

**THE LONG EXPECTED MIRACLE**  
**SURPRISE, SURPRISE**

Matthew 1.18-25

**There is almost nothing that is more exciting or that creates more anxiety and anticipation than having a baby. It's really a miracle. For some couples it can be a long and drawn out process, a long, long wait for the miracle of a child...**

**Now for others there might be a little less anxiety and expectations lightened.**

**For the Casey family it was a bit of both...Father Tim says there was a different level of excitement and expectation with his three children. For the first child his wife joyously welcomed him home one evening with one of Gomer Piles', "Surprise, Surprise", "Hi Daddy, we're pregnant", and then she jumped into his arms.**

**For the second child he woke up from a little nap with little pink booties on his chest, "Surprise, Surprise."**

**And he knew they were getting their third when his wife came in the room and said, "Honey, I think we need to start looking for a midi-van. Oh ya, "Surprise, Surprise".**

**Today we want to talk about another baby's birth. That is the awaited, the long-expected miracle for the people of Israel. The miracle baby was to be the Messiah, the one to lead the people out of their misery.**

**It was certainly long-expected but happened in some unexpected circumstances, with some unexpected people, with some unexpected results. Jesus is the miracle child for us as well.**

**The church has set aside a season in the church calendar to celebrate this long-awaited miracle, the birth of Jesus into our world as well as our personal lives. This season is called Advent.**

Let's start with our first two points, **"The Long-expected Miracle came in an unexpected WAY."** The Bible tells us, **"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph but before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."** Matthew 1.18 and

**The Long-expected Miracle came through unexpected PEOPLE** **"Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want her exposed to public disgrace, he had a mind to divorce her quietly."** Matthew 1.19

The people over centuries expected God to act, expected God to raise up one who would deliver the people from the dreaded rule of foreign governments and usher in the new age.

One might think that that ruler might be born of more sophisticated parents than an aging carpenter and a common teenager.

Well, surprise, surprise, God chose to act, to conceive this child, **"she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."** That was certainly a "Surprise, Surprise" for Joseph. He was to make a difficult decision.

In their culture there are three steps of marriage. The first is the engagement set up by the parents. Marriage was too important to be left to the children. Hey, what do you young people think of that?

The second step was called "betroyed". At that stage the bride and groom gave their consent. Thus were legally bound, considered husband and wife, but did not share the marriage bed.

And the third step was the marriage itself. Joseph and Mary were in the second stage and Joseph as I said before, had a decision to make, a tough decision **"for he did not want to disgrace her."**

Can you imagine the locker room talk about Joseph and Mary or the community's cackle about Mary now being pregnant. Joseph could save face by having her stoned. She was condemned by law for her unfaithfulness. The Bible tells us that Joseph was a **righteous man** which means a good man, a noble man...a man who would do something good in the interests of another even at his own expense.

Aren't you glad that the Bible tells us that **"Joseph was going to divorce her quietly"** before it tells us that God is going to take of the problem. Joseph was caught between his conscience and common sense.

The faith lesson for us is that God would bring this long-expected miracle in an unexpected way, with unexpected, yet common and ordinary people. God would use the unexpected but ordinary to do the extraordinary.

That might be worth saying again and if you want write it on the outlines or in your Bible

please do. God is using common, ordinary people, even marginal people, like Joseph and Mary to bring about something extraordinary, a long-expected miracle.

So might not God want to use you and I, common and ordinary as we are to work miracles in the lives of others?

Let's put the next two points together too. The third thing about **The Long-expected Miracle is that it had an unexpected DELIVERY.** **"But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1.2021**

Hey notice, what the angel says first, well almost first, "do not be afraid". Angels are always saying that to good people. The angel says that to Joseph for two reasons, one is that any of us would be afraid or at the least a little surprise if an angel gave us a little visit. The second is, not to be afraid to go through with the marriage to Mary.

Notice here too that Joseph was given two things to do...what are they? Take Mary home and name the baby, Jesus. Let's keep track and see if he gets them done.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>ed</sup> verse tell us that **The Long Expected Miracle is JESUS.** **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, "God is with us."**

Anyway, what this verse teaches us is that there is an unexpected delivery. Remember the people were looking to be delivered from the Roman rule. God sends Jesus not necessarily

to save them from the Romans and foreign rule but to save them from themselves. **“For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that all who believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life. He came not to condemn but to save.”**

The name Jesus was common at that time. In Hebrew it is Joshua which means “God saves.” That is the unexpected delivery, the delivery from sin and death and Jesus is the unexpected miracle because God is going to be with the people himself.

Some first graders were setting up the Christmas story. They were responsible for the directing, acting, and staging of the play. They had the cast complete with angels, shepherds, wise men, and even some sheep, camels, and a star. Joseph appears and is walking...actually pacing outside a stable. Finally another man appears. He has on a white smock and has a stethoscope... it’s a doctor. He asks about Mary, the audience hears some moaning coming from behind some hay bales. Doc goes to check, comes back, and announces, “It’s a God!”

I couldn’t have said it better myself, but I’m going to try.

Pastor Henry Carter’s church has a home for the emotionally disturbed children. Most of the residents have gone home for the holiday. He is trying to find something fresh and unique to preach on Christmas Eve.

He is disturbed and perturbed by the floor mother when she tells him that she needs help with Tommy. Tommy is under the bed and won’t come out.

Pastor Henry goes to the ward and began to encourage Tommy to come out by telling him of the good food and great gifts that were under the tree for him. Tommy didn’t hear or didn’t want to hear.

It would have been no problem to yank him out from under the bed but Pastor Henry got down on his stomach and wiggled under the bed with Tommy. The back of his suit coat get snagged on the bedsprings while the front pick up some dust.

He continued to talk about the service and singing Christmas carols until he ran out of things to say and then stayed silent.

Eventually a small hand found his. Eventually Pastor Henry said, “It’s close quarters under here, lets get out where we can stand up,” and they did.

**Pastor Henry had to moved from calling to Tommy from above into Tommy's world under the bed. God does the same with us, calling to us, coming into our world, asking us to take his hand, and move from the darkness to light.**

**There is no other God that would give in such a way. For the most part other God's take at their whim and will, they pay back only when paid off. Our God simply gives.**

**That's the incarnation, that's what Jesus is about and in a few moments were going to sing about Jesus, about the long-expected Jesus but first we need to learn one more thing; **The Long-expected Miracle came with an expected OBEDIENCE.** "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." Matthew 1.24-25**

**Isn't Joseph wonderful. He has a heart of people, a heart for God, and the courage to act on that. There is that common, ordinary, kind of guy that God uses to bring about the extraordinary, long-expected miracle. Joseph was obedient.**

**There is a nameless maid who was obedient, too. She happens to be the maid of Rose Kennedy. Rose Kennedy is the matriarch of the well-known Kennedy clan. She as much as anyone endured much heartache in her life. We know two sons were assassinated, we know that a son, grandson, and daughter were killed in airplane accidents. We know she had to endure the shame of many family scandals. Well, Pastor Jess Moody tells us that after the birth of her other daughter Rosemary, she began to give up on God. Rosemary was born retarded and had to be institutionalized. Rose Kennedy became bitter and withdrew from life.**

**The nameless maid lovingly confronted her about her attitude. She said, "you'll never be happy unless you make your heart a manger where the Christ child can be born."**

**Here it is again, "you'll never be happy until you make your heart a manger where the Christ child can be born."**

**Rose Kennedy fired the maid on the spot but she herself could not forget the words. That night she knelt by the bed and prayed her heart would become a manger where the Christ child could be born. From that day on she had a new perspective in mind and a new peace in her heart. "Surprise, surprise." Oh ya, she rehired the maid.**

**Hey, isn't that what Advent is really all about, "making your heart a manger for the Christ child to be born?" or helping others make their hearts mangers...or even making a little more room in the manger of your heart for the Christ child.**

**Give God your struggles and suffering, your sorrows, your strengths, your stuff...  
you've got to make room in your heart for a miracle...**

**Give God your best and your bitterness, your headaches, your heartaches..  
you've got to make room in your heart for a miracle**

**Isn't that what Advent is about**

**for some of you it's the long-awaited, yet long-expected miracle**

**or others, the miracle may be unexpected...but you'll know it's a Spirit directed miracle**

**Now let us pray the song, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus...**