

**Luke 2:10-12 (The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve)**

**“No Fear”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT**

**December 24, 2020**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is from Luke 2:

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

Today I have the joy of celebrating my 20<sup>th</sup> Christmas with you all. But I never imagined it would look like this—three services to keep us socially distant from each other, masks—Christmas 2020, what year is has been! When we were together a year ago, who could have imagined the pandemic, the isolation, the fear? In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for help because he doesn’t feel happy at Christmas. Lucy tells him that, if they can figure out what Charlie Brown is afraid of, they can label it. She offers a list of possibilities: responsibility, cats, staircases, the ocean, crossing bridges. She ends asking him if he has pantophobia. When Charlie Brown hears that pantophobia is the fear of everything, he exclaims, “That’s it!” If I had to put a one-word label on this year it would be “fear.” Fear has dominated our country and world. This pestilence of COVID-19 has spread not only sickness and death, but also so much fear: fear of the disease, fear of job loss and losing income, fear of getting food and necessities, fear of being alone, fear of being isolated. The list goes on and on.

Fear, however, is nothing new to our human experience. We experience fears on a regular basis even as we simply mind our own business and go through this life. The threatening forces of nature cause fear. Think of all the forest fires out West. Think about the

destruction of hurricanes and tornados, earthquakes and floods, causing the loss of property and life. We fear the actions of other people. Consider how much we spend on security for our homes, businesses, and computers to keep other people out and to keep our possessions, families, and selves safe. Bullying affects many in our families, schools, and workplaces. Bullies cause fear for so many with their hateful words and hate-filled actions.

Fear is a result of sin in the world, not the least of which is the fear of encountering God who is holy and without sin. This fear enters the world immediately after Adam's disobedience as we read in Genesis 3, "But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself'" (Gen. 3:9–10 ESV). Adam and Eve were afraid to be in the presence of God because they were now sinful, separated from God, and unrighteous. Their whole relationship with the Creator had been destroyed. And so had ours.

We have all inherited that fallen condition—sin—and are just as separated from God and unrighteous as were our first parents. We are by nature spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. Since we are enslaved in a lifelong sinful condition from which we cannot free ourselves, we deserve God's earthly and eternal death sentence. Is it any wonder that we are to rightly fear God and His just judgment against us and our sinfulness? We should all be afraid of the Lord's condemnation and the punishment of everlasting death in hell since the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23).

Have you noticed that fear is the normal reaction of people when they encountered God in the Holy Scriptures? Adam and Eve hiding from the Lord in the garden: they were afraid. Moses standing before God on the mountain where the bush burned but was not burned up: "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex. 3:6 ESV). The people

of Israel standing before Mt. Sinai: "Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off" (Ex. 20:18 ESV). Zechariah in the temple and Mary in Nazareth, as Gabriel, the angel of God, spoke to them, were afraid because the angel stood before them in the place of God. Shepherds, keeping watch over the flocks by night, behold an angel representing God Himself. They are afraid. Does this mean the time of punishment? Does this mean condemnation and everlasting death?

It should. But wondrously, it does not. The God who is holy, just, and righteous came among His people according to His grace and mercy, for their benefit and blessing. Even as God punished Adam and Eve in the Garden, so He did not destroy them. He clothed them in animal skins and banished them from Paradise with a promise that someday, the Seed of the woman, the descendant of Eve, would come and triumph over sin, Satan, and death itself. The holy God came to Moses and the people of Israel in order to give His Word to them, to make them His covenant people, that He might be their God, the God who keeps His promise to send THE Descendent of Abraham, according to the flesh, to rescue both Israel and the Nations from sin and death so that all families of the earth might be blessed.

In the fullness of time, God sent Gabriel to Zechariah and Elizabeth. His message to Zechariah began, "Do not be afraid." God's messenger announced the birth of John, who would go before the Lord Himself in the Spirit and power of Elijah. John would be a prophet of the Most High God who would prepare the way for God Himself to come among the people. John would "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high" (Luke 1:76-78 ESV).

Gabriel also stood before Mary in the village of Nazareth of Galilee. His message to her began, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." God was coming into the world in human flesh. Yes! The holy, just, and righteous God who made heaven and earth became incarnate, fully human, in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Word, God the Son, humbled Himself to come into this world according to our flesh and blood as a descendent of Abraham. Truly, the Seed of the woman promised back in Genesis 3:15 was the child of Mary, born in Bethlehem, to be the Savior of all.

God could have come in great power and might and punished humanity. He could have come with legions and myriads of angels to send us all to fires of everlasting death and hell. But our Father in heaven "did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17 ESV). Jesus, His name means, "The Lord Saves." And so the message to us on Christmas is a Gospel message. It is a message of Good News of great joy that is for all the people. The Savior is born. Christ, the Lord, God Himself wrapped in human flesh, with a true human nature, without sin, to be our Savior from the power of Satan, sin, and death. Fear not!

That's the simple message that the Christian Church proclaims from the First Sunday in Advent to the Last Sunday in the Church Year. From Christmas through Epiphany, from Lent to Easter through the Sundays after Pentecost, the message rings out, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10 ESV). Fear not, for Jesus, true God and true Man, has been "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15 NAS95). He kept God's Law perfectly for you. He never failed once to be righteous and holy. That sinlessness is credited to you. Jesus' righteousness is yours. "For as by the

one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19 ESV).

In exchange, Jesus took your sinfulness, your unrighteousness, your lustful thoughts, your hate-filled words, your lack of love and care for your neighbors, and He bore them to the cross. Fear not! Jesus died in your place. Jesus paid for your sins in full with His blood. Jesus broke down the wall of separation between you and God the Father. You are at peace with God. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1 ESV). And the proof isn't in any Christmas pudding—figgy or otherwise. The proof is in the empty tomb. On the third day, Jesus was raised from death. He is the Victor over sin, over Satan, and over death itself! Again the Gospel message echoes, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said" (Matt. 28:5-6 ESV).

The forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, rescue from death and the devil. No condemnation. No fear because you have been made children of God by grace through faith in Christ alone. Galatians 4, "But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights" (Gal. 4:4-7 NET).

Does this mean that there won't be all kinds of things to that threaten us and seek to cause fear in our lives? No, while we are still on this earth, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh will still attack us. We are still subject to the sufferings and pains and tragedies of life. But you and I are now victors in Christ. You are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves you so much. And the message of Christmas, the message of the Gospel, is for you now and always. Fear not, you who conquer through faith in Christ! "Neither death nor life, nor

angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate [you] from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39 ESV).

What a year it has been! But the Lord Christ has seen us through it. By means of your Baptismal faith you are placed daily by the Holy Spirit into the hands of Christ which are still marked with the prints of the nails. Christ has died for you. He is risen for you. And He comforts you with His Gospel: "Do not be afraid." "I forgive you all your sins." "My peace I give you." "Take, eat; this is My Body given for you. Take, drink, this is My Blood shed for you for the forgiveness of all yours sins." Good News of great joy, for you, for you, for you. Amen.