

## **Don't Be Afraid – Christmas Is Here!**

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Daniel Sulmasy, who was head of the Bioethics Institute of New York Medical College, made an interesting discovery while observing dying patients in a hospital. He aimed cameras at the doorways of terminally ill patients and tracked the number of minutes they spent alone. He said, “More than eighteen hours a day, there was no one in the room.”

Nurses checked on patients dozens of times during the day for no more than two minutes at a time and doctors averaged three visits a day for three minutes each. Visits from family members averaged twenty-four minutes per day and were the only visits that were likely to last over five minutes. Sulmasy said that patients who are terminally ill list isolation and abandonment as their biggest fears, and according to his research, that is what they often experience.

People can live in fear. If we are not careful, even Christians can experience overcoming and life-debilitating fears that are generated by the different circumstances we face in life. However, the message of Christmas reminds us that we can live above our fears! Christmas is for Christians because its message can dispel fear in our hearts. But Christmas is also for nonbelievers for when the true message of Christmas is embraced a person can be saved and have their fear of death and God's judgment removed from their heart.



We live during times when fear can very easily be generated in our hearts. There is the fear of America being overtaken by a communistic ideology. There is the fear of losing our freedoms. There is the fear of what lies ahead in the future. There can be fears related to financial and family challenges. There is also the fear we can experience when passing through

an illness or as we face older age. Fear can stem from many different events which we must pass through in life.

Fear can become like a knife that is stabbing itself in our side. It can take hold of our lives and rule our hearts. The good news is that the Christmas story is a reminder that God can dispel the fears in our hearts and lives. The repeated Biblical message of Christmas is this; “Don’t be afraid – Christmas is here!” We need hope during times of sudden change, difficulty, when things seem to be falling apart around us, during times of personal and world upheaval. It is during these times that Christmas provides us with hope instead of fear.

Christmas is the season that releases us from fear.

This is seen in 4 statements related to Christmas.

### **1. The "fear not" related to unanswered prayer (Zacharias).**

Sometimes we become fearful because God does not answer our prayers in the timing and way we think that He should. Zacharias had to learn to overcome his fear by waiting on God and submitting to His promise. Here is the background. The son (John) of Elizabeth and Zacharias would announce the coming of the Messiah into the world and therefore he was born as a contemporary with Jesus.



The story begins in this way in Luke 1:5-7:

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.”

Remember the setting to this Biblical and historically true story. God breaks through after 400 years of silence which occurred between the books of Malachi and the Gospel records. For 400 years there was no revelation from God other than the Scriptures that were already given. But suddenly, without advanced notice, God broke into history and announced what He was about to do in the birth of John the Baptist or baptizer.

Chronologically Dr. Luke begins the New Testament. He goes back to the birth of John the Baptist, to where the angel Gabriel appeared to John's father as he served in the temple. John's parents were Zacharias and Elisabeth. Zacharias means "God remembers," and Elisabeth means "His oath." Their names describe how God would not forget to bless Israel with the coming of the Messiah and how the Messiah would be announced by their own son whose name was John.

Luke 1:8–10 goes on to say:

"And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense."

One day Zacharias (of the tribe of Levi) was performing his priestly duties in the temple. His division was on duty among the 24 priesthood. This was a great day in his life because he had been chosen by lot to burn incense in the Holy Place. The people had gathered outside the temple and were praying. No one seems to know for sure the time signified by the hour of incense.

It is inspiring to see that Luke's gospel opens with people praying at the temple and it closes with people praising God at the temple. The intervening chapters tell how their prayers were answered in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Apparently, part of their prayer was for the birth and entrance of the Messiah into the world ("the desire of women" - Dan. 11:37) and even more specifically that Zechariah and Elizabeth would bear a son and that he might be the long-awaited Savior of Israel.

Luke 1:11-12 reveals what happened next:

“And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”

With priest and people engaged in prayer, it was an appropriate time and setting for a divine revelation from God. So, an angel of the Lord appeared on the right side of the altar which was the place of favor. Remember that this occurred after 400 years of silence. At first Zacharias was terrified since none of his contemporaries had ever seen an angel. But the angel reassured him with wonderful news. A son would be born to Elizabeth, to be named John (the favor or grace of Jehovah). In addition to bringing joy and gladness to his parents, he would be a blessing to many for he would be the herald who would announce the Messiah.

Luke 1:13-14 gives us the first fear not of the Christmas story:

"Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

This is the “fear not” that is related to un-answered prayer. Yes, there was the natural fear related to seeing the angelic visitor, but the fear of Zechariah and Elizabeth was much deeper than this. It was the fear that stemmed from doubting God and a lack of faith in God moving in Elizabeth’s womb to give them a Son. The angel seemed to stress the true nature of their fear when he said: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son..."

Here is the obvious point. Instead of being filled with FEAR over the situation of his wife’s barren womb and God’s previously unanswered prayer to give them a son, Zacharias was now to be filled with FAITH and hope in God’s promise regarding the birth of his son. Apparently, Zacharias and Elisabeth were praying for a son. I think that many people were praying that they would have a son. How do I know this? It’s because the angel said, “Thy prayer is heard.” Prayer had gone up for a son, but Elizabeth’s barren womb seemed to put out the fire and hope for this couple of having a baby. However, Zacharias was not to be filled with fear over this impossible situation, the barren womb of his wife, but instead believe God’s promise of the

birth of his son (John the Baptist) who would herald forth the coming of the Messiah.

Remember that this scene appears in the setting of the Christmas story.

Luke 1:26-27

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary.”

Why is the birth of John brought alongside the birth of Jesus Christ? It's because John the Baptist was to be born from the parents of Zacharias and Elizabeth so he might herald forth (announce) the coming of the Messiah to the nation of Israel. John was the herald of the Messiah and he would give the true reason why Jesus came into the world.

This is why John 1:29 records:

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

I was part of a music group many years ago called the “Heralders.” We were given this name because we had a message to herald forth about Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the promise of His Word. We are all to be heralders today of the good news. How much heralding have you been doing? How often do you talk to others about Jesus? Christmas is a perfect time of the season to talk about Jesus Christ to people who need the Lord.

Luke 1:15 says:

“For he (John) shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.”

This child would be GREAT in the sight of the Lord which is the only kind of greatness that really matters! We might be great in the eyes of the world and receive its

applause, but the world's accolades should not be our goal. Our greatness and goal should be to live in obedience to God's will and purpose for our life.

How would their son John be great? First, he would be great in his personal separation to God. The Bible says he would drink neither wine (made from grapes) nor strong drink (made from grain). Rather than being controlled by wine (booze), he was to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Wine and the work of the Holy Spirit do not coincide together. You cannot be controlled by both at the same time.

Second, he would be great in his spiritual endowment. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Of course, this cannot mean that John was saved or converted from the time of his birth for Psalm 51:5 reveals that we were all "shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." What this means is that God's prearranged plan and purpose for John, at the time of his birth, was that God's Spirit came upon him, as in Old Testament times (1 Sam. 11:6), to eventually prepare him for his special mission to be Christ's forerunner and herald forth the Messiah.

Luke 1:16-17 speaks of John's spiritual work:

"And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

With the Holy Spirit upon him, John would turn many of the Jewish people to the Lord or see a large number of Jewish people saved and prepared to meet the Messiah. His ministry would be like that of Elijah, the prophet, who sought to bring the people into right relationship with God through repentance that leads to salvation.

G. Coleman Luck points out this:

"His preaching would turn the hearts of careless parents to a real spiritual concern for their children. Also he would bring back the hearts of disobedient, rebellious children to the "wisdom of the just."

In other words, he would strive to gather out of the world a company of believing Jews who would be ready to meet the Lord when He appeared. This is a worthy ministry for each of us! We need to prepare people to meet God! We should not lose sight of preparing people for eternity! God has called us to be a witness to the lost today. There are always many opportunities to share the Gospel at the Christmas season.

Luke 1:18 speaks to the doubt of Zacharias:

“And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”

The aged Zacharias was struck by the sheer impossibility of the promise God gave to him about a son. Both he and his wife were too old to become the parents of a child. His question expressed all the pent-up doubt of his heart which had been causing fear to overtake his life.

A similar incident occurred in the Old Testament when Sarah did not believe in the promise of Isaac’s birth.

Genesis 18:12

“Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

- Have you ever laughed at God?
- Have you ever doubted what God can do through your life?
- Have we been experiencing the fear that is related to unanswered prayer?
- Have we been doubting God’s promises to us?
- Have we doubted God’s power to perform some task related to our life?
- What specific promises must we claim for our lives?
- How strong is our faith in God’s promises?
- Has our older age been a testimony of faith in God’s ability?

There are many fears related to older age. But remember this, we are never too old to rely on God’s promises! We are never too old for God to do something wonderful

through our life. In fact, older age is the time to bloom in relation to living by faith in God's promises!

Luke 1:13 once again reminds us about this Christmas statement. "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard." Like Zechariah, we should not be filled with fear and stress when God chooses to not immediately answer our prayer. Instead, we should express faith in God's purpose. Faith takes away the fear! Fear cannot exist in the atmosphere of faith.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones said this about a Christian:

"I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath—these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely—these are my native air."

A John Hopkins University doctor once wrote:

"We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non-worriers, but that is a fact. But I, who am simple of mind, think I know; We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality."

Luke 1:19-20

"And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

The angel answered first by introducing himself as Gabriel (strong one of God). Although commonly described as an archangel, he is mentioned in the Scripture only as one who stands in the presence of God and who brings messages from God to man (Dan. 8:16; 9:21). Because Zacharias had doubted, he would lose the power of speech until the child was born. Why God did this to Zacharias I do not know. God sometimes does and allows things to come into our lives which seem untimely



from our vantagepoint. But through it all Zacharias certainly learned the lesson to believe in God instead of living in fear and doubt.

“I've had many tears and sorrows,  
I've had questions for tomorrow,  
There's been times I didn't know right from wrong.  
But in every situation  
God gave me blessed consolation  
That my trials come to only make me strong.  
Through it all, Through it all  
I've learned to trust in Jesus  
I've learned to trust in God.  
Through it all, Through it all  
I've learned to depend upon His Word.”

Maybe you have learned this lesson or maybe you are still learning to trust in God in a greater way like Zacharias. Whenever a believer entertains doubts concerning God's word and His promises, he loses his testimony and his song. Our unbelief seals our lips from praise and our lips remain sealed until faith returns and bursts forth in praise and witness.

Here is the point in all of this. Zechariah's "fear not" is part of the Christmas story because He was not to express fear and anxiety over not having a son. Instead, he was to believe what God promised, how God would move upon Elizabeth's barren womb to bring John the Baptist (his son) into the world, who would be born to herald forth the coming of the Messiah. The angel was essentially saying, "Don't fear a barren womb and what seems impossible to you. God will give you a Son who will be great for he will call Israel to repentance and prepare the nation to eventually meet the Messiah who was soon to be born."

Sometimes we can possess a lot of fear in the situations we face in life (physical, relational, financial), and we may also fear that God does not hear our prayers. But this is not the case if we are on praying ground! When we are on praying ground it means that our sins are confessed to God (1 John 1:9) and we are yielded to God's purpose for our life. This reminds all of us that we need to settle our accounts with

God (confess our sins) and grow in our faith in God's promises in times of distress and turmoil, and those times when we think that God is not hearing us. God says in our time of stress and grief, "I have been here all the time, I have you covered. I will be good on all of my promises I have given to you and you can bank on it!"

Beloved, we can possess a new freshness in our daily living when we come face to face with God's promises and what He wants to do for us and through us! Zacharias was given the promise of a son who would be born and announce Messiah's entrance into the world to save Israel! This is why we sing:

"O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel."

Zacharias needed to believe God's promise that Israel's Deliverer (Jesus Christ) would be announced by the son that God would give to Elizabeth's once barren womb (John the Baptist).

- What promise has God given to you which you must claim today?
- Have you been a "doubting Zacharias" when it comes to what God can do in your life and the lives of others?
- How strong has your faith been in God's truth and promises?
- How strong is your faith in God answering your prayers and doing what is right for your life?

Uncle Oscar was apprehensive about his first airplane ride. His friends, eager to hear how it went, asked if he enjoyed the flight. "Well," commented Uncle Oscar, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, but I'll tell you this. I never did put all my weight down on the seat!" God is asking us to put down all our weight, all of our fears and anxieties upon Him, and allow Him to carry us through whatever we might be presently facing in life.

1 Peter 5:7

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

## 2. The "fear not" related to immediate obedience (Joseph).



The Christmas story also reminds us to not possess fear in relation to how or what the world thinks about us, but instead it reveals that we should simply obey God directly and faithfully. The Christmas story moves from Zacharias and the birth of John the Baptist (the heralded of the Messiah) to focusing on Joseph and the birth of the Messiah Himself.

Matthew 1:20

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ..."

Matthew 1:24

"Then Joseph ...did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him"

This is the "fear not" that is related to being obedient to God's command. Joseph was not to possess any fear over Mary's condition. She was not unfaithful to him but had been impregnated by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Joseph should not FEAR what others think about Mary, or what he had to do, which was to obey God's command and proceed with the marriage betrothal.

We need to understand the Hebrew marriage customs as they relate to the Christmas story. Marriages were arranged for individuals by parents and contracts were negotiated. After this was accomplished, the individuals were considered married (betrothed together) and were called husband and wife. They did not, however, begin to live together and have physical relations.

Matthew 1:18 makes this very clear:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.”

Instead of living together, during the betrothal period the woman continued to live with her parents and the man with his parents for one year. The waiting period was to demonstrate the faithfulness of the pledge of purity given concerning the bride. If she was found to be with child during this period of betrothal, she obviously was not pure, but had been involved in an unfaithful sexual relationship. Therefore, according to Jewish custom, during this unique Jewish betrothal period (before physical union occurred) the marriage could be annulled. If, however, the one-year waiting period demonstrated the purity of the bride, the husband would then go to the house of the bride’s parents and in a grand processional march lead his bride back to his home. There they would begin to live together as husband and wife and consummate their marriage physically.

Matthew 1:20 goes on to say:

“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”

Joseph was a very gentle man and he was mapping out his strategy to protect Mary from embarrassment and shame. During this time, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The salutation of “Joseph, son of David” was designed to stir up the consciousness of his royal pedigree or lineage and to prepare him for the unusual advent of Israel’s Messiah-King. Joseph was to have no misgivings or FEAR about carrying through the marriage betrothal contract with Mary. Any suspicions concerning her purity and faithfulness to Joseph were groundless. Her pregnancy was a supernatural miracle of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:21

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

The angel then reveals the unborn child's sex, name, and mission. Mary would bear a Son. He was to be named JESUS, (which means "Jehovah is salvation" or "Jehovah, the Savior"). True to His Name, He would save His people from their sins. This child of destiny was Jehovah Himself, visiting earth to save people from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin in their lives.

The lesson we learn from this part of the Christmas story is that we should never be afraid to obey God and do what is right. Instead of fearing what others might think (the world's view), or what our circumstances might dictate us to do, we must follow Joseph's example who feared God and obeyed Him!

Deuteronomy 13:4

"Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."

1 Samuel 12:14 adds:

"If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God."

Sometimes we can fear what others might say or think about us as a Christian (our stand, testimony, and holiness). We might fear what might occur if we take the right path – the God-ordained path – the straight and narrow road. But we must get passed the fear of man, which is a snare, and actually demonstrate fear and respect toward God by obeying Him and doing what pleases Him.

Proverbs 29:25

"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

This part of the Christmas story reminds us that we should not be fearful of the culture that is trying to change us, the world, or the opinions of others, but instead reverence and fear God, and obey Him. Joseph took the right path. We must do the same thing today in the midst of a world that has gone stark raving mad!

During the civil war Abraham Lincoln met with a group of ministers for a prayer breakfast. One of the ministers said, "Mr. President, let us pray that God is on our side." Lincoln's response showed far greater insight, "No, gentlemen, let us pray that we are on God's side."

All of us face the temptation to walk according to sight instead of faith. I'm sure Joseph was tempted to walk by sight and do what others thought. But faith in God will keep us from taking a detour and crashing in our Christian life. Human reason will fail us at times, but God never fails. The direction of His Word keeps us on the right course, as long as we obey it, instead of fearing what others might think of us.

### **3. The "fear not" related to the humanly impossible (Mary).**

Luke 1:30-37

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then

said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."



The angel reminds Mary of Elisabeth's miracle to reinforce the truth that God can do the impossible of giving her a supernaturally conceived child. Mary was startled and apparently frightened by the message that Gabriel shared with her about being

highly favored of God. Mary was troubled at the saying of the angel. However, Gabriel reassures Mary that she should not fear the message about God favoring her and moving upon her womb to bring forth the Messiah. In another words, Mary should not fear what the angel was saying to her about a virgin conception that would occur inside her womb and bring forth the long-awaited Messiah. And to reinforce the supernatural miracle that would occur inside of her the angel declared: "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

In essence, Gabriel was saying, "Mary, don't be afraid of what I am telling you. Instead, rejoice that God can do the impossible and give you a son as a result of a supernatural work occurring in your womb." This is the "fear not" of the humanly impossible! Mary should not be disturbed at what God had chosen to do through her but instead rejoice!

We must remember that without the virgin birth, which was supernatural in origin, Christ would have had an ordinary conception and birth, which would have been no different than any other sinner that was born in Adam's race. The virgin birth of Christ is an absolute necessity to maintain Christ's purity, sinlessness, and it is proof that He is God. If you reject the virgin conception and birth of Jesus Christ, you are not a half-baked liberal, you are an apostate!

The apostate Robert Schuller said:

"I could not in print or in public deny or affirm the virgin birth of Christ. When I have something I can't comprehend I just don't deal with it."

Folks, we had better deal with the virgin birth or else we will wind up in hell! Denying the virgin birth means denying Christ! With it, the Gospel stands or falls. Shuler's statement implied that the virgin birth is somehow optional or irrelevant truth. It is not optional. Satan knows this. Perhaps that is why he has worked so hard to discredit the virgin birth.

There have been three tendencies which have emerged when dealing with the doctrine of the virgin birth. 1) rejecting it (flat out disbelief of it); 2) redefining it (finding the spiritual meaning in what some have termed as a mythical metaphor); or 3) re-categorizing it (demoting it to a secondary doctrine, true and good, but

unnecessary for salvation). My question to those who reject or redefine the doctrine of the virgin birth is always the same - why? What's so offensive about the miracle of a virgin conception that would force us to regard it as either a loony legend or a meaningful myth?

If a person reads a passage like Matthew 1:18 and says, "That's ridiculous" or "That can't possibly mean this," I wonder what that same person does with the miracle of Christ's bodily resurrection. I have no patience for this kind of rejection or redefinition of the virgin conception. These types of positions have no place within Christian and Biblical fundamentalism. They never have and never will. The virgin conception in Mary's womb by the work of the Holy Spirit is foundational to the Christian faith. It was a definite supernatural miracle. Therefore, in this context the Bible declares: "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

Luke 1:36-37 records the same words in connection with Elizabeth's birth:

"And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

In the case of Elizabeth, God overcame the impossible situation of a barren womb of an old woman. In the case of Mary, God overcame the impossible situation of giving a son to a woman who never knew a man. Here is the spiritual lesson. God turns the impossible into the possible! And faith sees the impossible as possible!

Hebrews 11:1-2

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report."

"Fear not, Mary." Again, Gabriel was saying: "Mary, don't be afraid of what I'm telling you. Instead, rejoice that God can do the impossible and give you a son as a result of a supernatural work occurring in your womb."

"Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God;  
Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in His Word.  
Hearken to the voice of God to thee:



"Is there anything too hard for Me?"  
Then put your trust in God alone  
and rest upon His Word--  
For everything, O everything,  
Yes, everything is possible with God!"

G. Campbell Morgan had already enjoyed some success as a preacher by the time he was 19 years old. But then he was attacked by doubts about the Bible. The writings of various scientists and agnostics disturbed him (e.g., Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, Thomas Huxley, and Herbert Spencer). As he read their books and listened to debates, Morgan became more and more perplexed. What did he do? He cancelled all preaching engagements, put all the books in a cupboard and locked the door, and went to the bookstore and bought a new Bible. He said to himself, "I am no longer sure that this is what my father claims it to be--the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." The result? "That Bible found me!" said Morgan. The new assurance in 1883 gave him the motivation for his preaching and teaching ministry. He devoted himself to the study and preaching of God's Word.

The Christmas story reminds us that we should not doubt God's Word, promises and power. It also reminds us that God can do anything but fail when it comes to bringing His purpose to pass in connection with our lives.

"God can do anything, anything, anything  
God can do anything but fail  
God can do anything, anything, anything  
God can do anything but fail.

He can save, He can cleanse  
He can keep, and He will  
God can do anything but fail.  
He can save, He can cleanse  
He can keep, and He will  
God can do anything but fail

He's the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end  
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.  
God can do anything, anything, anything  
God can do anything but fail."

- Have you been doubting what God can do in your life?
- Have you been yielding to His supernatural work and power that He wants to unleash in your own life?
- Are you afraid of what God wants to do through your life?

Don't be afraid! Just yield to God's purpose and let Him work in your life in amazing ways!

#### 4. The "fear not" related to Christ's salvation (Shepherds).

The next angelic statement is perhaps the most well-known "fear not" statement of the Christmas story.



Luke 2:10-11

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not (don't be terrified!): for, behold, I bring you good tidings...which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord"

Instead of being afraid at the visitation of the angel and the display of God's glory in the sky (the fireworks of God!) occurring above them, the shepherds needed to rejoice for Christ was born as the Savior of the world. This is the fear not that is related to the Savior entering the world.

Now, it is understandable why the shepherds were terrified! It's likely that the radiance of God's glory was similar to His Shekinah Glory presence. God's radiating

glory that was displayed on this night long ago means that God was directly involved in the event of the birth of His Son!

The angel wanted to calm the hearts of the shepherds and exclaimed the famous words, "Fear not." Again, this is one of the well-known "fear nots" of the Christmas story (Luke 1:30). The shepherds were not to fear the glorious display of God's glory because the birth of the Savior was actually a blessed event which should remove the fear from the hearts of all humanity regarding their judgment as sinners. The actual Savior had come into the world who could take away their sins forever and give them salvation from hell and eternal life.

In one sense, the scene of fear was emblematic of the fear that can overtake the hearts of sinners whose sins have not been forgiven and who are not saved and headed toward God's wrath and judgment. This is why the angel declared, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings...which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord"

Ultimately, the angel was declaring that the shepherds did not need to fear because a Savior had come to save them from sin's penalty which was the righteous expression of God's wrath and judgment (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). The true Messiah and Deliverer had come which was foretold to come and which for thousands of years was typified in the system of animal sacrifices. Jesus had finally come to take away the fears related to death and reassure the world that He was the Savior who can remove the fear related to God's wrath and judgment being poured out upon sinners.

"Born to set thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in thee."

Hebrews 2:14-15 tells the same amazing Christmas story:

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same (Christmas – the Word became flesh); that through death (Calvary – the Cross) he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, He destroyed the devil's power and authority to keep us in the realm of spiritual death which is ultimately separation from God in hell. Christ came to provide us with deliverance from Satan's power, bondage, and authority by giving us salvation and new life in Christ. In other words, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ removed the strongholds of Satan from our lives including His power, blindness, and accusations against us, demanding that God should judge us as sinners. When placing personal faith in Christ, the devil's power and authority over our lives is broken and removed and we are given eternal life and the hope of Heaven. This is because the death of Jesus Christ is the basis of our deliverance from Satan's power and sin's penalty.

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings...which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Christmas takes the fear out of our hearts regarding death, hell, and God's wrath. Why? It's because Christ was born to be our Savior! The people knew this in Jesus' day, and it brought hope to their hearts. The same can be true for each one of us today. When we believe in Christ to be our personal Savior and Deliverer from God's righteous wrath and judgment, we can have the fear of death removed. The old Scotch hymn sums up this point:

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground,  
The angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around.  
"Fear not," said he for mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled mind;  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
To you and all mankind."

The Gospel of the Savior is glad tidings – good news! Christmas brought to the world the greatest news and story every known to mankind. The Savior was born! In the midst of all the "fake news" and propaganda in our world today, it's wonderful to know that there is the true news and the good news! And the news is this: "Don't

be afraid – Christmas is here!” Christ entered the world to become your personal Savior.

A man traveled a great distance for an interview with a distinguished scholar. He was ushered into the man’s study, where he said, “Doctor, I notice that the walls of your study are lined with books from the ceiling to the floor. No doubt you have read them all. I know you have written many yourself. You have traveled extensively, and doubtless you’ve had the privilege of conversing with some of the world’s wisest men. I’ve come a long way to ask you just one question. Tell, me, of all you’ve learned, what is the one thing most worth knowing?”

Putting his hand on his guest’s shoulder, the scholar replied with emotion in his voice, “My dear sir, of all the things I have learned, only two are really worth knowing. The first is, I am a great sinner, and the second, Jesus Christ is a great Savior!”

Jesus came into the world as the hope of all the ages to give sinners salvation from hell and eternal life in Heaven. Is He your Savior? Have you personally placed your faith in His death and resurrection to save you from hell? No person can be delivered from the fear of death and going to hell, which is paying the penalty of judgment for one’s own sins, unless that individual expresses faith in the only One (Jesus Christ) who can deliver them from God’s wrath. So, don’t be afraid – Christmas is here! Place your faith in Christ and be set free from God’s judgment forever. This will bring peace and calmness into your soul.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:29:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

There is a rest or peace that we can experience when we know that our sins are forgiven, that we are saved from hell, and are going to Heaven. The calmness or stillness (peace) we can possess in our hearts when trusting in Christ as our Savior is beautifully illustrated in the timeless hymn, “Silent Night.”



"Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child  
Holy infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight!  
Glories stream from heaven afar;  
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!  
Christ the Savior is born!  
Christ the Savior is born!"