



Christ Church of Atlanta
P.O. Box 76320
Atlanta, GA. 30358
Phone: 404.255.5033
Fax: 404.255.5383

Newsletter – January 2012 – Heather Werle

Surprise Me!

Deep in the archives of the Werle family home videos live the tales of Christmas pasts. The early '80s were filled with plastic toys, matching Christmas pajamas and the miniature stockings filled with Chocolate gold coins.

The night before what was our probably favorite holiday at ages 3- and 5-years-old (my brother) was filled with much anticipation. Six of us would pile in the car to go to church. The Advent calendar that greeted us at the bottom of the staircase each morning was almost complete. And my dad would read us the classic 'Twas the Night Before. We'd then try our hardest to fall asleep, knowing that the sooner that happened, the sooner we'd wake up.

Morning would come long before any adults would prefer. We'd jump out of bed, run down the hallway to my parents' room wondering how they could still be asleep because, after all, it was Christmas morning! We wake them up as we bounced, hoping that Grandma and Grandpa had already gotten up for their morning cup of coffee, for we were forbidden to interrupt their sleep. A few other relatives would arrive for breakfast. And just as the sun was peaking over the horizon...the fun would begin.

We'd gather in the living room, Grandma and my mom on the couch, my aunts on the chairs, my dad standing at the end with the room with video camera, and my brother and I each one side of the Christmas tree with saucer-sized eyes.

It was go time.

My older brother would open each gift slowly. After unwrapping one carefully, he'd figure out what it did, play with it, build it and enjoy it. Sometimes, my parents would have to remind him to look at the next present or he'd sit there for as many hours of entertainment that the toy would provide and use them all up in one day.

I, on the other hand, had a much more enthusiastic approach to Christmas morning that somewhat resembled the Tasmanian Devil on a sugar rush. Wrapping paper would fly and giggles would be heard, and at the end of it all, I would be so excited that I would run around in circles in the living room trying to tell my relatives about all the toys I had received but too giddy to actually stop and communicate with any real words.

I vaguely remember being confused as to why Christmas seemed to last longer for my brother. *What was taking him so long?!* That's one of the only memories of my own. The rest of this scene has been told and retold by relatives as they laugh at my spastic energy. (And yes, these videos do exist but should probably remain back in my parents' basement. Permanently.)



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My enthusiasm for the holiday was slightly off. I'll admit that. I knew about Jesus, went to Sunday School every week and probably even helped my mom set up the nativity, but it wasn't so much the Jesus-being-born thing that got me so excited. It was the presents. The surprises.

My brother and I, obviously, had different approaches to Christmas morning. He carefully embraced every moment and wanted to know more. I was just so excited that I started to explode. Yet both of us were captivated by the unknown. We had surprises waiting for us.

2000 years ago, an angel surprised a teenager in Israel. The angel told her that she would have a baby, that the baby would be named Jesus and that this Jesus was the Son of God. She had no idea what would come next. Or that more than 2000 years later and halfway around the world, millions of people would know this and base their life on her child's life. That is one big surprise.

It's easy, especially as adults to forget that we can still be surprised by God. We sing the songs, watch the pageants and even read the Bible without *really* thinking about it. We fail to open up our minds and hearts to the possibility that God could surprise us.

I want to be surprised. I want to have a deep interest in or ridiculous enthusiasm for what God has for me as my brother and I did with presents on Christmas morning. I want to look for what is to come and be so excited that I can't help but tell people around me when I see God working. So I started praying and asked God. I pray that 2012 is a year where God surprises me, my heart is open to these surprises and that, in return, I praise Him.

- Heather Werle, Director of Youth Ministry Services