

Christmas Eve 2011

Get ready for the unexpected! Yup, that the story of the nativity for me. God says: Get ready for the unexpected.

Mary and Joseph find themselves living temporarily in a city full of people trying to gather for the required census. Everyone they possibly could be related to is there....second cousins, great uncles, ancestors of the House of David. Required to return to their homeland to report in. But it was crowded there and, get ready for the unexpected, their baby decides it's time to be born! There's just a lot in life you can't control, and when the baby wants to be delivered, labor will begin. But wait, the town was bursting to its brim with people and there just weren't any more guest rooms available. Someone owned a shelter where there was safety from the elements and place to lay down, so in hospitality and graciousness, the young, maybe scared, couple birth their firstborn and lay him in the manger. I bet Mary had other plans for the birth of her baby, but then again, you've got to be ready for the unexpected. That's ok, God will work it all out for them. God worked it all out for them. And for us. Miracles abound.

Isn't that the gift of Christmas? The unexpected happened when God gifted us with the baby Jesus....when heaven came down to earth and earth connected with heaven in the form of a human baby. They expected a King who would save them, but with God, the unanticipated is often the gift. At Christmas, it's the newborn baby whose life would ultimately save you and I.

Isn't that the gift of Christmas? The unexpected happened. The unexpected happens. And God holds it gently and lovingly, graciously and hospitably, just like holding a newborn baby, and warms that unexpected into something miraculous when you stop and think about it. When the life we live seems to have everything under control and something happens which requires us to move out of our comfort zones, to move, even temporarily, away from our daily routines, even when we have to leave the life we knew behind, God brings blessing and grace in unexpected ways and once more we know that we are never alone, never without hope, for the God we believe in is a God of redemption and resurrection, of recovery and restoration. We often have other plans for our life, but we know what happens with the very best of plans. The unexpected happens. So we turn once again to the light.

Isn't that we gather together tonight? We come together to know hope again. To know that we have received a gift no matter where we are in life, or how we are in life; a gift that brings hope for healing and renewal to us, for us. We hope in simple light, candlelight this evening, for another chance to hear the story and know that God is with us and that with God's help, it will all work out. For God is found in the most unexpected ways and in the most unexpected places.

No wonder we sing the same words which the angels sang, not only tonight, but every time we come to worship we repeat the angels praise: "glory to God" "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth."

Maybe that's it. We hope for peace. The ultimate gift. Peace within our souls and spirits. Peace wherever we find ourselves. Peace, not an absence of conflict, but peace defined as a sense of confidence in our God of the unexpected, in our God of redemption and resurrection, in our God of recovery and restoration.

The only Son of God was given that all will live. That's the complete Christmas story. You're here to worship and celebrate because you believe it. I know you do. I know how you believe it is different for every one of us. And that's ok.

So hope, dear friends: hope with joy. Hope with the angels and shepherds and all those gathered in heaven tonight on our behalf. Touch hope tonight, hold hope again, for the gift has been given. . That's the present of Christmas: God works it all out. Miracles abound in the oddest of all places. Even in a manger. Even in your human heart. Get ready for the unexpected. *Amen.*