

Text: Luke 2:8-11

Title: "Christmas without fear"

Time: 12/23/2023

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I would like to begin this morning with a bit of Bible Trivia Pursuit. You may be familiar with the game Trivia Pursuit. We are going to do a Bible version of that. Here is the question: What challenge or temptation is caused in the life of many Bible characters due to certain circumstances they faced? Your clue is that I will give you a list of the circumstances that caused many Bible characters to face this same challenge, and then you must tell me what that singular challenge was. Here are the clues:

For Abraham, his childlessness and what that meant for the future of his household caused him to face this (Gen. 15:1).

For Hagar, her inability to keep Ishmael alive after Sarah expelled her caused her to face this (Gen. 21:17).

For Isaac, the unknown about whether God would be with him like He had been with Abraham caused it (Gen. 26:24).

For Jacob, the need to move his household to Egypt brought this challenge (Gen. 46:3).

For Moses and Israel, the approaching Egyptian army while trapped at the Red Sea was the cause (Exod. 14:13).

For Joshua, it was the need to make a second attempt to defeat Ai after failing the first time (Josh. 8:1).

For Gideon, it was the possibility of dying from seeing an angel (Judg. 6:23).

For Ruth, the thought of rejection from Boaz caused this challenge (Ruth 3:11).

For David, the threat of Saul's desire to kill him brought this temptation (1 Sam. 23:17).

For Mephibosheth, it was the possibility that David would seek revenge (2 Sam. 9:7).

For Solomon, the responsibility of becoming king on the throne of his father David caused this (1 Chron. 28:20).

For Solomon's son, it was the likelihood of unknown and sudden dangers (Prov. 3:25).

For the widow of Zarephath, the starvation of herself and her son caused her to face this (1 Kings 17:13).

For Elisha's young servant, it was the angry Syrian army (2 Kings 6:16).

For Ezekiel, the hard hearts of Israel brought him this challenge (Ezek. 3:9).

For Daniel, it was delayed answer to prayer (Dan. 10:12).

For Joseph, taking pregnant Mary as his wife made him face this (Matt. 1:20).

For Mary, the lofty things the angel said about her had the same effect (Luke 1:20).

And in our passage this morning, the Christmas shepherds faced this challenge after the appearance of the glory of the Lord from the angel of the Lord as they watched their flocks on Christmas night (Luke 2:10).

So what is the temptation that was caused by all these different circumstances in the lives of these Bible characters? What challenge is the same in all of these examples? It's fear. In each and every case I have listed (and many others could be added), the circumstance described had the potential to cause fear in the life of the person experiencing that circumstance. And in every single one of these 19 passages, the Lord tells someone He loves to "fear not."

So given this list, the question for us this morning is not really "Are you fearful?", but "What is your fear?" We all battle the temptation to fear, just like the many from Scripture we have listed. What are you afraid of this morning? Can you find any parallels between our list and your own life?

For me, there is one Bible example of fear that reminds me about a kind of fear that I sometimes experience. In Luke 5 Jesus tells Peter to go cast their fishing nets one more time, and Peter responds with exasperation: "Master, we have toiled all

the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." The catch was so great that their nets broke. And as Peter pulls himself on to shore, he is struck with guilt over the way he had spoken to Jesus. He falls at Jesus's feet and says to Him, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Peter was afraid that he had failed too severely to continue to be a disciple of Jesus. He feared that he was too sinful to serve his Lord. Jesus recognized this fear in Peter and said to him lovingly and reassuringly, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." And so Peter did.

There are many things that can make us afraid. 2020 and 2021 were miserable years of Covid fears. In 2021, Brother Tom Jackson, the director of Camp Northfield, had to cancel the Christmas banquets they host each year at the Camp. The cancellations meant a great loss of blessing and needed revenue as well for the ministry there.

But as I read Tom's letter announcing the cancellations, I was encouraged by the courage Tom expressed: "We trust that you all have a great time of thanksgiving, and a Merry Christmas as you reflect on the birth of our Savior. Luke 2:10 says, 'Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people' - this year has been hard, but trust in Him, and fear not! What an incredible God we serve!" God has blessed that trust.

Those courageous lines are the inspiration for my message this morning. I want us to focus for our remaining time on the good news of great joy from the angels to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-11. The angel tells the shepherds to fear not, and then he tells them why they do not have to be afraid. I want us to hear them say to us this morning: "Fear not what is making you afraid, and here's why not." Look at the reason we need not fear in verse 11, one phrase at a time.

I. "For unto you is born" (v. 11a).

Illustration: Maureen and I were blessed with the birth of three beautiful babies, each one a tremendous blessing from the Lord to our lives. After each was born, we were given a bracelet that matched that of our child to make sure that the hospital could keep track for us of who belonged to whom. Knowing to whom the baby is born is very important.

Application: When we think of the birth of Christ, we normally think of the miracle of His being born to the virgin Mary. We think too of Joseph as the father who helped to raise this baby. We correctly say that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary, his parents.

But here the angel is not talking to Mary or to Joseph when he says, "Unto you is born." He is talking to the shepherds, whose names we do not know. The birth of Jesus was unlike any other birth. Every other birth of a baby is a birth of one born to the baby's parents. But Jesus's birth was a birth to His parents, and to the shepherds, and to you and me as well. His is a birth, "which shall be to all people" (v. 10).

There is a sense in which the Child born that night is your baby and mine. The angels tell the shepherds that the reason they need not be fearful is that a baby has been born to them. We do not have to be afraid, because Jesus was born to us. You do not have to be afraid, and the reason why is that Jesus was born to you, which tells us of the grace of God's love for us.

John 3:16 explains the sense in which it is true that Jesus was born to all people: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God loves you. God gave His Son to you. And so, fear not (see Rom. 8:32).

II. "this day in the city of David" (v. 11b).

Application: The angel references the time and place of Jesus's birth. In other words, this is the Christmas story that really happened in history, unlike the other popular legends we enjoy this time of year.

The city of David is, of course, Bethlehem. Daniel prophesied the time of Jesus's death as 483 years after Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra (see Ezra 7:11-26; Daniel 9), and Micah prophesied the place of His birth, the little town of Bethlehem; and they did so hundreds of years before the birth and the death happened.

Illustration: *The Book of Mormon* illustrates how hard it is to get historical details like this right even hundreds of years after it has happened, let alone hundreds of years before. In Alma 7:10, it records of the Son of God, "And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers." That is clearly a mistaken contradiction to the teaching of Scripture. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not at Jerusalem.

I asked a Mormon elder at my door once about that verse, and he tried to explain to me that in the ancient Egyptian (a language no longer extant) the word *at* means *in the region of*. So he explained that because Bethlehem is in the region of Jerusalem there is no contradiction.

I asked him where else that word means *in the region of*, and his response made apparent that he had no true knowledge of the word's usage in the no-longer-available Egyptian text. Then I explained to him how that saying, "Jesus was born in the region of Jerusalem," misses the whole point of the true Scripture prophecy about the birthplace of Jesus.

Micah 5:2, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though thou be little among the thousands of Judah*, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Jerusalem was large in Judah. Bethlehem was little. The littleness of Bethlehem in

contrast to largeness of Jerusalem is the whole point of the prophecy. The *Book of Mormon* simply gets the geography wrong hundreds of years after the event took place.

Yet when the angel tells the shepherds, “this day in the city of David,” he speaks of the birth of Jesus in the exact time predicted by Daniel, and in the exact place predicted by Micah, both hundreds of years before it happened. Jesus’s birth was the miracle of fulfilled ancient prophecy.

And so, fear not. Jesus was born exactly when and exactly where the prophets said He would be. We do not have to be afraid, because God’s eternal plan for this Child happened right on schedule and in the right town. The Child born to us is God’s miraculous fulfilment of ancient promises, which means He cannot lie and His promises to us are true. Just as the prophets promised He would come the first time, so they assure us that He is coming again. Fear not.

III. “a Savior” (v. 11c).

Application: The baby born miraculously on schedule to you and to me is a Savior, and that is why we need not be afraid.

Without a Savior, we have much to fear. Without a Savior, our holy God is a terror to us fallen creatures. Without a Savior, the righteous law that we have broken in sin frightens us with its just condemnation. Without a Savior, the bondage of the fear of the death and of the hell we deserve terrifies us.

This bondage to fear characterizes the unsaved world we live in today. Our world is a place of the fear of death. But listen to how the author of Hebrews describes the significance of the birth of this Christmas Child: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death 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" (Heb. 2:14-15).

The angels tell the shepherds, "Fear not – Jesus is the Savior." You can stand before your holy God and call Him your Father with a Savior. You can be justified in spite of your violations of His righteous law because a Savior took your guilt and gives you His righteousness. You can overcome the bondage of the fear of death and hell with a Savior who arose again from the grave promising to do the same for us.

Jesus is the Savior. He was born to die for your sins and for mine. Are you without the Savior this morning? Then you have much to fear. Is Jesus your Savior? Then fear not.

IV. "who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11d).

Application: *Christ* means *Anointed One*, and it is the title of Jesus that refers to His three offices as the One Mediator between God and man. In the Old Testament, priests, prophets, and kings were all anointed ones. For those who have Jesus Christ as their Savior, He is their priest whose sacrifice atones for their sin; He is their prophet whose word they hear and obey (remember the Mount of Transfiguration: "Hear Him!"); and He is their King who reigns over their hearts and lives.

Jesus is all those things because He is their Lord. *Lord* refers to God's covenant name *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*. In our passage, the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds (v. 9). That was Jehovah's angel. The glory of the Lord shown round about the shepherds. That was Jehovah's glory. And the baby who was born to you and me that night was Christ, the Lord (v. 11). The baby is Jehovah.

His name is "Jesus [Jehovah saves] because He [Jehovah, the baby] shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Is your Savior your Christ and your Lord? If not, your savior is not the Christmas Child, because He is Christ the Lord.

Conclusion: And so this is why the angels could tell the shepherds, "Fear not." "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." He is the only reason. He is the only way we can have a Christmas without fear.

The account goes on to tell how the shepherds feared not. They came with haste to worship the Baby, spread abroad the good news that His birth was for all people, and returned to their fields glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. Clearly, they had stopped being afraid. There was a Christmas without fear. That is what the birth of Jesus did for them. It gave them their Savior and Lord, and it conquered their fear so that they could worship and serve Him.

So again, of what are you afraid? Fear not. Go to Him in haste, worship Him, trust Him, proclaim Him, and glorify and praise Him as your Savior, your Christ, and your Lord.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*