalty ... no riches.

They had other plans as how God should give them their King ... to overthrow the Roman oppression.

The First Christmas Brought Some Surprises To;

Shepherds – They were just keeping their flocks by night. It was a night like any other night. then ... an angel came, and they were “**sore afraid**”. They didn’t expect to be the first witnesses to the newborn Son of God.

The First Christmas Brought Some Surprises To;

Bethlehem – This sleepy little town was only 5 miles from the capital City of Jerusalem. **Surely the “King of the Jews” would be born in Jerusalem!** Bethlehem was about to go down in history!

Christmas is full of surprises! Jesus would surprise you ... if He came today, instead of 2000 years ago.

Chuck Swindoll writes,

Surprises come in many forms and guises, some good, some borderline amazing, some awful, some tragic, some hilarious. But there's one thing we can usually say -- **surprises aren't boring.**

Surprises are woven through the very fabric of all our lives. They await each one of us at unexpected and unpredictable junctures. (Finishing Touch p. 268)

This morning we focus on one of the greatest surprises of all time . . . the surprise that took place when an angel by the name of Gabriel appeared to a young teenager by the name of Mary.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favoured woman! The Lord is with you!” verses 26-28

God Surprises Us at Unexpected Times and In Unexpected Ways

It's obvious that Mary was surprised by the angel. **Wouldn't you be?** I imagine her life was running along pretty much as expected. As with most women her age, she was engaged to be married.

Certainly, it would have been an arranged marriage. Joseph would have paid some kind of dowry as a way of compensating Mary's father for his loss. This surprising visit wasn't what Mary was expecting or seeking in her life.

You can imagine that when the angel appeared, Mary was very frightened. Her first thought was probably that she was about to die. And to be honest, you and I would probably think the same thing. But God sent Gabriel to Mary because He had a job for her to do. **He wanted Mary to be the mother of the Messiah.**

It's not likely that an angel is going to appear to you to announce some great thing that God wants you to do, but God often surprises us in other ways.

God's surprises come at unexpected times and in unexpected ways.

And Christmas is a prime time for surprises. **Some of the surprises are wonderful**

An unexpected gift

An unanticipated opportunity

A renewed friendship

Great news hidden in a Christmas card

Some surprises are painful,

Having to let go of someone we love

A sudden change of plans

An illness or other trying circumstance made more difficult by the contrast of celebration around you

Bad news from friends you only hear from once a year

God's Surprises Are Often Difficult To Fully Comprehend

I think sometimes it is easy to glamorize what happened to Mary.

Luke 1:30-34 “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favour with God! 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

We have a tendency to think that Mary heard these words and then said, "Cool!"

But I don't think so. I don't think Mary had any real idea of what she was being asked to do.

She was risking being cast away and disowned by her father, and a disgrace to her family

She was being asked to give birth to the "Son of the Most High" which is something no one else has ever done.

Was she scared? You know she was. Was she confused? You bet. Was God asking something easy from her? Not a chance.

God doesn't ask us easy things either.

He asks us to do things that we can't do on our own, so that we will have to trust Him.

There are lots of things He brings to our lives that we don't understand. **There are lots of surprises that bring pain in addition to opportunity.** Many times we've no idea what God is doing in our lives. But . . .

When In Doubt . . . We Are Always Wise To Trust Him

Mary's response to Gabriel was;

I am the Lord's servant." "May your word to me be fulfilled?"

What a remarkable attitude Mary had. She was willing to follow the Lord no matter how difficult the situation might be.

And that's the lesson that you and I need to apply to our lives. No matter what the circumstance, it's always wisest to trust the Lord.

That's what Mary was saying with her words . . . whatever the Lord wants and chooses for me is fine.

We can learn a lot from Mary and that Christmas "angel". There are many things that come into our lives that we don't understand

and that are extremely difficult . . . but if that's our Father's will for us, we should willingly seek to honour Him in that situation.

Do you see how different this kind of faith is, from the faith we often see around us today? Many proclaim faith when things are enjoyable and going well . . . but when things get tough they walk away and say, "it didn't work." They're not looking for a personal relationship with God . . . they're looking for a business partner!

Let me give you three suggestions on how we can move toward the faith of Mary, rather than the faith of others in the world today.

In all the surprises of life;

Remember God's Character. Recall who He is and what He's like. Remind yourself that He's not reckless. He's Holy, Righteous, Wise, Good, Merciful, and Loving.

Remember His Track Record. Think back to how God has helped you in the past. Remember the tough times you came through. Remember the things you learned and how you have grown from the difficult and surprising times of the past.

Remember God's Gift of His Son. Mary, of course, didn't have the advantage of this knowledge, we do. When we wonder whether or not God is trustworthy, our first thought should be the cross. When we recognize what Christ has done for us it should be easy to trust Him.

Years ago I heard of a young man from a wealthy family who was about to graduate from high school. It was a custom in their affluent community for parents to give their graduating children a new car, and the boy and his dad had spent weeks visiting one dealership after another. The week before graduation they found

the perfect car. The boy was certain it would be in the driveway on graduation night.

On the eve of his graduation, however, his father handed him a small package wrapped in colourful paper. The father said the package contained the most valuable gift the father could think of. **It was a Bible!** The boy was so angry he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again.

Several years later the news of the father's death finally brought the son home again. Following the funeral, he sat alone one evening, going through his father's possessions, when he came across the Bible his dad had given him.

Overwhelmed by grief, he brushed away the dust and cracked it open for the first time. When he did, a cashier's check dated the day of his high school graduation fell into his lap --in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together. **The gift had been there all along . . . but he had turned away.**

Perhaps the greatest surprise at Christmas is the declaration that God loves us, and gives us hope for time and eternity. Do you remember the first words to Mary: "Greetings to you who are highly favoured?"

They may have been the most surprising words of all.

They are certainly surprising words to many of us. God has given his gift and some of us are tempted to toss it aside and to walk away.

You may be one of those people who dread the holidays. Painful memories tend to work their way out at Christmas more than at any

other time of the year. You may remember a father's drunken rage, a child's hurtful words, a time of disappointment, while all around you people are celebrating.

This is the time of the year that makes the pain of grief much sharper. It's when family tensions are more pronounced. And for you, Christmas may be the time of year that you dread more than any other.

For you, the greatest surprise this Christmas may be the simple message that "You are loved by God." Yes, you. He has seen us walk away from Him countless times . . . but He still pursues us in love. He knows how you have been hurt and He wants to make you whole again with renewed hope.

Yes, it may be mysterious that the God of Creation would notice and love you. God's love is a mystery to me too. **I didn't come to Him . . . He found me.** And He's reaching out to you as well. His invitation is simple, "Dare to trust me.

One more time dare to believe that someone . . . no, not just someone . . . **the Lord of Creation, loves you.**" Begin your Christmas celebration by welcoming God's forgiveness and love.

I don't know what surprises are in store for you this Christmas. Some will sting, some will make you jump for joy, some may take you down uncharted paths, some will give you hope. Others will stretch you in ways you never imagined.

But each surprise comes from the hand of a Heavenly Father who loves you. Or in the words of Mary . . . **"I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled."** May God's surprises in your life give you hope, and change you forever.