

Christmas Surprise (2012)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

Anticipation and surprise are close to the heart of Christmas. That's true in our lives today, as it was true in Bible-times, when believers expected some kind of super-hero, and got a baby instead, born of a nobody teenager in a distant corner of the mighty Roman empire: surprise!

It was sure true when I was growing up. Maybe the best surprise happened when I was twelve, when we were going to drive to my grandparents in Big Spring, Texas, in an old Chevrolet coupe, and I KNEW for a certainty that there was no room in it anywhere for the Red Ryder BB gun that I wanted so desperately. What I did NOT know was the skill of my father, and his long grey overcoat, folded casually over his arm, just long enough to hide beneath it a surreptitious BB gun.

The most useful Christmas gift was also a surprise. I think I was nine; again we drove the West Texas wilderness a hundred miles -- at a steady 50 MPH -- to get to the grandparents. It was there I got the tricycle I wanted so badly: red, and shiny, and with a headlight, powered by a couple of batteries. It was on the drive home the night after Christmas when we had a flat tire on that boundless prairie -- flats were frequent in those days, when tires with inner tubes took thorns or suffered blow-outs... and there you were.

We had a spare tire, but no jack to lift the car to install it. The answer was a fence-post, a lever with a rock as a fulcrum, to pry the car up and wedge it there for repair... and for light, in that deserted darkness, the steady beam from a brand-new trike and a proud little boy to train it on the fender.

Anticipation: what will it be, this year, this time, this holy time? Surprise: what will come, this year, anew? Wait, wait, wait... for the promise to be fulfilled, more than you imagine.

The Rev. Houston Hodges will be surprised again this year, no doubt, at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church in Hampton Cove, where he serves as one of the ministers.

