

DO NOT BE AFRAID!! FEAR NOT!!

A sermon for Sunday, December 24, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: **Luke 1:26-38** *Christ's Birth Announced to Mary*

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!'

²⁹But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.'

³⁴Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?'

³⁵And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷For with God nothing will be impossible.'

³⁸Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

Merry Christmas to all! **Do not Fear! Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified!** It is Christmas, a **time of joy, a time of celebration; a time of hope. Fear Not!!**

Today we remember again the holy story -- the story of the birth of Jesus, the son of God. Our emphasis today is on the words the angel spoke to Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds. **"Do not to be afraid!"** In other words, **do not Fear! We are called today not to fear or be afraid. Why? Because Christ the Savior is born!**

We start with Mary, a young teenager, unmarried, but betrothed to Joseph. She as faced with a terrifying possibility, the scorn of her family and neighbors, the burden of being an un-wed mother – begetting a child who happens to be the son of God. She didn't know anything about what her child would be like. It would certainly not be a normal human pregnancy. From her horizon, she couldn't foresee his death on the cross nor the miracle of his resurrection.

- Mary was at the very least human.
- She was troubled and fear struck.
- Her fear is understandable yet her reactionary faith was unwavering before God.

None of us has ever seen a dazzling angel who stands before God's throne in all his splendor. None of us has ever spoken to an angel one-on-one like Mary. Consider also, Mary's limitations - she was a mere human being.

To her the angel said, **"Do not be afraid, Mary, all things are possible with God."**

Mary accepted her future as it was dictated to her in obedience to God. She set a standard of obedience that shines out to all believers.

At the same time, fear and frustration took over Joseph's life. Joseph was looking forward to marrying a pure, righteous Jewish girl. The news of Mary's pregnancy shattered his life and brought all his dreams and hopes crashing down because Joseph was not the father of Mary's child. Joseph heard of Mary's pregnancy and didn't understand what had happened.

With dreams shattered, his hopes dashed, his pride lost, his life seemingly over. What options did Joseph have?

1. He could divorce Mary privately/quietly or
2. He could divorce her publicly.

Of course, option 2 would subject Mary to public ridicule and humiliation. In addition, this option could easily result into Mary's death by stoning (*Deuteronomy 24*).

But the angel commanded Joseph in a dream: ***"Do not be afraid, Joseph." Take the risk. Raise the child, take care of the family, even though you will have a hard journey to Bethlehem and will have to flee into exile in Egypt for fear of the tyrant king.***

- Joseph was righteous man. But, he was also human.
- He trusted in God. But, he was also troubled.
- However, trusting only in God outweighed other concerns.

Joseph obeyed God's direction, took Mary as his wife and the child as his Son to raise.
THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM!

And finally, the Shepherds. They were the rough, poor, almost homeless, social and religious outcasts of the day.

- They lived on the margins of society
- They suffered from all kinds of injustices.
- They were dirty, and smelly.
- They were deemed unfit to participate in the sacred ceremonies of the Temple because they were considered ritually unclean.

How could it be that God chose shepherds to behold ***God's glory?***

God does not obey human rules. He sent to them a multitude of angels. ***"The angels of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified!!!"*** Suddenly an army of angels said: ***"Do not be afraid!! We bring you good news of great joy..."*** Immediately their ***fear*** was changed ***into great joy.*** (*Luke 2*) And the shepherds followed God's guidance and went and saw the newborn King and returned, telling the world the miracles of God.

GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT HUMAN WAYS. GOD'S WAYS ARE UNSEARCHABLE.

The phrase – “***Do not be afraid***” is proclaimed again and again at Jesus’ birth. It is a Word of reassurance to those who trust in God.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples locked in a room for fear of the Jews, he declared to them, “***Do not be afraid, it is I, peace, be still.***” We are never alone or forsaken. He comes to us when we least expect him. He takes away our fear and declares to us his peace that surpasses all understanding.

At the Tomb these blessed words were repeated again: “***Do not fear, he is risen.***”

We acknowledge that **fear** is part of the human existence. Everyone, even the bravest are afraid of something: **Heights, Snakes, Spiders, Disease, Financial Setbacks, Old Age, Gray Hair, Rejection, Disappointment, Exposure, Being Forgotten,** and on and on and on. Fear makes us flee for our life!!

Great men in the Bible were stalked by fears:

- Abraham lied about Sarah, calling her his sister instead of his wife. (*Genesis 12:11-13*)
- Jacob displayed fear of his twin brother Esau. (*Genesis 32:6-8*)
- Moses feared to face Pharaoh and what he might do to him. (*Exodus 2:14*)
- The Disciples feared the storm. (*Matthew 8:24-26*)

This Christmas Season may bring a number of fears to some:

- **Fear of not having enough money to meet every relative’s Christmas present expectations;**
- **Worrying over meals, worrying over travel expenses;**
- **What shall I give my grandkids, grandpa might wonder! They are waiting!**

We just seem to fear!

Despite all our fears, like Mary, let us declare “***Let it be according to the Lord’s Word.***” Mary did set a high **standard of obedience and complete trust for all believers to follow.**

The secret of serving the Lord is to learn to trust completely in God. We must get rid of all **our assumptions, our suppositions, that make us miserable... Suppose this, suppose that!!**

Let it be according to God’s Word. Leave it to him.

Be assured that God’s providential hand is always there for us. God will never leave us nor forsake us if we put our trust in him.

Though the Lord’s assignments are hard and costly, God’s payback is far greater than what we put in.

Like Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds, let us carry out God's plans without fear.

- ***Do not fear***
- ***Do not be afraid***
- ***Do not be dismayed***

God will make a way where there is no way!!

An old man was once asked, "What robbed you of your joy most of your life?" He replied, "***Things that never happened!***"

All of us can recall the FEARS we have put on our shoulders by anticipating the worst that can happen. But God sends his word of assurance saying -- ***FEAR NOT; DO NOT BE AFRAID! I AM WITH YOU TILL THE CLOSE OF AGE!***

Amen!

Merry Christmas!