

Rejoice!

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One of my favorite things to see on TV are the “Soldier Surprise Returns.” I’m sure you’ve seen them. The spouse or the child of a someone in military service has been separated for months because of deployment. They get invited to a special gathering, being told they won a contest or are getting an award at school. Then, right in the middle of the event, the soldier appears from behind a false wall and we all get to see the incredible reunion. Surprise, joy, tears, fulfilled longing – all packed into an intense few moments of bliss. I could watch these all day.

But as I find myself getting verklempt, I can’t help but think: It isn’t supposed to be this way. This beautiful moment is happening because one person has to go off to war. This happy occasion is in lieu of all the days spent apart. This scene tugs at our heartstrings because we know this young dad didn’t get to be present for his daughter’s birth. This mom in the service didn’t get to see her son score the winning goal.

Intro Option Two

Show a reunion video clip, such as this story about Sargent Josh Sarpu and Cassie and their daughter Savannah Belle. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HOdzFls_3E

This reunion has a lot in common with the Nativity story.

A lot a planning is involved,

A lot of people get to join in, and

It’s all about the hug.

1. A lot of planning was involved.

Like any great surprise, a surprise reunion takes a lot of planning. The family reaches out to GMA, GMA coordinates with Josh's superiors, developing a cover story, making the travel arrangements... tons of details while keeping the whole thing a secret until the big reveal.

The incarnation was in the mind of God from the beginning of creation. In the beginning was the Word, John chapter one says, and the Word was with God and word was God and nothing was created apart from the living Word, who is Christ. The big bang was the first incarnation. Being created very good and in the image of God, humanity receives special honor in all creation. But coming close to us in the person of Jesus – becoming Immanuel, God-with-us, was always part of the plan. Isaiah promised it some 500 earlier, at one of the darkness moments in Israel's history. Isaiah 7: 14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." The reunion is going to happen, according to God's perfect timing. As Paul would reflect on it both in his letter the Galatians, "When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman..." to identify fully with us under the weight of the law – that is – the reality of our human condition for failure and frailty. Jesus wasn't a Plan B. It was a gift the Triune God intended to give to us all along.

2. A lot of people get to join in.

As wonderful as it would be to hear about Sarpu's family reunion, wasn't it so much better to see it? Let's be honest, GMA would not have gone to all that trouble just for the sake of this sweet young family. They wanted this moment shared with millions of viewers.

As anyone who has ever watched a Christmas pageant knows, there is room for lots of people to get involved! This isn't just about Mary and Joseph and Jesus. There are parts for multitudes of Angels, a healthy-sized group of Shepherds, then the Magi from the East – not to mention all the cuties in sheep and donkey costumes!

Romans 1: This message comes out of Israel, but it is for the whole world.

For GMA it is about ratings. For God is about glory! Glory is about making God's love and loving intentions famous in the world.

3. It's all about the hug.

Thanks to social media, “Soldier’s Surprise Return” videos abound. And they all end the same way: With a passionate embrace. In that moment, months of pent-up emotion erupts in one intense expression of love and joy and relief. The moment that felt as though it would never come, finally does. The wait is over. Lover and Beloved are now one, as they were always meant to be.

It is for this union that God has done everything – absolutely everything.

Conclusion

Perhaps you are longing for God to draw close to you. But maybe there is someone else you know who is suffering, who is longing for God to be Immanuel to them. How can help them experience their longed-for reunion this Christmas?

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