

## Fear Not!

St. Mark Lutheran  
Christmas Day Service

Pastor Ken Welsh  
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*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. 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 news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:8-14*

When you stop and think about it, Christmas is filled with very simple and ordinary things. There are shepherds taking care of their flocks. There is an inn that is filled with people. There are concerned parents after a long trip. There are curious visitors, and, of course, a baby. All of this is pretty much normal stuff.

But when God decided to enter human history as a human baby through the incarnation, he used all of these ordinary things in extraordinary ways. He did add one thing that was remarkable. It was so remarkable, in fact, that the first people "were filled with great fear". An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds with the news. He said, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

It is interesting that before the angel delivers the Good News, he calms the hearts of those who hear it. Have you noticed that nearly every time when angels deliver a message from God to human beings in the Bible, the first words spoken are some variation of "Don't be afraid"?

Where does this fear come from? Fear of the divine is the reaction of human beings in their natural human state. It has its source in the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. After they sinned in Eden, God came looking for them and asked Adam, "Where are you?" Adam's well-known reply was: "I heard the sound of you walking in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen. 3:9-10) Adam feared God because he was terrified that God would see him as he really was-sinful, naked, and ashamed.

That is the state of every person conceived and born into this world; they are separated from God because of their sin. Often like Adam and Eve, we try to avoid God and we hide from him.

But God seeks us out. He did so with Adam and Eve. The word he had for them was twofold: judgment and promise. The snake Satan used for deceiving Adam and Eve is cast on his belly. Eve is told that having children will be painful. Adam is told that he will toil and sweat all the days of his life. So there are some good reasons to fear God. He can punish us.

But also in Eden, God gave the first promise of a coming Messiah. He intended to save his creation which brought sin and death into the world. How did God restore us to himself? You should know the answer. It is the reason why we are here today. We have reason to celebrate, for God sent his Son to be one of us, to be the Savior of the entire human race. On the cross, Jesus earned salvation for whoever believes in him. That's why the angel told his stepfather Joseph; "You shall call his name Jesus. for he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)

Christmas is intensely personal. God comes personally to every one of us who does not reject him. He will not force his way into our lives, but he is there for those who seek him. As the Bible explains it, our sinful rebellion leaves us spiritually dead; we can't save ourselves. So God sent his Son to be born a human being of the Virgin Mary. He came into this world and offered the perfect sacrifice-himself-for all human sin. That's the whole point of Christmas.

The life and ministry of Jesus was a road from the manger to the cross. His purpose was to restore all people to God. He has done many things along the way to prove to us that he really is who he says he is. He restored sight to the blind. He helped the dumb to speak. He cured the lepers. He even raised three people from the dead, and then as was prophesised, on the third day he came back from the dead. A Jewish historian named Flavius Josephus was born four years after Jesus Christ was crucified. He grew up and compiled a history of mankind. In his writing, he states that he met and interviewed people from all over Jerusalem who swore that they had seen this Jesus who had risen from the dead. The lives of his disciples were utterly transformed by this man. They sealed their testimony with their blood. They were so convinced that they were willing to die for the faith.

The Holy Scriptures have left us all sort of signposts throughout history that point to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. Micah said that the Savior was to be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was. He was to come from the Tribe of Judah. He did. He was to be a descendant of David. He was. He was to be born of a virgin. That happened. Hosea said that God's Son would live in Egypt at some time, and he did, to avoid being put to death by King Herod. His life, manner of death, and purpose in coming are all recorded for us in the Book of Isaiah, and Jesus fulfilled every prophecy.

The best gift that we have on this Christmas Day is that God loves us. If we are truly sorry for our sins, he is willing to grant us forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We do not need to fear a God who created us and has worked out a plan of salvation for us, unless we ignore him. Heaven's door is open to us. We need not fear death and judgment if we trust in Jesus. Not only that, but God is available to help us with our lives today. He speaks through his prophet Isaiah with these words of comfort today: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

On that first Christmas Day, the angel announced to the shepherds that "A great joy will come to all the people: the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born for you today in David's town." Through the Word of God and the Holy Supper, God continues to give and sustain that joy today. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to those who believe. Amen.

