

Sermon 2, The Christmas Imperative: Fear Not, Luke 2:10-11

Proposition: The imperative of Christmas is “Fear not!”

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- II. Jesus’ Coming Banishes Joyless Fear, v. 10
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 - B. The Fear of the Supernatural as such
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I trust that all of you know the Christmas story backwards and forwards. It is a fabulous story, and one well worth re-reading even when it’s not officially Christmastime. Well, in your many careful perusals of this story, you have no doubt noticed something: It doesn’t tell us to do anything. Indeed, there is only one imperative in the entire story: Fear not. Now, strictly speaking that command was addressed to the shepherds, not to us. But the reason given for the command applies just as much to us as it did to the shepherds, and therefore we can take the liberty of applying this command to ourselves. Brothers and sisters, Christmas is a time to stop fearing. I’ve been fearful lately. I’ve talked to many of you who have been fearful lately. But do you know what the most common command in the Bible is? That’s right: Fear not. In the KJV, the phrase occurs 63 times. That’s almost once per book (though actually, it’s mostly concentrated in a few books, especially Isaiah and the gospels). We have much that we think we need to be fearful about — the future, the past, the action of angels and demons and men and God’s providence, and the list goes on and on. But the command remains, angular and impossible to explain away. Don’t fear! And the reasons for not fearing swirl like snowflakes around the grand truth of Luke 2, which is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Believe it, and accept the imperative that His birth carries with it. If you believe that on Christmas day there was born a savior in the city of David and that His name is Christ, the Lord, then you may not live in fear. You must not live in fear. Loveless, joyless fear is totally inappropriate for everyone for whom this Savior came.

I. Jesus Has Come, v. 7

And I just want to emphasize that again: Jesus has most definitely come. Mary gave birth to a baby boy, wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger. Technically, at this point He was not yet named Jesus, for He was named at His circumcision, as v. 21 informs us. But we know that this child is the baby Jesus who grew into the man Jesus who was resurrected and now sits at the right hand of the Father. This Christmas, if you get nothing else, get this: Jesus came, and He came for everyone who will accept Him. That is good news. In fact, that is the gospel proclamation.

II. Jesus' Coming Banishes Joyless Fear, v. 10

And as I said, His coming evicts fear from our hearts and lives. I want to focus on four areas of fear that the text brings to our attention.

A. The Fear of the Supernatural as such

The first of these is a theme repeated several times in this gospel of Luke. It is the fear of the supernatural as such. Why did the angels say "Fear not"? Because angels always say "Fear not!" When you see an angel, as the Church Curmudgeon says, you fall on your face and say "Don't kill me don't kill me don't kill me" as quickly as you can until you pass out.

1. Supernatural Visitors Are Terrifying, 1:13, 1:30

To put it so mildly that you will know that I have never had the slightest experience of them, angels are terrifying. You are overwhelmed with fear in the presence of an angel. If you thought your grade school principal was scary, or that that Halloween haunted house was scary, or that the other party's political platform was scary, you have no idea what fear is. Zechariah and Mary were two of the godliest people around. They could not bear the presence of their angelic visitors.

2. Supernatural Visitors Consistently Forbid Fear

Yet throughout this book, and elsewhere in the Bible, angels always say something along the lines of "Don't be afraid." You don't need to fear them in the bad way, in the way that they forbid.

Now, I don't think most of you have a problem with fearing the supernatural. In some other cultures around the world there can be an unhealthy fixation on or fear of the supernatural. But by and large, our attitude is too lackadaisical, not too uptight.

3. Only Joyless, Loveless Fear Is Bad, 1:65, Acts 2:43

Specifically, though, the kind of fear that the angels forbid is the loveless, joyless kind. After all, after the events surrounding the birth of John fear came upon the neighbors, while after the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost fear came upon every soul.

How do you know which kind of fear you are feeling? Just ask whether it excludes love and joy. If you love and enjoy God, but also deeply respect Him to the point that we could truly call it fear, you are on the right track. But if you think that so-and-so is out to get you, and you are correct — he really *is* — and that makes you walk in the kind of fear that hates your enemy and longs for his destruction, then you are not feeling the good kind of fear. You are feeling the bad kind of fear.

Brothers and sisters, there is a lot to fear in this world, and many non-Christians and Christians too are driven by fear in their decision making. They surrender to a fear that casts out love and joy, and then they wonder why their lives are so loveless and joyless.

The Holy Spirit brought joy. John's birth brought joy because it foretold the coming of Jesus. Those things inspired a good fear, a reverent awe that brought God's people to greater obedience and righteousness.

B. The Fear of Enemies, 1:74

Zechariah sang about God's mercy delivering us from our enemies so that we can serve God without fear. Now, that did not mean political deliverance. Many Jews thought of the Roman occupiers as their enemies. Well, let me tell you something: Jesus lived and died a subject of the Roman Empire. He did not bring any kind of deliverance from those enemies of His people. Paul lived and died a subject of Rome. So did every other character in the NT, except perhaps the Ethiopian Eunuch. And so we have to conclude that the deliverance from the hand of enemies that Zechariah's song speaks of, a deliverance that allows us to serve God without fear, is not necessarily a promise of good, Christ-respecting government. Yes, we will be saved from enemies and haters. But this is not a promise that no one will die for Christ. (Luke goes on to record James and John the Baptist being killed — and, of course, Jesus was killed too!) And so in what sense does the coming of Jesus address our fears? It does not address them in the sense of showing that they will never come true. (Actually, that approach generally does very little for most fears, which were irrational or highly unlikely from the start!) Rather, it addresses them in the sense of giving us a hope on the other side of every fear. Zechariah saw deliverance from enemies and serving God fearlessly in the age of Messiah that was dawning in his son. He realized, in other words, that God's salvation relativized all earthly fears. However badly things go in this life, we have the resurrection and the hope of the next life. We don't have to be afraid of our enemies, whether political, cultural, or otherwise, because our enemies can't touch what's most important to us!

C. The Fear of Bad News, v. 10b

In other words, the good tidings of great joy are news so good that they swallow up and overwhelm with joy the worst bad news you could ever hear. If you heard that an asteroid had been spotted heading straight for earth and that scientists were totally certain that it was big enough to kill us all and would do so by the end of the week, you would likely be afraid and upset. You would likely be even more afraid and upset about the probable reaction of your neighbors. But brothers and sisters, our hope and joy were not on earth anyway! The gospel message is such a joyful message that no news could be bad enough to overcome it and snuff its joy. Now, of course, the devil has tried. He has told us that if we lose political power and our enemies take over, we have lost our hope. He has told us that if we go hungry, we have lost the thing we lived for. He has told us that if we hear that a loved one is dying, it is good and right to be angry at the God who let it happen. He has told us that if we're poor, it's right to be mad at the rich who aren't afraid of the things we poor people have to deal with.

And you know what? He's lying. Bad news can't hurt us, because we have Good News.

We have news of joy. That's why we celebrate Christmas. And that's why we shouldn't be fearmongers and news junkies. I already know how it ends.

D. The Fear of Other People, v. 10c

Notice, too, that the good news is for all people. Luke has emphasized this already by mentioning Zechariah's mention of the Gentiles. Jesus' coming is a light for revelation to them. The birth of Jesus is associated with a census of the entire world. And now, the news of His coming is for all people. So how do we look at other people? As people for whom Jesus has good news. Maybe they reject that good news. Maybe in our heart of hearts we're pretty sure that they will never accept the good news or recognize that it is good for them. But the fact remains that the good news is not simply for most, for the enlightened or the elect. It's for everyone.

So do you look on enemies and deliverers of bad news as permanent enemies? Or do you regard them primarily as people for whom the coming of Jesus is good news? Jesus came for *them*. They may be deeply misguided, confused, wrong — even hostile, ill-intentioned, evil. But the good news is for them. We no longer need to fear the worst efforts of the worst people — not because they can't hurt us, but because they can't undo Jesus' work. Brothers and sisters, as Christians we are people of good tidings of great joy. We are not people of fear. We shouldn't fear angels and other manifestations of the supernatural. They are incomparably scarier than human enemies, bad news, or other people. But the only way we can transcend fear is by going to the one who was born to address it.

III. Jesus' Coming Addresses Our Deepest Needs, v. 11

You see, the good news is that Jesus was born. And who is Jesus?

A. He Is One of Us

First of all, He's one of us. He was born. That means that He came out of His mother and that He is a true human being just like us. He is descended from David and born in David's city. He is the true ruler of the Jewish people and thus of the human race too.

B. He Is Savior

Not only is He human; He is also Savior. That means that He delivers. He rescues. He brings us out of sin and into righteousness. He takes us from our bondage to every kind of evil, including an evil conscience.

The world needs some saving. The best we have been able to do as human beings still falls short of what needs to be done. But Jesus can do it all. He is Savior.

C. He Is Christ

He is Christ. That means Anointed. He is the Father's official envoy charged with saving the world. He's not doing this unofficially, or outside the proper channels. That's what we mean when we say "Anointed," "Messiah," "Christ."

D. He Is Lord

And finally, He is Lord. That means that He is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, who is called "LORD" thousands of times in its pages. He is Yahweh manifested to us as one of us. And He is also Lord in the ordinary sense of the term — the boss, the one in charge, the one to whom we must give an account of our behavior.

Did you think you needed an Anointed Savior who is also Lord? Well, you did. His coming is the best news that you have heard or will ever hear. Believe Him. Trust Him. And don't fear. Amen.