

10th December 2020

Unexpected

“The unexpected always happens.”

A late 19th century proverb

Tales of the Unexpected is a UK television series broadcast in the 1980s, each episode telling a story, usually with sinister or peculiarly funny overtones, and often with an unexpected twist at the end. Most of the tales were based on short stories by Roald Dahl, collected in his books: *Tales of the Unexpected*, *Kiss Kiss* and *Someone Like You*.

All of us who've attended Christmas Nativity Plays over the years could write our own "tales of the unexpected" books, so numerous are the stories of mistakes and blunders, gaffes and disasters, which children deliver to us through their medium of Nativity Dramas ... The third King, who's late because he's not properly dressed, and runs to catch up with his two colleagues, only to fall, slide, and crash – unexpectedly – into the manger ... The Innkeeper, who is so taken-aback by Joseph's overacting that he shouts – unexpectedly – off-stage, "Please Miss, is that the way Stephen's suppose to be doing it?" ... The beatific Mary, who wanders off during the birthing process because – unexpectedly – she wants a wee ... The shepherd who – unexpectedly – is carrying a stuffed monkey under his arm because he couldn't source a recognisable lamb ... The angel who – unexpectedly – stands up and shouts "Hello!" to her mother at the back of the hall, with the mother – stupidly – shouting back ... The scenery that – unexpectedly – falls over ... The baby Jesus who – unexpectedly – falls out of the crib and rolls gently off the front of the stage.

We've all been there! Maybe you were one of the characters who offered the unexpected. But it's interesting, isn't it, that it's the unexpected we remember, the unexpected that marks out the event as different and anchors it in our memories. It's the unexpected that leaves us with a smile.

The meaning of Christmas is unexpected. It's what marks it out as different – that we would be touched by a Love from beyond ourselves. Goodness, that's worth remembering with a big smile, I reckon.

A prayer for today

Surprising God, keep me grounded when things are normal.

Make me excited when you offer me the unexpected. Amen

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