

Advent 2022: What God is This?

Week 3: Don't Be Afraid!

Sunday, December 18th, 2022

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✝ **God with us!**

- *This advent season we have focused on the miracle of the INCARNATION- the totality of the Christ Event- as it has been said, from 'womb to tomb to resurrection and ascension.' As the angel said to Matthew...*

**Matthew 1:23** *"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

- *This is the miracle that when we look at Jesus- the story of his life- how we came into this world, how he lived, what he said, and reaching its apex at the cross- when we consider Christ we see fully revealed to us the nature, character, and heart of God.*
- *There are many iconic scenes in the Christmas story, and four of them involve an 'Angelic Announcement'... The Shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and... Zechariah.*
- *Aside from there being a supernal angelic presence, these stories have something incredible important in common- as it relates to the people to whom the angels appeared, all the way back then.. It is the message.. DON'T BE AFRAID!*

✝ **Then: Don't be afraid!**

- *It seems like every week we see a news story of some new study showing that anxiety is at an all-time high in young people- and not just them. It seems to permeate society. It's not difficult to make a list of things in our world that can be scary, and to some degree this is always the case. Fear and anxiety are two of the most entrenched symptoms of the human condition.*
- *And into this brokenness, before the infant Jesus even drew his first breath, God proclaimed the Good News of Great Joy, that because of WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, in the midst of ALL OF LIFE, we would no longer need to be afraid.*
- *So we're going to briefly look at these four stories of the angel's announcements of the birth of Christ. They overlap quite a bit, but in each one we see a different perspective on the fullness of our deliverance from fear.*
- *Start with...*
  - **The story of the Zechariah**
- *Zechariah was the husband of Elizabeth, who was a relative of Mary. Zechariah was a priest of the temple in Jerusalem. The angel Gabriel visits Zechariah not to tell him of the birth of Christ, but of the one who would come right before Jesus...*

**Luke 1:8-13** *Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. <sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> 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.*

- John, of course, would become John the Baptist, the one who would later say ““I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” It is John who would first identify Jesus as the messiah, “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”
- SO, Zechariah is inside the temple burning incense, representing the people before God. According to the Old Covenant law and Jewish understanding, Zechariah was at that point as close to the presence of God as a human could get. THEN, all of a sudden, GOD SHOWED UP, in the supernatural presence of the messenger angel Gabriel. Zechariah was NOT expecting this, and he was TERRIFIED.
- The irony here is that just as Zechariah at the golden altar of the temple, right next to the holy of holies- right next to the temple presence of God....

#### Zechariah was terrified by God’s PRESENCE

- Not only was the Angels’ sudden appearance completely overwhelming, Zechariah knew the consequence of being in the actual presence of God. He certainly knew what Isaiah had said after his vision of God’s throne room (Is 6)... ““Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips... and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”
- NOW, Gabriel was not God! But in that moment, the distinction may have mattered little to Zech.
- And in the terror of God’s presence, the Angel said... DO NOT BE AFRAID! NEXT..

#### • The story of Mary

**Luke 1:26-33** In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

- Mary’s response is really interesting. She doesn’t seem to be terrified by Gabriel’s appearance (like Zech), rather, she is troubled by what Gabriel might be about to say.
- I’m sure none of you were ever called into the principal’s office, so just image this analogy with me. You’re minding your own business, when all of a sudden you are called into the presence of the highest authority in your life (at least at the school)- a presence you had never even personally met before. What are you thinking? THIS CAN’T BE GOOD! I doubt the principle is calling me into his office to congratulate me on my B- in algebra!
- Another image- parents, your teenager comes up to you with a big smile, gives you a hug, and says “hey there parent who is most highly favored!”... what do you think is coming? They’re about to ask for something big!
- You see, this is subtle, but Mary is a teenage girl herself, and suddenly standing before an Angelic messenger of God....

#### Mary was frightened about what God was going to DO

- Have you ever been in church when they had a special missions focus, maybe a visiting missionary... and at the end of the service the pastor prays something like “Dear Lord, we

*thank you for this missionaries sacrificial service- all of us here also offer up our lives to respond to your call, to go ANYWHERE, to do anything you would call us to do...” AND you’re thinking... UH... GOD.. I’m not sure I’m there yet!*

- *For us, there may be times when we are afraid of being found out... and if I stop hiding, God may reveal my secret bondage, pain, doubts...*
- *Or perhaps we’ve been sincerely, desperately praying for God to intervene, to provide in a situation, and it’s not happening... we are afraid that what God is going to do is not what we deeply want to have happen. Like Mary, we recognize God is prompting us, leading us, but we are troubled at what this might mean.*
- *In the fear of what God might do, the Angel said...*
- *Next we have...*

- **The story of Joseph**

**Matthew 1:18-21** *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.* <sup>20</sup> *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

- *For Joseph, he was covered in anxiety before the Angel ever arrived? What was his fear?*
  - *He knew Mary was pregnant, and not by him. In that place, this was probably the worst scenario he could imagine.*
  - *He is afraid of what people will think- of the disgrace she will endure. Even deeper, Joseph knew the punishment for adultery- and that’s what Mary would be accused of- would bring condemnation upon her- it was punishable by stoning.*
  - *What was the source of this condemnation? It was the Mosaic LAW. Leviticus 20 to be precise.*
  - *And who was the author of the Law? GOD.*
- *You see, Joseph was certainly afraid of the public shame of his community, but even more...*

**Joseph was afraid of God’s CONDEMNATION**

- *Fearing for his beloved’s very life at the hand of the very law he devoutly followed, Joseph instead heard the Angel say... DO NOT BE AFRAID!*
- *Lastly...*

- **The story of the shepherds**

**Luke 2:8-11** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

<sup>9</sup> *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

- *Here Luke gives a detail not found in any of the other stories. As we know, the Shepherds were among the lowest of ancient Israel’s socioeconomic status. If they had heard the*

*story of Gabriel appearing to Zechariah in the temple, they might have thought “Well, that makes sense, he is a priest.” But when the single greatest angelic scene in all of scripture appears before them- they aren’t just terrified by God’s presence, they...*

*The shepherds were terrified by God’s GLORY*

- *Every now and then a movie will attempt to capture this scene, and it inevitably fails- usually comes off as pretty cheesy. It is IMPOSSIBLE for us to start to comprehend what the shepherds beheld- the very GLORY OF GOD shining around them.*
- *And there, in the midst of a presence they too believed would end their lives, the Angel said... DO NOT...*
- *These stories are profound, they are stirring, and they are ancient. But because of what they were announcing- that IN CHRIST GOD had come to us- today these message still stand true for us. In our lives RIGHT NOW, through our trust and faith in Christ, God still says to us...*

**† Now: Don’t be afraid!**

– *Thinking of Zechariah...*

- **In Christ:** We no longer fear the presence of God, for we now live in the presence of God!

**John 14:15-20** *“If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*

- *As we discussed a few weeks back in Colossians, we are now IN CHRIST, and CHRIST IS IN US. And as we saw last week demonstrated through Christ’s life on earth, by the Holy Spirit, GOD-IN-CHRIST continually participates with us, associates with us, ACCEPTS US, and LOVES US- as who we are RIGHTNOW, as He leads us into the trust and obedience of who we are becoming.*

– **THINKING OF MARY**

- **In Christ:** We have no fear of God’s actions, because God’s heart, presence, and purpose to us is always from His love.

**2 Peter 1:2-4** *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. <sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

- **CHURCH!** *As Jesus said himself, in this life we will have trouble! We live in world loved by Jesus, but a world that is fallen! Life can be hard!*
- **AND,** *there may be times when God’s calling, God’s leadership may guide us into situations that are profoundly difficult, where we can do nothing but look to Him, trust Him, and take on step of obedience at a time.*

- **BUT- or should I say AND- in the midst of life as it really is, we proclaim and hold onto the promise that GOD IS GOOD. That God will NOT violate his nature to accomplish his purposes. AND WE COME TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S PRESENCE AND GOODNESS BY .... FAITH. LISTEN as I read from Romans 8... when we BELIEVE THIS, HOLD ON TO IT, sometimes one moment at a time, this is GOD’S power over fear!**

**Romans 8:31-35** *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? NO! IN ALL THINGS we are more..*

– **Next: THINKING OF JOSEPH...**

- **In Christ:** We are set free from the fear of condemnation...

### **Free of the fear of condemnation of the law- Of God**

**Romans 4:7-8** *“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.” THIS IS TRUE... IN CHRIST*

**Romans 5:9-11** *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

**Romans 8:1-2** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

- **Because we are free of the condemnation of the law, we are also free of the condemnation of...**

### **Of other people**

- **THIS IS HARD. This is deep water faith. There are days we have to just sit and hold on to this truth- IN CHRIST, we are free from the condemnation of man, because we have BEEN ACCEPTED BY GOD. We are the beloved of God, and no other person can take that away.**

- **LISTEN to who scripture says you are...**

**Colossians 3:12** *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, **holy and dearly loved**, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

**1 Peter 2:9** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God’s special possession**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

**1 John 3:1** *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called **children of God!** And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

- **LASTLY, thinking of the Shepherds...**

- **In Christ: IN THIS LIFE-** We are set free from fear because we have seen the Glory of God in Christ.

**John 1:14** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- **Before the coming of Christ, to behold the Glory of God would mean terror and even death.**
- **NOW, IN CHRIST, the Glory of God is what brings PEACE and LIFE.**
- **And my friends, we can face the fears of this life and humbly say “LORD, IN YOU I AM NOT AFRAID”- because we have seen the GLORY OF GOD, and it was most fully revealed in the PERFECT LOVE of the CROSS.**
- **As John would write in his first letter- There is NO FEAR IN LOVE, because perfect love drives out fear.**
- **MY FRIENDS... God’s call for us to trust him, cast our anxiety on him, to NOT BE AFRAID- this is not just found in the NT, it is found through all of scripture. LISTEN as I read from the psalms. All of these are in your outline- go back this week and read them. Maybe you need to cut them out, put them on your fridge, commit one to memory. YOU SEE...**

† **Reality!** In the midst of so much that could bring fear, God’s invites us to know and experience His Peace.

**Psalm 27:1** *The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?*

**Psalm 118:5-6** *When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD; he brought me into a spacious place. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*

**Psalm 56:1-4** *Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit; all day long they press their attack. My adversaries pursue me all day long; in their pride many are attacking me. **When** I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise— in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*

**Psalm 3:5-6** *I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*

**Psalm 46:1-3** *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

**Isaiah 41:10** *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

- **I’ll close with this. Scripture commonly uses the imagery of a STORM as a metaphor of this life.**
- **As disciples of Jesus Christ- people who by faith in Jesus Christ- who by the Grace of God have been brought from DEATH TO LIFE...**

† In the midst of storm, our peace is a PERSON.

- **Last week we saw the story of the disciples caught in a storm on the sea of Galilee. The situation was dangerous- perilous- although it was not uncommon. THEY WERE AFRAID.**

***They see Jesus approaching, miraculously, but they don't recognize him until he is RIGHT THERE. RIGHT THERE, in the midst of their storm, in the midst of their fear...***

**Matthew 14:27** *But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

- ***This Christmas, if you are struggling with fear, with anxiety... JESUS UNDERSTANDS THIS. HE is right there, and he invites you to come to him, to cast your burdens upon him, trust him, and IN HIM – by FAITH- you will find rest for your soul.***