

Living the Story: Fear (Advent Series – 3)

Pastor Mike Bidell

December 16, 2018

Text: Passages from Matthew 1 and Luke 1 & 2

NOTES

A. Introduction:

By video the Scott family told of the birth of Regan Hope and discovering she was born with Down Syndrome. This brought many questions along with fear into their lives (Story to be continued next week).

B. Fear in the characters of the Christmas story:

1. Zechariah: Fear of the unknown – Luke 1:11-18

- As a priest, it was Zechariah's job to go into the Holy of Holies this year, a once-in-a-lifetime assignment.
- When the angel came to him with news of a son-to-be, and he asked for proof and facts and understanding before he would trust that this would happen, he was struck dumb.
- We too may struggle with fear of the unknown—real and scary feelings.

2. Mary: Fear of rejection – Luke 1:28-38

- Pregnancy out of marriage was serious and could mean the rejection of Joseph, Mary's family, the community, even Mary's death.
- Mary questions *how* this will happen. (Her questioning doesn't lead to her losing her voice.)

3. Joseph: Fear of what others might think – Matthew 1:18-25

- After Mary was found to be pregnant, Joseph planned to divorce her quietly. This would preserve his reputation in the community.
- After the angel visited him, he trusted God, was obedient to God's messenger, and married pregnant Mary.

4. Shepherds: Fear of being overlooked – Luke 2:8-20

- Shepherds were a rough-around-the-edges crowd, not trusted in the community, ceremonially unclean. **Pastor Mike:** *"The angels coming to the shepherds would be like an angel showing up at an out-of-town truck stop to a group of bikers and announcing 'God is coming to live with people.'"*
- God says of the marginalized: *"I'm not going to overlook you. I'll start with you."*
- After seeing Jesus, the shepherds couldn't hold in the good news. They spread it all over town. **Pastor Mike:** *"If you struggle with living evangelistically, behold Him. Set your heart on an encounter God. You'll have a response like the shepherds."*

C. Pastor Mike's fears:

- Pastor Mike told of some fears he's struggled with as a child, some into adulthood: fear of an angelic visitation, the dark basement, spirit (ghost) encounters, snakes, fear of being unable to provide for family, that his children will wander from their faith in God...
- Fear is real and can deepen as we age. **Pastor Mike:** *"Fear grips, suffocates, and distorts reality. It tries to control things. It brings out our worst."*

D. God responds to our fears:

- He places us in a family – Romans 8:15.
- He gives us perfect love – 1 John 4:18.
- He gives us His presence – Psalm 23:4.
 - The story is told of a little girl, afraid of the dark. **Mother:** *"God is with you."* **Little Girl:** *"I know God is with me, but I want someone with skin on."* **Pastor Mike:** *"That's what God did when He sent Jesus. Jesus is God with skin on. We can be God's skin for the world."*
 - E.g. Darren and Michelle Yorke: adopted a young man, recovered from addiction, to be part of their family, giving him their name and status as a child.
- Receiving Immanuel's presence into our lives comes with the commission to bring Him to the world. When we're intent on that, our fears get dealt with.

DISCUSSION:

1. What fears did the Christmas story characters struggle with? When have you encountered the fears of: the unknown, rejection, what others might think, and being overlooked? What are some other fears in your life?

2. What three ways did Pastor Mike identify as God's response to our fears? Has knowing and applying these things helped you overcome your fears? How? What accounts for the shepherds' boldness in spreading the news about Jesus' birth (Luke 2:17,20)? How might their experience inform your desire to live evangelistically?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, thank You for sending Jesus, God with skin on. Help us to face our fears and overcome them through Your enabling, as the Christmas story characters did. Help us to behold Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Jesus, may we be so struck by You that we can't help but share Your love and presence with those around us this Christmas. Amen.