

42-02-06.wpd—Fear Not, Shepherds!
fear, Incarnation, Advent, death, good news, evangelism
Luke 2:8-20

Christ's birth is the fear-inspiring event that brings fear to an end.

INTRODUCTION: (text read as the **Scripture Reading**)

–The shepherds were used to the gloom—used to darkness every night in open fields. It frightened them, when an angel appeared, announcing the greatest news ever heard by human ears: the birth of God's Son.

–9 months earlier, an angel said, “*Fear not, Mary!*” An angel told her fiancé, “*Fear not, Joseph!*” when her pregnancy began to show. Now, the Messiah was born, and to get these trembling night-shift workers calmed down enough to listen to the ***best news in the world***, this angel said, “*Fear not, shepherds!*” (title).

–**HOM.idea.** This story illustrates this, especially as we consider a few questions... the 1st being...

I. Why Were the Shepherds the First to Hear the Good News?

A. Shepherds were social outcasts (at least, they in Palestine).

1. Who cares about shepherds? (God was showing that He did!)
2. What can reverse the poor self-image of the lowly? (Entrust them with a highly important responsibility! That's what God did!) – [**God's formula:** “the last shall be first, and the first shall be last”]

B. King David started out as a shepherd in those same Bethlehem fields where these shepherds now kept watch. (Who'd better appreciate the news that King David's promised son had arrived?)

C. This news was about the birth of greatest Shepherd of all time, Who would later proclaim– **John 10:11**, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

D. Abel was the first shepherd, whom Cain killed out of jealousy that his brother's offering was acceptable, and his wasn't. [**Abel's blood** cried out to God from the ground that Cain was guilty; later, the blood of this newborn Shepherd-Priest would be spilt into the earth by jealous Jews, but the cry of the blood would echo His dying cry, “Father forgive!”]

TRANS: What greater privilege for these shepherds than to be the first group of people to hear the *birth announcement* of Christ, the long-awaited Messiah! Yet, the awesome circumstances of this message had

them scared silly! The KJV says, “they were sore afraid,” they were “*terrified.*” This leads into our next question...

II. Why Was Fear the First Response to God's Approach?

A. Humanity has been accustomed to reacting this way...

1. It started with Adam & Eve hiding from God, then having to leave Eden, with an angel's deadly sword blocking their return.
2. We see it in the threat of death at God's approach when He gave the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai– Exo 19:21, and the LORD said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish.
3. We see it in Manoah, Samson's father– Judg 13:21-22, When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. “We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!”
4. We see this fear in ourselves, whenever we break God's law (not as a *preventative* “fear of the Lord,” helping us wisely avoid evil, but a *fear after the fact—fear about the consequences of sin.*)

B. These fear-habits lead us think there's too much distance between God and us for us to have real fellowship with Him.

1. That's not what the story of creation says– Gen 1:27, So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (We were created to have fellowship with God.)
2. The message of the Incarnation forever closes the gap between us and God– v.10-11, *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid... Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. [WHICH can and should be translated “Messiah-Jehovah”]*
3. The sinner's fear of God is absolutely justified, but the cessation of that fear is absolutely provided for by “a Savior” in Whom both divinity and humanity are forever perfectly in union!

TRANS: There *IS no hope for fearful humanity* if Christ is *only human* and not also *God*, OR *only divine* and not really *human*. The Incarnate God-Man is sinful humanity's only hope for approaching a holy God. God's desire for fellowship with us never undermines His holiness... [from an old, now forgotten, Christmas carol...

“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just and sacred Three,
Are terrors to my mind.

“But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins.”]

The call of Christ's Incarnation is for sinners to leave their sinning and partake of the holiness for which they were originally created – which can be found only in a personal faith relationship with Jesus “*the Savior that has been born to us, who is **Messiah-Jehovah***”

III. What Are the First Signs That Fear Is Disappearing?

- A. **Inspiration:** “*Let's go to Bethlehem and see...*” (God inspires your interest to go *check it out!*)
- B. **Investigation:** “*they hurried off and found...*” (God will help you find His truth, BUT our responsibility is to hurry up while the Spirit is moving, and get ourselves moving!) [*Moving Spirit* newsletter's effect.]
- C. **Proclamation:** “*When they had seen him, they spread the word*” (The divine announcement of “good news of great joy” is not just for our personal happiness. It enlists us into the ministry of evangelizing [“making the good news known”] because the angel said that it was “*good news of great joy that will be for all the people*”

CONCLUSION:

–[An old man was asked what had robbed him of joy the most in his lifetime. He replied, “*Things that never happened!*”] What robs many of the “great joy” God has intended for them is not taking advantage of something that has happened: the awesome *advent of His Son, Jesus Christ!*

–**Christ's birth is the fear-inspiring event that brings fear to an end.** [Here are the concluding lines of that old forgotten Christmas carol...

It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,	Though earth's foundations should be moved,
And will for ever he,	Down to their lowest deep;
To muse upon the gracious truth	Though all the trembling universe
Of thy humanity.	Into destruction sweep;
Oh joy! there sitteth in our flesh,	“For ever God, for ever man,
Upon a throne of light,	My Jesus shall endure;
One of a human mother born,	And fix'd on Him, my hope remains
In perfect Godhead bright!	Eternally secure.”

–“**Fear not!**” was the angel's a message to the shepherds, and it is the message to us: “*Do not be afraid...Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is **Christ the Lord.***” He is **Messiah-Jehovah!**

Luke 2:8-20 (NIV) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. {9} An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. {10} But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. {11} Today in the town of David a **Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.** {12} This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” {13} Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, {14} “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” {15} When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” {16} So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. {17} When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, {18} and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. {19} But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. {20} The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.