

A child is born

Luke 2:1-14

TITLE

I've been looking through the news this week and I've got a few news items for you and I want to ask the question: was what happened expected, or a surprise?

SNOW IN SCOTLAND Some people were taken by surprise, but snow in Scotland in winter and all the chaos that follows it happens every year.

ENGLAND WIN THE SECOND TEST AGAINST AUSTRALIA A surprise - they usually lose!

THE CORONATION STREET TRAM CRASH Expected. It's been in the papers for weeks. And of course, having a dramatic episode where characters get killed off is the way most soaps celebrate something. But here's a surprise:

TRAM NEWS Now knowing that the tram crash episode was coming up, there were still some sad people living in Greater Manchester who thought it was real and checked that there were no disruptions to service - so that's a surprise. But staying on the Manchester theme

RAIN IN MANCHESTER If I were to show you a picture of rain in Manchester, you'd all say expected. Manchester has a reputation of being a wet place. Well, its wetter than Felixstowe, but is by no means the soggiest city in Britain. In fact it's only the 9th soggiest city after top contender Swansea in the Land of Eternal Rain otherwise known as Wales. So that may well be a surprise to you.

X FACTOR NOT A FIX Expected or a surprise? The jury's out on that one I think. So let's have something Christmassy

CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY. No it isn't just me, the Christmas season really did start on August 2nd in Selfridges. Maybe you were surprised by that, but to a cynic like me it was no surprise. I'm expecting to hear any day that Autumn is in future going to be renamed the Christmas season.

CHRISTMAS But Christmas is so much more than just about making money, because right at the heart of it is the birth of Jesus Christ. That said, most children would say that Christmas is about presents: that's no surprise at all because we all like presents and in a few moments we are going to open this present and find out what we can learn about Jesus and His connection to presents.

Get volunteers up on stage to do a Pass the Parcel game.

I'm going to ask the children what they are expecting for Christmas - because on Christmas Day I'm going to ask whether they got what they expected, and whether they got any surprises. But back to this Pass the Parcel game. In each layer is a statement about something the Bible tells us happened at Christmas.

Whoever gets the statement is going to read it out and is going to say Mary and Joseph were expecting it, or whether it was a surprise to them.

A CHILD IS BORN TO US

Mary was going to have a baby (Surprise, then Expected)
The Baby was going to be born in Bethlehem (Expected)
Shepherds turned up to see the baby (Surprise)
The baby would grow up to perform miracles and teach people about God (Surprise and expected)
The baby would die on a cross and rise again (Surprise)
The baby was to be a gift to be shared with the whole world (Surprise)
Gift (Surprise – it's an Easter egg!)

So the prize the winner got was an Easter egg. What! It's Christmas, not Easter. But that's the whole thing. At the heart of Christmas is Easter. Jesus was born so that one day He would die for our sins. Jesus was God's gift to the world.

JOHN 3:16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

The problem is that of our own nature, we don't know God and can't know God because we do things that are wrong – the Bible calls them sins – and this keep us from God and these keep us separate from Him and that's from Him eternally – that's what the word "die" means in the verse on the screen. But God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us that we could be forgiven our sins and know God personally, not just now, but forever. Here's another verse.

ROMANS 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus was God's gift to us, and because He died on the cross, God now offers us a gift – and that gift is eternal life. But to have a gift, you've got to receive it before it comes yours. The eggs I gave to the children were gifts – which they gratefully snapped up. God does not force eternal life on anybody, you have an opportunity to take the gift, or just have what you earn through ignoring God and not accepting what He offers. *The wages of sin is death.*

But God went to a lot of trouble for that not to happen – by giving us His Son. And this Christmas, if you've never accepted that free gift of knowing God, knowing forgiveness and having the hope of eternal life, the God is making that offer to you now. Will you accept it?