

Christmas Day, “For You Who Fear...” Luke 2, 2021

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

What do you fear this morning?

These past few days, as my various family members were out running errands through the rains, I feared auto accidents, and I feared the extra challenges, debts, injuries, and potential loss of life that such car accidents might bring. Millions of people around the globe this morning have known fear from the terrible virus that has gripped the world. Many more fear the financial fallout from the pandemic, or the ways our lives will be permanently changed because of it. What do you fear this morning? Illness? Unemployment? Loneliness? Political upheaval? Your after-Christmas bills?

The shepherds, too, were filled with fear on that first Christmas night, but it wasn't over the little stuff. It wasn't over the price of sheep, or the unseen dangers that lurked in the darkness, or the decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. It was the Angel of the Lord who appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord that shone around them, that caused the shepherds to fear as they were out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. They were "filled with great fear: Luke tells us (v 9). "Sore afraid," the King James Bible says. Filled with fear because of the mighty and mysterious glory of the Lord that shone around them when God's angelic messenger spoke to them.

This was a godly fear that the shepherds had. It was a fear that recognized and acknowledged the presence and holiness of God. It was a fear that tacitly confessed their utter unworthiness to be in the presence of the holy God because of their unholy sin. It was a fear that left the shepherds naked and exposed before God, whose glory surrounded them when His messenger appeared to them on that cold winter night. It was fear that unholy men would die when facing the Holiness of God, as He himself said to Moses, “for man shall not see me and live (Ex. 33:20).”

And what about you and me? We're certainly not shepherds, but we do each have our own vocation: father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, worker, state employee, medical technician, nurse, schoolteacher, accountant, road worker, firefighter, paramedic. We each have our vocation, just as the shepherds did, and we live and move and have our being in whatever "field" and over whatever "flock" God has placed us.

And as often as we are confronted by God's Word, the angel of the Lord appears to us and the glory of the Lord shines around us. For what are angels but God's messengers whom He sends to do his bidding and declare his Word—that Word which is "living and active" and "[pierces] to the division of soul and of spirit," that Word which "[discerns] the thoughts and intentions of the heart" and makes it so that "no creature is hidden from [God's] sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:12-13).

Yes, the glory of the Lord shines around us whenever and wherever our lives come face-to-face with Him who meets *us* in his Word. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). And that glory of God which shines around us, as often as his Word breaks into our comfortable lives—that glory of God should rightly leave us, like it left the shepherds, filled with fear, utterly exposed, and sore afraid because of our sin.

But for you who are filled with fear at the prospect of standing before God alone on Judgment Day, for you who have been led by God's Spirit to a godly repentance for your sin, for you who are searching for cover for your nakedness and are craving the love, mercy, and affection of our gracious God that Adam and Eve knew in the beginning, for you: THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS—GOD'S GOOD NEWS TO YOU THIS MORNING—IS "FEAR NOT!"

Fear not! For God himself has acted decisively to save you from your sin. He who created you, and was grieved by mankind's turning away from Him, but who wants all people to be saved and to know life again as it was in the beginning—this loving Lord of heaven and earth has sacrificed Himself to buy his creation back from the curse of sin.

He has done what only God could do to make right the situation! God the Father has sent his one and only divine Son into this world to assume our human nature, to become sin for us, to live up to God's Law perfectly for us, and then to give His life into death also for us and for all people, to silence the accusation of the Law and Satan the Great Accuser, forever!

We frail humans are sometimes forced to cancel Christmas services on account of bad weather or illness, but on that first Christmas, God gave birth to his plan to cancel sin—forever! "Fear not [the angel said], 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" (vv 10-11).

And in Christ there's no need to fear when surrounded by the glory of the Lord. In Christ, there's no need to fear at the prospect of standing before your Maker on the Last Day, because in believing that Word of the angel to the shepherds, you will not stand alone! Instead, by faith, you always stand in Christ! And in Christ—that is, fearing and loving and trusting Him above all things—God's final Word to you is good news. It is grace and mercy. Because Jesus Christ has borne in his own naked body, exposed and hanging on a cross, the full wrath of God over your sin.

So, "Fear not!" on this chilly winter morn. Fear not any day of your life, including your last. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." He has come and set the captives free from sin, death, and the devil! And in His body and blood you have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Amen.

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!