

## The Best Gift Ever –The Gift that Removes Fear

Dec. 8 – Pastor Randy

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As I reflect on the birth narratives of Christ found in the NT, I am struck by certain messages that come from God to various persons. These messages are timeless; they are as true and as important for us to hear today as they were at the time they were first expressed. They are also messages that are true and applicable to us *only because* of Jesus' coming. They are:

1. Do not be afraid!
2. God is with you/us!
3. Nothing is impossible with God!

Jesus is the best gift ever because He is the one who makes the impossible possible; He is the one who frees us from fear; He is the one who gives us unfettered access to the presence of God now and forever.

Today we will begin by focusing on the significance of the repeated message "Fear not" that we find in the birth narratives of Jesus. There are four instances of angelic appearances in these narratives and in each instance we encounter angels, messengers from God, saying "Do not fear", "Fear not" or "Do not be afraid"!

***And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord** standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, **and fear fell upon him**. But the angel said to him: **"Do not be afraid,** Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. – Luke 1:11-13*

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, **"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife,** for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Matt. 1:18-20*

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*And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But **she was greatly troubled** at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "**Do not be afraid, Mary**, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

– Luke 1:28-33

*And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and **they were filled with great fear**. And the angel said to them, "**Fear not**, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. – Luke 2:9*

These passages remind us that we don't need to fear **God's presence** or **God's purpose** for our lives.

### A. Don't Fear God's Presence

In the case of Zechariah and the Shepherds, the fear they experienced was due merely to the appearance from "an angel of the Lord". The angel quickly calms their fears with the message, "Do not be afraid".

Why was there this need to calm the hearts of the recipients of God's message? Shouldn't the appearance of an angel make them excited and happy? Why would it instill a sense of fear instead of wonder, awe, and excitement? I mean angels are good, demons are bad, right?

Angels are spiritual beings that act as faithful servants of God. But they are also representatives of God and so to experience a visitation of an angel of the Lord for Jews was akin to a visitation from God: And being in God's presence was often in the OT a terrifying experience.

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Listen to the description Daniel gave of the angel of the Lord he encountered in a vision: *“His face looked like lightning. His eyes were like flaming torches. His arms and legs looked like polished bronze. When he spoke, his voice sounded like the roar of a crowd.”* At the sight of this angel the blood rushed from Daniel’s head and he fainted. When the angel told him to get up he was trembling in fear.

In order to understand the fear associated with visitations from God we need to understand the paradox of God’s presence as revealed in the OT. What do I mean by the paradox of God’s presence? I mean God’s presence is simultaneously good and terrifying. C.S. Lewis captured this paradox wonderfully in his book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. If you know the story you know that Aslan the lion was a representation of Jesus. In one scene, Susan and Lucy ask the Beaver about Aslan, “Is he safe?” Beaver replies, “Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” Jesus, God the Son is both protector and destroyer; merciful savior and mighty judge.

Zechariah encountered the angel while he was performing his priestly duties in the temple. The temple was both a glorious and dangerous place to work. The high priests in Israel enjoyed the great honor of being able to enter into the Most Holy Place. They experienced the glory of God’s presence in a way that no one else did. However, they had a dangerous job. God said to Moses, “Tell your brother Aaron not to enter freely into the Most Holy Place behind the veil in front of the mercy seat on the ark, or else he will die... (Lev. 16:2).

Exodus 20:20 is a snapshot of this paradox: God had led Moses and the people to the foot of Mt. Sinai. God presence was manifested at Sinai in a terrifying manner with thunder, lightning, smoke, and shaking like that of an earthquake. The people were afraid they were going to die but Moses said, **“Don’t be afraid... “for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!”**

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Don't be afraid of God... but don't play around with God either!!! God's presence is a threat to sin. When God's pure righteousness encounters sin and evil, something must go! Sin and evil must be eradicated and obliterated.

The Jews rightly understood that being in the presence of God, or one of his holy messengers, was dangerous for sinners like them. They were very aware that they deserved God's judgement. This is why, after Jesus performed his first "fishing miracle", Peter fell on his face before Jesus, pleading with Jesus to leave from His presence. Why? I would expect Peter to try and stop Jesus from leaving, not plead with him to leave? Peter's words explain why he was afraid when he recognized Jesus was God's holy messiah.

*"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

These "Do not be afraid" statements are reminders that while we are deserving of God's judgment and have every reason to be afraid, the birth of Christ signals that God has come to save and deliver, not to condemn and destroy. Christ has come to save us, so that instead of receiving the condemnation which we deserve, we receive a righteous status that we are completely undeserving of. John 3:17, 18 tell us that Jesus didn't come to condemn because we already are condemned. That's why we need a Savior!

**If you have embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior, you don't need to fear God anymore. You don't need to fear God's judgement because you are no longer His enemy but His child. We are now saved from judgment because of Jesus' took the penalty for our sin upon Himself on the cross.**

### **Don't Fear God's Purpose**

Zechariah and Elizabeth were blameless but not blessed? That doesn't make sense! Shouldn't blamelessness before God lead to blessings from God? Why would God allow a couple who were so faithful to God experience the shame

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and pain of not being able to conceive? He was teaching them to wait and to trust. How long does it take for us to lose our faith in God's faithfulness?

Joseph was told to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. He was being told to trust God with what God was doing in his life even though it didn't make sense to him. My wife is pregnant with a child conceived by the Holy Spirit?!?!

God was also asking Joseph to trust and accept God's purpose for him even though his circumstances would almost certainly cause his friends and family members to criticize him and shame him.

Anyone who suggests that Christianity offers us the hope and promise of an easy life free of shame and pain must never have read the NT!! Jesus has called us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

### Don't Fear Death

*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.** Hebrews 2:14,15*

The fear of death can become a slave-master to us. An unhealthy fear of death causes us to be willing to sell our soul just to stay alive. When self-preservation becomes our ultimate Lord, we confuse godly risk-taking with ungodly recklessness. You don't live until you have a cause worth dying for!

### **Conclusion: Jesus came so we could exchange fear with joy!**

When Mary went to her cousin Elizabeth's house to share the good news she received from the angel, Elizabeth felt the baby she was carrying leap inside of her at the sound of Mary's voice. Elizabeth burst into joy and interpreted the movement of the baby as if the baby leapt for joy. The next thing we read is Mary breaking into a song which began "My soul magnifies the Lord,

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my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

When the angels appeared to the shepherds they were filled with *great fear*. But the angel said, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of *great joy...*” Great fear was replaced with great joy.

When Zechariah’s wife Elizabeth gave birth to John and Zechariah saw the fulfillment of God’s promise he burst into joyful praise to God.

When we are full of fear we often respond in one of two ways: Sometimes when fear overwhelms us we become quiet. We shut down and go into an emotional hiding place. Other times our fear is expressed by speech which becomes full of gloom and doom. Words reveal a hopeful or fearful heart.

The gift of Jesus is the gift that spells “Fear not!”

*“...abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” 1 John 2:28*

*“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” 1 John 4:27,28*

**YOU DON’T NEED TO FEAR GOD OR HIS PURPOSES ANYMORE**

**...AND IF YOU DON’T NEED TO FEAR GOD... then you don’t need to fear anyone or anything. If God is NOW for you, who can be against you?!?**

**I don’t know what fears you came in here with, but Jesus came down so you could LAY YOUR FEARS DOWN!**

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