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12-13-20 Pastor Bill Mosley

Years ago, in a Christmas Pageant, the innkeeper was played by a boy named Ralph who had very much wanted to play the role of Joseph. He didn't get the part, & had refused to be part of the program -- but his mother & his director insisted that Ralph do his duty & be part of the pageant. So he was the innkeeper.

But Ralph wanted revenge. When Joseph & Mary came to the inn & asked about a room, Ralph grinned & said, "Come on in. We've got plenty of room!" The audience gasped, especially Ralph's mother & the director. Joseph & Mary were stunned.

They expected to be turned away. Instead they obediently walked into the inn. But the boy playing Joseph was resourceful. He looked around, turned to the audience, & said, "Hey, this place is a dump. We'd rather stay in a stable!" (adapted from Pastor Casey Zesch in Reader's Digest)

What would life be without surprises like this? You're thinking, "a lot less embarrassing."

There are some surprises we could do without. Christmas is not one of them. God comes into the world in the person of a tiny babe.

John the Baptist was a surprise. People asked how this rough-hewn preacher could lay a path for the Messiah.

The Baptist caused quite a stir in the desert. People from all over were going out to see and hear him. Countless

persons were baptized by John in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. There were some, though who were uncomfortable with John and his message. In fact there were some who thought John might have gone too far.

A group of priests and Levites were sent to investigate him. They had one burning question: "Who are you?" They wanted to know why John was preaching about the coming of the Messiah. They wanted to know by what authority he was requiring people to be baptized.

They asked him if he might be Elijah. They taught that Elijah would return just before the Messiah. Was John the Messiah? "I am not," John replied. "Are you the prophet?" No, was John's answer. Again they asked him, "Who are you?" John quoted Isaiah, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

He pointed the way to Jesus. That was his role. That is what Christmas is about. Bringing the light. It's about adoring, worshiping, proclaiming Jesus. It's about the unexpected. It's about surprises.

Joel Robert Poinsett gave his name to the red "flower" we see everywhere at Christmas time. He "discovered" the poinsettia in Mexico, and managed to market it in the U.S. It made him wealthy, and made his name a household word in our country. But the "flower" is not really a flower, and was already a religious symbol when it was cultivated by the Aztecs. And do we really want to

remember Joel Robert Poinsett in the spirit of Christmas?

The truth is, the name of Poinsett was already a household word in Mexico well before our American Civil War.

Besides his interest in botany, Poinsett was a high-placed diplomatic official in the service of the United States Government. President Van Buren made him Secretary of War. He had a part in the "Trail of Tears," a sad part of our Native American history. He was a congressman and ambassador-at-large, specializing in relations with Latin America.

It was while Poinsett was Special Ambassador to Mexico that he discovered the poinsettia and sent it back East to South Carolina and took steps to popularize the Christmas flower. He also got a reputation in Mexico for being an officious, intrusive interloper. "Poinsettissimo" became the word for intruding yourself into the business of others.

Ironically, it was a Christmas day when Poinsett left Mexico, in fear of his life and his name disgraced by the Mexican government, for his unethical part in an internal Mexican political dispute.

And like boycott and quisling, his name became part of the language -- two languages. -- Mosley, EMPHASIS.

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Here's another one: Scrooge.

Ebenezer Scrooge is the central character in Charles Dickens' book *A Christmas Carol*.

We don't even have to describe him. We know just by saying the name that a Scrooge is stingy, greedy, grumpy, selfish, & cruel. He keeps his employees poor & makes them work on Christmas. If anybody seems cheerful or mentions Christmas, he says, "Bah, humbug."

Towards the end of the story, the Cratchet family receives a prize turkey. It's a wonderful gift & they don't know who it comes from. Only Tiny Tim has any idea who might have sent the turkey. He says the name, Mr. Scrooge. & his mother says, "Why would Mr. Scrooge lose his sense & do something like this?"

And Tiny Tim replies with one word: "Christmas."

It's a word that dwells & lives among us. it carries hidden meanings that can still surprise us.

It's a surprise. It's unexpected. It explains how stingy people can be generous, tired persons can be energized, Lonely individuals can feel loved.

This Christmas let's do something unexpected & surprising. Let's do something out of the ordinary. Let's do something that anticipates the Lord's coming among us, to find room at our inn. We don't want him to say he'd rather stay in a stable.

Lord, surprise us so much that we say no to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you. 928 word