

Christmas Eve 2018
Luke 2:10-11

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. FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD."

"Fear not, I bring you Gospel – Good News – of mega-joy for all people." How strange, an urgent message to share Good News -- we interrupt this boring night for news of great joy. Breaking news of great joy -- that would rarely, if ever, happen. But God is born in human flesh to know everything that it is to be human; to live a perfect life; to take on our failures, our sin, to take them all into Himself and win salvation for us. God is man and He is on earth with us.

Fear not. Fear is a powerful force, a powerful motivator. On one hand, fear can be good. If you are out in nature, the sound of the rattle means that a snake is most certainly attached to that rattle and you shouldn't go there. The fear of a full, upset stomach causes us to forego constant binging on Christmas cookies and goodies. And of course, fear of God is a good thing. We should concern ourselves with doing His will above all things.

But on the other hand, there are a lot of fears that are useless and burden our hearts and minds needlessly. There's fear of disapproval and rejection that causes us to be silent when we ought to speak up. Sometimes, there is the fear of being unpopular, so we even speak against our neighbor or blaspheme God, when we ought to defend them. Terrorists seek to add fear to every activity of our daily life. There's lots of fears in which one of us gathered here tonight. Its Christmas, but that doesn't mean you are not anxiously waiting for the doctor's office to call about that

biopsy. Your family will soon be gathered around the holiday table and that one family member with the drinking problem is already on your mind. And, all of us fear death.

“Fear not,” the angel says. But why? Why were those shepherds afraid? For the same reason Mary was afraid when the angel Gabriel came to her; the same reason the apostles were terrified at the sight of the angels at the open grave of Jesus. We need to be afraid, too. One angel appears and the glory of the Lord is shining around him, and the shepherds naturally thought, “Oh no, we are in big trouble. The Lord knows about our coarse joking a few minutes ago; the jealousy and envy I have in my mind; the Lord knows I haven’t been in worship for quite a while. The Lord is my enemy; He is my Judge, and He knows me. Uh, oh.”

“Fear not,” the angel says. Notice that the angel doesn’t just say, “Don’t fear,” but he gives God’s children the reason there is no need for us to be afraid, “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). Dear Friends, these words are just as much for you tonight as they were for the shepherds of Bethlehem on the first Christmas. Fear not, there is Gospel of great joy for you. And how do you know it is for you? Because that messenger from God says it is for all people, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.” Unto you, your Redeemer, your Deliverer, has come, who is the Lord God Himself now in our flesh. For you – to save you from your sin and all its wages; from the judgement you deserve; to save you from a futile, meaningless life.

He saves you by trading places with you; taking your sins, your death, your damnation, your judgment and giving you His heaven to be your very own. The Christmas hymn says it so beautifully,

He undertakes a great exchange,
puts on our human frame,
and in return gives you His realm, His glory, and His name
{LSB 389:4}.

This incredible exchange takes place, as you are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

There just something that is so precious about a baby, isn't there? You have a baby, and he or she is always going to be the center of attention, right? Take a look in that manger at Mary's baby. Those beautiful little hands, with those chubby, little fingers, those delicate, little fingernails. Your God wears those precisely to comfort fearful, burdened people. To reach out to a grieving mother, say "stop weeping," and then touch her son's casket to raise him to life (cf. Lk 7:11-17). To say to a paralyzed man, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Pick up your bed and walk" (cf. Mk 2:1-12). To touch the eyes of a blind man and open them (cf. Jn 9). To spit into the ears of a deaf mute and grab his tongue to release them to hear and speak (cf. Mk 7:31-37). To console Mary and Martha at their brother's grave and raise him from the dead. To take a dead girl's hand and call her back to life. To hand the disciples His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. To take those hands formed in the womb of Mary and allow them to be pierced with spikes, so that your sins, your death, your judgment would be finished in Him.

Those pierced hands are raised in blessing now, today, on you, "Peace be with you," He says. Fear not, I am God with you. I am not some distant God seated far from you in heaven. I am your Savior on earth,

coming to you in the waters of your baptism, my saving word, my body and blood. “I will not leave you nor forsake you” (He 13:5). “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Mt 11:28-29). “I am with you always to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20b). I will work everything – yes, everything -- together for your good because you are mine (cf. Rom 8:28). You have nothing to fear, you are mine.

Only after one angel had comforted the shepherds with the new of the Good Shepherd’s birth, only after telling them they would find Him in a feed trough, wearing common cloth, only then does all of heaven break forth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased” (v. 14). Where is the glory of God? On earth. In Mary’s baby, in our flesh and blood, in that manger long ago, on that cross long ago, in that tomb long ago, risen to life again the 3rd day, saying “I am with you always”.

Tonight, He is here for you, a Savior, in comforting forgiveness. Fear not! Jesus in on earth – for you!