

Do Not Be Afraid, Rejoice

Luke 1:13&30,2:10&14, Matthew 1:20
Pastor James York
December 24, 2011

As a child I was afraid of social gatherings. My parents desired for me to be joyful, to make friends and have fun. I am an introvert. I was certain I would be a dairy farmer all my life, so I rationalized that I didn't need to have friends. I was very afraid of social settings. Afraid of looking foolish. Afraid of saying the wrong words. Afraid of being rejected. 4H was having a be our guest roller skating party. Mom and Dad were excited for me to attend. Being afraid I made all kinds of excuses however Mom had a solution for every excuse. Finally Dad even told me I would not need to do any farm chores for that day if I would attend. Mom kept calming my fears, took me to the party and promised to stay in the car in case I got embarrassed and needed to bolt. As I roller skated slowly my fear dispersed. I started having fun. I met some nice kids my age. My parents were delighted that I was having fun.

God created paradise to play with us, and delight in us. Paradise was lost when our ancestors became afraid. They were afraid of what they did. Afraid that they were not good enough to enjoy fellowship with God. They were afraid of each other so they hid. Fear is the opposite of love. Fear distorts the harmony of paradise.

God has been working to disperse fear with God's grace ever since. God is working to reestablish paradise, a fear free cosmos, where all enjoy fellowship with each other and God.

On the first Christmas God longed to play with God's children, but they were all afraid. God wanted God's children to delight, rejoice and celebrate God's gifts such as creation, blessings, love, the special abilities and unique personality thoughtfully hand sculpted into each and every person. Some had run away and were afraid to come home. Some were afraid of others. Some were afraid of what was happening in their life. All had rebelled and were afraid that their mistakes could not be forgiven. All were hurting in some way and afraid that their life would not be restored to joyful, beautiful, abundant life. God is aware that we are afraid and easily intimidated so God came to us as a baby.

Can you imagine God putting together the Incarnation, Emmanuel, Jesus our savior, to disperse all our fear and fill us with joyful love like a parent assembling a gift for their child on Christmas Eve, anticipating the look of delight in their child's eyes? God wanted to see your jaw dropping happiness, your squeal of glee, your clapping of pure pleasure, your dance of abundant joy so God needed to surprise us. God needed to keep our gift secret until the perfect moment so God choose a young lady from a small town to carry God's gift. Who would ever guess? God choose a stable in Bethlehem as the place to deliver the gift. Who would ever imagine? God saw our delight whenever we held a laughing baby so God came to us as a baby. When the gift arrived God

got so excited God could not hold back God's joy. God tore open the heavens. God's smile lit up the sky. God's dance caused the heavenly host to sing. God gave the world a hug filling all with God's glorious radiance.

God comes to us in Jesus to disperse all our darkness, to restore us, to overcome all our fears with love. Over and over again God says, "Do not be afraid."

The angel Gabriel appeared to the old priest Zechariah who was afraid his lifetime of prayers for God to redeem the world through a messiah will not be answered. The angel said to him, **Luke 1:13 "Do not be afraid because your prayers have been answered"** Zechariah's prayer was answered in an intimate way for he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son who would become John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for Jesus to save all people.

Do not be afraid God is answering every one of your prayers. Sometimes the best answer is no or wait. Often God's answer to your prayer is something way beyond your hopes and expectations. Sometimes our prayers are answered in ways that we want, but more often we see God at work in giving us what we really need when we need it. In Israel's case the Messiah came as a tiny, helpless baby instead of a conquering hero. Instead of taking on the Roman oppressors with military might, Jesus saves the world through loving service and personal sacrifice. God save us and the whole world -- by participating in human suffering and taking it on, overcoming pain with joy, overcoming suffering with healing, overcoming hate with love, overcoming

every brokenness with redeemed wholeness, not by bailing Godself, or us, out of it. Our prayers are always answered by the God who walks with us no matter where we find ourselves.

Mary was afraid of being insignificant, common, ordinary. The angel Gabriel visited her and said to Mary. **Luke 1:30 "Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God"** Favor is sometimes translated honored or gracious. Favor means special privilege granted. To the world Mary was plain, a poor girl, but to God Mary is cherished and beloved. Just as you are cherished and beloved by God because you are God's child.

Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. God favors each of us. God loves us with an everlasting love. Loves us enough to come as one of us, die for us, live with us and in us. It's not favor that we earn. Instead, it is the ultimate gift -- better than all the presents under the tree. We call that gift "grace," and God offers it to us lavishly. God doesn't promise us a pain-free life but God does promise to be with us every step of the way. God reveals that you are special for the Creator of the cosmos left the glory of heaven to come to be with you.

Joseph was afraid of what to do. Should he marry Mary? He was afraid of what others thought. How this would affect his parents, his career, his life? An angel appeared to Joseph and said, **Matthew 1:20 "Do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary."**

Do not be afraid. God has wonderful plans for you. God often gives you many wonderful choices. Regardless of which one you choose God makes the journey with you.

Wise men, astrologers, leaders, the financially comfortable, were afraid. They were searching for meaning and purpose. God sent them a star that led them on a fear dispelling journey that culminated in the worship of Jesus.

Do not be afraid. God is providing whatever you are searching for and will lead you on a journey to fulfillment.

The shepherds were the poorest of the poor, outcasts. Scripture says they weren't just afraid they were "sore afraid" This time a whole host of angels appeared and said. **Luke 2:10 "Do not be afraid, for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people"** Notice the angel song: **Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in heaven and on earth peace."** Peace. Not fear. It is good news for all the people -- not just for some.

Jesus came to dispel your fear. No matter what happens, in Christ, God is saving and setting right the entire cosmos. Until all are redeemed listen for the angel voice telling you: "Do not be afraid." Whatever your fear God is with you, delighting in you and ultimately God will save you, perfect you and give you glorious eternal life with all your love.

The last thing Jesus said before he took all of your fears, all of the entire cosmos' fears, to dispel them through the cross was, "Do not be afraid." Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" and then explained how he would always be with us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" and explained

how fear will be overcome with love. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid” and describe the glory of our resurrection and the glory of reunion with God and others in heaven. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, my peace, joy and love be in you.”

When you are afraid and all is dark remember that God tore upon heaven to be with you. Jesus will transform your every fear, surround you with the music of angels and shine the glory of heaven upon you.

The shepherds after just one look at Jesus were set free from all their fears and filled with wonder. Unafraid, they danced. They high fived. They ran through the town hooting and hollering telling all about Jesus. They laughed. They celebrated. They banged on windows, woke everyone up, to tell them the good news of fear dispersing love which produces great joy. It is Christmas you are invited to see what God has done, is doing and will do. You are invited to leave your worries and fears and bring your hopes and dreams. You are invited to celebrate God’s extraordinary gift wrapped in ordinary circumstances. You are invited to sense God’s delight in your enjoyment of God’s gifts. You are invited to experience the presence of our living God so you to can leave praising God.

Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. God’s gift to you is way to wonderful to receive all at once. You are invited to ponder, to see how God’s gift will grow you. Treasure Christmas. Christmas is only beginning. We have received a gift from God. The gift will make us perfect, radiant and unite us in eternal love.

Can you imagine God's delight in seeing the world and us rejoice? On Christmas Eve God put together a gift that will disperse all our fear and darkness, a gift that will restore us. God with joyful anticipation put together a gift for you. God fitted together Mary and Joseph, a loving family. Jesus united them with such love that everyone, outcast shepherds, the religious, unreligious, rich, poor, even animals were connected together in loving harmony. In time everyone will discover their favored, honored niche in God's family. God fashioned stars so all of us, no matter where we are, can see a reminder of the radiance of our home with God. God squeezed into a baby, to reveal God's desire to hug you, play with you and delight in you. God became a baby to show you how precious your life is and to assure you that you will be born again into eternal life in heaven. Enjoy God's gifts to you.

Amen