

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2008
Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Luke 2:1-20

The Christmas Surprise

Who among us doesn't like surprises?

There's a series of car commercials that have been running this Christmas season. You've probably seen at least one of them. They all start out with a person remembering their fondest Christmas memory, their "Best Christmas Ever." One of them features a woman remembering the Christmas she was surprised with the gift of a pony. She says, "You thought it was the bestest Christmas present *ever*.

Nothing could be more... *perfect*."¹

We probably all have memories of that "best Christmas ever" when we were children. I certainly remember a number of special gifts I received, things that I wanted so badly they were all I thought about for weeks before Christmas. A Barbie playset one Christmas. An Erector set another Christmas. The Christmas I received a microscope, whereupon I immediately set about sampling pond water and poking my fingers to see what my own blood looked like, and witnessing in awe the miracle of creation.

What's your favorite Christmas memory? What's that one gift you just had to have, and it came as a wonderful surprise on Christmas morning? Maybe it was a shiny new bicycle, or the latest edition of the Guitar Hero video game? Or maybe it was even, like in one of my favorite Christmas movies, a Red Rider B-B-gun?

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On this night we gather to remember what was *truly* the best Christmas present ever. It was the greatest surprise history has ever known. And, indeed, it was the most perfect Christmas present people have ever received.

This Christmas present came as a surprise. The long-awaited Messiah, the one whom people believed would come as a warrior-king, to lead them from oppressive rule to independence as a faithful nation.

But a surprise. He wasn't born into a royal family. He was born of the most lowly means, to a poor carpenter and his wife in, of all places, a stable. His birth was not attended by the royal court and a host of midwives. His birth was witnessed only by the lowly animals.

The first people to visit this miracle child were not the leaders of the royal court; they were lowly shepherds, normal people like you and me. The first people to declare this Messiah's birth were these same shepherds, not emissaries of some royal court.

Yes, Jesus was a complete surprise. God appearing to deliver His people was such a surprise, a gift so different than what was expected, that angels were sent to declare his conception and coming into the world. Chances are good that if these angel heralds had not come, people might not have recognized Jesus for who he was and is – the long-awaited Messiah.

And what's more, Jesus was the *perfect* surprise. What could be more perfect than a baby? Any parent can tell you that moment of complete awe when they first hold their child. Awe that God could do such a marvelous act of creation. Awe at how God uses us in the process of creation.

And Jesus was one of those perfect babies. But he was more than that. While we often say that Jesus' was the only perfect life that ever lived, I wonder how often we stop to ponder exactly what that means, and the implications of that perfection?

We know that Jesus was perfect, in that he was fully God *and* fully human. Paul's letter to the Colossians says, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things."² This little babe, born in a manger. God come to earth to dwell among us.

It was only Jesus who could have accomplished for us what Jesus did. The little God-child. His perfect life, from beginning to end. Begun in a lowly stable to a poor family. The truly perfect Christmas surprise.

Bishop T.D. Jakes, founding pastor of the Potter's House in Dallas, wrote the following words:

“I have often wondered, since God proved to us in Adam that He can have a son who bypassed childhood, why did He come to redeem us in the small, frail package of an infant?

“I can only imagine that he appreciates, as I do, the unique innocence and fresh love that emanates from the face of a child, a child who is so obviously pure from this world's constant contaminating influence. A child leaks love through the pores of his skin. His outstretched arms offer acceptance without any bias or bigotry. His gentle cooing at the end of a feeding teaches our souls to rest in the comfort of divine provision. And his rest on the breast of his mother exhibits his grace to trust so perfectly.

“In the same way that a baby trusts his mother not to drop him but to sustain him, we now trust the Savior, the Lord Jesus, to keep us, to bless us, and protect us. He comes to us as God's strength wrapped in human weakness. But like all Christmas gifts, the content is far more exquisite than the wrapping it comes in. Personally, He is the Gift I can't wait to unwrap moment by moment and day by day. After all these years, I am still unfolding the grace and majesty encompassed in His wonderful redemption.”³

Perhaps it's not entirely inappropriate for us to borrow the words of Madison Avenue when we pause to ponder our Christmas miracle, this little baby Jesus who came to change the world. He is the best Christmas present *ever*. Nothing could be more... *perfect*.

Amen.

<952 words>

¹ Lexus commercial, Christmas 2008

² Colossians 1:19-20a

³ T.D. Jakes, *Follow the Star: Christmas Stories That Changed My Life* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2003), 132-33.