

JOY & SURPRISES *at Christmas*



Article written by
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I love to surprise people!

There is something about seeing the look of disbelief, the smiles, and the laughter when a package is unwrapped or an unexpected loved one walks through the room.

One of my first memories witnessing a surprise was when we celebrated my aunt and uncle's 25th wedding anniversary. My mom and grandmother rented out a fellowship hall, invited all their friends and family, made more chicken salad sandwiches and pasta salad than I have ever seen in my life, and had the perfect excuse to lure them in before bringing my aunt to tears with the party. The energy was electric!

My dad, too, surprised my mom one Christmas morning when I was a little girl. He saved his gift to her for last. After all the delicately wrapped gifts were ripped to shreds and toys were strewn out across the living room floor, my father said coyly, "There is one more gift outside." My mom had no idea what he was talking about. None of us did. After all, mom was the one who gave Santa a run for his money.

My mom, brother, grandmother, and I quickly rose to our feet to see this mysterious gift. Sure enough, as the garage door lifted, parked out in the cold bitter Christmas morning, a brand-new fire-truck red Chrysler LeBaron sat with its convertible top ready to be opened. My mom checked all the boxes—disbelief, a giant smile, and then a ton of laughter! Dad pulled off an epic surprise!

I learned early on the joy that comes with surprising people. I have since adopted the magic whenever I can find little ways to fill the hearts of my

own family and friends with surprises. Nothing as extraordinary as a new vehicle, however I have flown across the country to surprise my mom on mother's day, and have hosted surprise birthday parties.

Joy and surprises are key markers to the Christmas season. One, of many surprises, was when the angels visited the shepherds in their fields at night. The angels surprised the shepherds by their unexpected appearance and with their words of hope, "I bring you good news of great joy for all the people...a Savior has been born!" (Luke 2: 8-11). Not only was their presence startling but the message they proclaimed was the best news of all eternity!

God is the creator of joyful surprises! God demonstrated this through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection.



Amid a dark and broken world, God's gift of joy mysteriously and blissfully appeared through the baby Jesus. God surprised the shepherds, who would have been the least likely of people to be told first of the Savior's birth. God would continue to surprise others as Jesus would rise to be the king of kings even though he was from a small town, never led an army, or come from wealth or power. Then, when everyone thought that all hope had been lost at Jesus' death on the cross, God surprised humanity again. Jesus resurrected from the dead! Jesus saved the world!

Joy is found in Jesus. It can also be uncovered when we choose to adopt the very essence of Christmas and create joyful memories for the people in our lives. I am not suggesting that

you need to surprise someone with an extravagant gift. I am, however, suggesting that you embrace the joy of Christmas by your presence with the people you love and care about. Show up to a friend or family members house that you have not seen in a while to catch up and laugh about old times. Plan a scavenger hunt for your children around the house with little notes of love, candy, or both. Put up the Christmas tree without your spouse asking you or bake their grandmother's favorite pecan pie.

I believe that we can and should embrace the joy and surprises of Christmas. After all, don't you think God got the biggest kick out of the surprises found in Jesus?



Pastor Jen Hodson

is the senior pastor of Bryan Community Church. Part of her philosophy of ministry is to meet people where they are, just as Jesus met people where they were. To learn more about Jennifer and the ministry of her church, visit BryanCommunityChurch.org.

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Bryan Community Church

10:00 AM on Sundays
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