

"Fear Not - - God Is at Work"

(A Christmas and New Year's theme)

Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:8-13, Luke 1:26-33, Luke 2:8-11 (8-20)

We often think of the coming of Jesus in light of the tranquility of the manger scene. The cattle were lowing as the sheep stood quietly by. There were shepherds and their flocks on a quiet hillside. And a star was silently leading the wise men who came in reverence.

However, there were four significant events in this story where fear was more real than tranquility! Something new and unexpected was happening. Something outside of their plans and certainly beyond their control. God was moving. He was bringing change, and change often elicits fear!

Consider that in each of these situations ordinary people were doing ordinary things when the event took place.

[Matthew 1:18-25](#) (Angel speaking to Joseph)

V20 "Do not be afraid to take Mary - -." *Certainly* Joseph would have feared to take pregnant Mary as his wife! There would have been the fear that she had been with another man. Or people would accuse him of being the unwed father! And what would they say about *Mary*? Wouldn't they accuse her of being a loose woman?

But the angel said, "Do not be afraid - *because* God is at work!" Joseph was at peace. Wow!!

[Luke 1:8-13](#) (Angel appearing to Zacharias as he was burning incense in the temple)

These were sacred moments and Zacharias was concentrating on his most holy responsibility! Certainly he expected to be alone when "whooooosh!" - there was an angel!!!! "Fear gripped him." Why *of course* fear gripped him! How could it be otherwise?

And then V13, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias." Imagine the absurdity of that - - "Do not be afraid!" You're kidding! Then the angel explained God's plan and Zacharias had peace.

[Luke 1:26-33](#) (Angel tells Mary she will have a child)

Mary was a pure, godly young woman. A virgin who was planning toward the consummation of her marriage to Joseph. Probably she was alone at the time. And then this stranger walks in and gives her an unusual greeting that troubled her. She sensed that something unusual was about to happen and must have shown fear because the angel says (v30), "Do not be afraid - ."

When the angel explained God's plan, and Mary accepted it, she had peace. Awesome!

[Luke 2:8-20](#) (Angel appears to shepherds)

Picture this quiet country hillside with the shepherds and their sheep. It was a night like thousands before it and thousands that were to come. And then *suddenly* - an angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shown around - "and they were terribly frightened"!!!!

Certainly they were frightened by the voice out of nowhere and the bright shining of God's glory. How would *you* respond? "Do not be afraid." It's ludicrous! Absolutely ludicrous!!

But then the angel explains God's plan and the shepherds have peace!

So there we have it. A carpenter, a priest, a single girl and a bunch of (probably) smelly shepherds whose ordinary lives were dramatically interrupted by God as He went about His work of redeeming man.

In each case, the message "do not be afraid" was based on the invitation to see God at work and to be part of what He was doing! Fear *came* when they looked at themselves and the circumstances. Fear *left* when they saw the plan of God.

Things in our world are changing in ways that are causing Christians to fear, and we haven't seen anything yet! The years ahead will provide many opportunities to fear as our political, moral and spiritual environments continue to deteriorate, threatening our present way of life and the security it offers. And change is the seedbed of fear. (Some Americans are in denial; others cling to the false hope of spiritual revival in a way that will save our nation; and still others, because of blind nationalism, are depending on American power or resourcefulness to see us through.)

But know this. God is at work. He knows *exactly* what is happening. Nothing catches Him off guard. Everything that transpires as the result of man's choices will be used for His ultimate purposes. I revel in [Acts 17:26-28](#)! I just loooove to read that over and over! God will "do His thing" of drawing people to Himself, as man does *his* thing in cooperation with Satan' attempts to further establish his rule over the earth. But God has the last word and we serve *Him*!

So, as we approach the New Year with so much of life in turmoil, let's determine in a new way to see God at work. His "business" is to make His love and salvation known to the ends of the earth. And that's *our* business too, as in [John 17:18](#) and [Matthew 28:18-20](#). And there's an assumption in [Acts 1:8](#) that we often miss in our childish enthusiasm for certain implications of Jesus' words there.

It is obvious that those we considered were able to hear God and to give themselves to His plan. However, because of their love for the world, many Christians today are deaf and blind. Those who do see and hear will probably be in the minority and must draw together to encourage each other.

The touching words of Mary, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled," represent the heart that is able to cooperate with Him. The word "servant" there is actually "slave," and would be written that way except for the cowardice of translators who don't want to offend us. A slave lives only for his/her master's purposes. I pray that Mary's words are ours!

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