When Joy Conquered Fear

Luke 2:9-11
9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Introduction
• Angels appeared on multiple occasions
  o as heralds of that first Christmas.
• It was an angel that appeared to Mary,
  o and an angel that appeared to Joseph.
• Even Zachariah, as he carried out his priestly duty,
  o was confronted by an angel
    ▪ bearing a message
    ▪ about the birth of his own son.
• In our text we read of the shepherds on the hillside,
  o on the night that Jesus was born
    ▪ and they too had an angelic visitation.
• The one thing
  o that all of these angelic encounters have in common
    ▪ is the initial command
      • of the angelic messenger.
• In every case, the angels preceded
  o their individual message
    ▪ with these words, “Fear not!”

Fear
• Even as we enter the Holiday Season,
  o after a wildly unpredictable election cycle,
    ▪ we live in a world that is caught in the grip of fear.
• Our news cycle is filled with stories of fear and anguish.
  o We’ve all read about those who are afraid
    ▪ that their values will be trampled under foot
      • that their president elect will become
        o a tyrant and a dictator,
    ▪ that family members will be deported
      • that racism will rise
    ▪ and that this great bastion
      • of liberty and justice for all
        o will somehow turn into a Gestapo state
          ▪ on inauguration day.
• Regardless of your political views,
  o you have to recognize that fear
    ▪ is running rampant through our society.
• And it’s not just fear
  o of the political fallout of the election.
• Those who watch the financial markets
  o are constantly forecasting gloom and doom.
    ▪ Our economy is sputtering,
      ▪ businesses are closing,
      ▪ people are losing jobs,
        o and whole factories are shutting down.
• Our country is deeply divided along racial lines,
  o perhaps more divided today
    ▪ than at any time in the last fifty years.
• Fear, is the primary motivator
  o that compels folks to irrational actions
    ▪ that add to the national unrest.
• The American Dream,
  o the vision of prosperity and hope,
    ▪ has been overtaken
      ▪ by a collective societal unrest
        o that runs on fear.
• Though it’s been quoted so often
  o that it’s become a cliché,
    ▪ Franklin Delano Roosevelt
      ▪ spoke these words to a nation
      ▪ at the depth of the Great Depression:
        o "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself
          ▪ -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror
            ▪ which paralyzes needed efforts
              ▪ to convert retreat into advance."
• President Roosevelt recognized the debilitating effect of fear.
  o Fear can grip us,
    ▪ choke all faith out of our hearts.
  o Fear also drives economic depression.
    ▪ Fear causes companies to contract
      ▪ and people to stop buying.
  o It causes runs on banks
    ▪ and panic on Wall Street.
• FDR reminded a nation that fear itself
  o was the greatest enemy that they faced.
• His words ring true today.
  o Our greatest enemy is fear itself.
Bethlehem

- But then, that’s always been the case.
  - Times have changed,
    - the issues have changed,
    - but fear... fear has not changed.
- It was as present at that first Christmas as it is today.
  - When Mary and Joseph
    - made their way to Bethlehem,
      - on that first Christmas Eve,
  - they journeyed through a world
    - that was caught in the grip of fear.
- Times were desperate,
  - the whole reason why
    - they journeyed to Bethlehem
      - was because a census was being conducted
        - in order to raise already high taxes.
- A murderous, paranoid man,
  - named Herod the Great
    - was king in Jerusalem.
- Herod was a profoundly evil man
  - who lived in constant fear
    - that he would fall from power.
- Driven by that fear,
  - he maintained his grip on power
    - through murder and mayhem.
  - He killed his wife,
    - his mother-in-law
    - and three sons,
      - at different times,
      - because he perceived each of them
        - as a threat to his power.
- The Roman Emperor, Augustus,
  - said it was safer to be Herod’s pig
    - than his son.
- To put Herod in perspective,
  - when he fell ill
    - and it became obvious that he was going to die,
  - he ordered some of Jerusalem’s
    - most distinguished citizens
      - to be arrested on trumped up charges
        - and sentenced to death.
  - Their execution was to take place
    - the minute he died.
- Herod knew no one would mourn his passing.
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• but wanted to make sure
  ▪ that people mourned the day he died.

• That’s the world that Mary and Joseph lived in.
  ▪ Even on that night of nights,
    ▪ Joseph was afraid
      ▪ that he would find no safe place
        ▪ for his pregnant wife to rest,
    ▪ no doubt Mary was afraid
      ▪ when all that was available to them
        ▪ on that cold winter night
      ▪ was a cave that served as a stable
        ▪ outside of the inn.

• There they huddled against the cold.
  ▪ He, a poverty stricken carpenter,
    ▪ she a lonely teenage mother,
      ▪ together they were caught in the grip
        ▪ of a much larger story
    ▪ as God brought his eternal plan to pass
      ▪ in the midst of the chaos and confusion
        ▪ of a world wrecked by sin.

A Savior Is Born

• On the windswept hillside outside of town,
  ▪ a group of shepherds were also
    ▪ huddled together against the cold.

• Their part in this story is really incredible.
  ▪ Shepherds were the outcast of society.
    ▪ There was nothing honorable,
      ▪ nothing prestigious
        ▪ about the job of shepherd.
    ▪ They were uneducated and unskilled.
      ▪ They were the lowest paid, blue collar labor
        ▪ that you could find in Bethlehem.

• And, beyond that fact,
  ▪ they weren’t the most religious people either.
    ▪ They simply couldn’t be.
  ▪ Not because they didn’t love God
    ▪ but because the necessity of caring for sheep 24/7
      ▪ kept them from maintaining the Sabbath
        ▪ the way it was supposed
          ▪ to have been maintained.
    ▪ They lived in the fields with the sheep.

• But it was to shepherds,
  ▪ the religious outcasts,
• those on the fringes of society
  • that angels appeared on that glorious night.

• Can you imagine the fear that gripped their hearts
  o as the heavens turned to fire
    ▪ and an angelic host materialized
      • over the hills of Bethlehem.

• No doubt, in that singular moment
  o when the splendor and glory of a heavenly host
    ▪ was revealed before their very eyes,
  o they were frozen in fear,
    ▪ unable to move,
    ▪ unable to run for their lives,
    ▪ unable even to speak or scream.

• But fear lasted only a moment
  o as the promise of the moment
    ▪ chased it away.

• “Fear not,” the angel said,
  o “for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,
    ▪ which shall be to all people.
  o For unto you is born this day
    ▪ in the city of David
      • a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

• A savior was born
  o And fear was conquered
    ▪ By joy!

The Origin of Fear

• Fear is a strange and powerful force.
  o It makes us act irrationally.

• I’ll never forget the story of the man
  o who was so afraid of spiders
    ▪ that when he saw one in his laundry room,
  o he grabbed a lighter
    ▪ and a can of spray paint
      • and proceeded to ignite an inferno
        o that quickly got out of hand
    ▪ and burned his whole house to the ground,
      • all for fear of a spider.

• Fear has a way of overwhelming our minds,
  o shutting off all logic and reason,
    ▪ drowning out all hope and optimism,
      • it freezes us in a moment
        o and drowns out any potential
          ▪ of a good outcome.
• Have you ever wondered where fear came from?
  o How did fear become a part of the human condition?
• You might think, for a moment,
  o that fear has no origin,
    ▪ that it has always been a part
      • of the human experience,
        o but that’s not true.
• Fear has a definite origin
  o in the story of humanity.
• Fear first entered psyche of humanity
  o in the Garden of Eden
    ▪ when sin entered this world.
• The story unfolds
  o in the third chapter of Genesis.
• When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit,
  o their eyes were opened
    ▪ and they realized they were naked
      • so they made a covering for themselves.
• Just as they were finishing that task,
  o they heard the voice of God calling to them
    ▪ as he walked through the garden
      • in the cool of the day.
• This was their daily routine.
  o Each day they met with their maker
    ▪ and enjoyed the wonderful fellowship
      • of his presence.
• But this day was different.
  o At the sound of his voice,
    ▪ their yearning for fellowship
      • was overwhelmed by fear.
• For the first time ever,
  o Adam and Eve were afraid.
    ▪ It was fear that compelled them
      • to attempt to hide from their maker.
  o It was fear that caused them to tremble
    ▪ in the shadows of the garden.
      • Fear was unleashed in the world
        o on that fateful day
          ▪ and it has been stalking
            • humanity ever since.

Fear Stalks Humanity
• It was fear that compelled Abraham
  o to lie to Pharaoh
    ▪ and say that Sarah was his Sister
• rather than his wife.
• The father of the faithful,
  o the one who trusted God enough
    ▪ to leave Ur of Chaldea
  o and journey to a distant land
    ▪ on nothing more than a promise
      ▪ that his seed would possess the land.
• He whose faith in God
  o is heralded throughout the New Testament,
    ▪ found himself in a place
      ▪ where his fear was greater than his faith.
• It was fear that caused him
  o to forget the provision of God
    ▪ and compelled him
      ▪ to attempt to save himself.
• It was fear that gripped the heart of Jacob
  o when he heard that his brother Esau,
    ▪ with a mighty army
      ▪ was marching out to meet him.
• Fear caused him to split his household in two
  o and send them home by different routes
    ▪ so that if Esau attacked one,
      ▪ the other might escape.
• That fear is what compelled him to wait alone
  o by the edge of the brook
    ▪ at a place called Peniel
      ▪ and to cry out to God
        o from the depths of his despair.
• On that fateful night
  o when Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord,
    ▪ it was fear of what would happen on the morrow
      ▪ that motivated him
        o to cling to his opponent
        o with all that he had.
• It was fear of the fury of Pharaoh
  o that caused Moses to stand
    ▪ and argue with the almighty God
      ▪ before the spectacle of a burning bush
        ▪ that was not consumed.
• Think about it.
  o Here stands Moses,
    ▪ in the presence of the great I Am,
      ▪ the one who was
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• and is
• and is to come,
  • the Ancient of Days.
• Yet it was fear that caused his faith to waver,
  o even in the presence of God.
• Make no mistake,
  o when the Lord told Moses
    ▪ to cast his rod to the ground
    ▪ and watch it turn to a snake,
      o it was fear that was being conquered
        ▪ in the heart of Moses.

• On and on I could go.
  o Fear stalks humanity,
    ▪ throughout the history of the world.
• It was fear that caused the Children of Israel
  o to turn away from the Promised Land
    ▪ and return to the wilderness
      • for another 40 years.
  o They were so afraid of the giants
    ▪ that inhabited the land
      • that they forgot the power
        o of the mighty God
          ▪ who had delivered them
            • from the hand of Pharaoh.

The End of Fear
• The message of the angels
  o on that night of nights
    ▪ was not a message that was reserved
      • for poor lowly shepherds
        o on the hills outside of Bethlehem.
• It was a message for the whole world,
  o it was a message to all people,
    ▪ everywhere,
      • from every generation
        o from every nation
          ▪ and every kindred:
            • Fear Not!
• Fear's dreadful reign has come to an end.
  o The solution to the sin problem
    ▪ was also the answer to fear.
      • Fear was swallowed by joy,
        o on that night when Jesus was born!
• Think about it.
  o Jesus came to take away the sins
    ▪ of the whole world,
      • he would ultimately conquer
        o sin and death at the cross,
  o but his earthly ministry
    ▪ was focused on turning
      • hearts and minds
        o from fear to faith.
• Just one example will suffice.
  o The storm was bigger
    ▪ than any they had ever encountered.
  o The waves were dangerously tall
    ▪ and the ship was terribly small.
  o In that moment,
    ▪ when the storm overwhelmed their senses,
      • it was fear that gripped
        o the hearts of the disciples
          ▪ and caused them to shake the master awake.
• You have to stop and wonder,
  o “Did they forget who they were traveling with?
    ▪ Had they forgotten what he could do?”
• The obvious answer is no.
  o They woke him up
    ▪ because they knew what he could do
      • but it was fear that caused them to panic
        o when faith would have compelled them
          ▪ to simply trust.
• After Jesus arose,
  o and rebuked the wind,
  o and said unto the sea,
    ▪ Peace, be still.
• Once the storm disappeared,
  o and the seas became calm,
    ▪ Jesus turned to his disciples and asked,
      • in Mark 4:4, “Why are ye so fearful?
        o how is it that ye have no faith?”
• There they stand, fear and faith.
  o They are the opposite ends of the same spectrum.
    ▪ Over and over again,
      • throughout the ministry of Jesus
        o fear yielded to the power of faith.
          ▪ Jesus met fear and turned it into faith.
• I am reminded of the story of the little boy
  o who had a part in the Sunday School play.
    ▪ He had one line
      • and it was really simple.
  • All he had to say was, “It is I; be not afraid.”
    o He worked hard to memorize that simple line,
      ▪ to make sure that he would get it right.
    o But it was a timid little boy
      ▪ who stepped on the stage that night
        • and declared,
          o “It’s me and I’m scared.”

• If we were honest this afternoon,
  o we would all admit to feeling
    ▪ what that little boy felt.
• All of us have our own fears.
  o Oh, we do a good job of hiding them
    ▪ behind the façade of a smile,
  o and we aren’t really comfortable enough
    ▪ with each other
      • to really admit the things that scare us.
• But in the darkness of the night,
  o when we lay our heads on our pillows,
    ▪ it is the fears and uncertainties of life
      • that meet us there.
• And there is so much to fear.
  o During this time of year,
    ▪ many fear that the money won’t be enough
      • to make the holidays special
        o for the ones they love.
• They fear that they lack the resources
  o to fund another Christmas.
    ▪ The bills loom large,
      ▪ the bank account is ever small,
        o and the paychecks are too few
          ▪ and too far between.
• Christmas is supposed to be
  o a season of joy and hope
    ▪ but for so many
      • Christmas is shrouded
        o in dark depression
          ▪ as fear haunts
            ▪ the shadows of the mind.
• For others it is health concerns
  o that dominate their thinking.
• They fear that their health,
  • or the health of a loved one,
    • will falter and fail.
• The anxiety of an uncertain future
  • haunts them
    • and fear of what tomorrow may bring
      • captivates their minds.
• For some it is the condition of their family
  • that causes them to worry.
    • If we aren't careful,
      • the cares and concerns of jobs and bills
        • and all the other issues
          • of day to day living
    • can cause strife and division
      • in the family
        • driving a wedge through
          • the very foundation of our lives.
• I could go on and on.
  • We all have our fears.
    • We fear that our job won't last,
      • that the financial house of cards will collapse,
    • that a loved will betray us,
      • or that our worst fear,
        • whatever they may be,
          • will finally come to pass.
• What I want you to understand this afternoon
  • is that fear is our constant enemy.
    • It stalks us, right where we live,
      • working its way into every facet of our lives.
• But that's not the way God want us to live.
  • If anybody ever had a reason to be afraid
    • it was Paul as he sat in prison
      • waiting for the executioner to come
        • and carry him to his death.
• Yet, it was in the final hours of his life
  • that he took his pen in hand
    • and wrote to Timothy, his son in the gospel,
      • making this powerful declaration:
    • God hath not given us the spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).
      • Even while the executioner
        • was sharpening his sword,
          • Paul was making a declaration of faith.
• Listen to this preacher, this afternoon,
God has not called us to live in fear,
- even when everything around us tells us
  - that we have a legitimate reason to be afraid.
- The executioner was real.
  - Death really was coming.
    - But Paul refused to give in to fear.
- Why? Because, fear is the enemy of faith.
  - It robs us of our confidence in the Lord
    - the many blessings of God in our lives.

Fear compels us to deny the provision of God
- and convinces us to think
  - that it is our responsibility
    - to save ourselves.
  - Nothing could be further from the truth.

Joy Conquers Fear
- This is why the most important message
  - that was ever delivered to the world
    - began with these words:
      - Fear Not!
- But it didn’t end there.
  - No the same angels that denounced fear,
    - declared the remedy for fear,
      - Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.
- What was this good news
  - that brings joy
    - and wipes away fear?
- For unto you...
  - I always loved that line.
    - The angels declare to the lowly shepherds
      - that they have good news for all men
        - but they personalize it when they say,
          - unto you a child is born,
          - a savior,
          - Jesus Christ has come!
- He didn’t come to the religious elite,
  - he didn’t come the kings in their palaces,
    - he didn’t even come to the well-to-do in society.
- No, He came to common shepherds,
  - the religious outcasts,
    - those who quaked in fear
      - at the sight of a heavenly host.
- That’s the message that conquers fear,
  - that’s the message that overcomes doubt.
• Not only did Jesus come
  • but he came unto you and unto me.

• You see, fear tells me that I am unworthy.
  o Fear tells me that I can never change.
    ▪ Fear tells me that I am stuck
      • in the mistakes of my past
    ▪ that what I have always been
      • is what I will always be.
• But the joy of Christmas,
  o the joy that conquers fear,
    ▪ is the hope filled declaration
      • that Jesus came for me and for you.
• He came to set us free
  o from the grip of fear
    ▪ and despair in our lives.
• That night,
  o on the hills outside of Bethlehem
    ▪ is the night when joy first conquered fear.
• Those shepherds who,
  o just moments before,
    ▪ were quaking in fear,
      • all of a sudden became
        o the first evangelists ever
          ▪ to spread the good news about Jesus.
    o Leaving their sheep,
      ▪ and everything else, behind,
        • they raced into the city
          o to seek out this king
            ▪ wrapped in swaddling clothes.
• On that night of nights, joy conquered fear.
  o And its still true today,
    ▪ joy sets fear to flight.
• Joy instills confidence,
  o and drives the shadows
    ▪ of doubt and fear from our lives.
• Because of this,
  o men have pursued joy
    ▪ in every way imaginable,
• seeking some temporary reprieve
  o from the fear and doubt
    ▪ that grips their lives.
• The problem with the joy that men manufacture
  o is that it is short lived.
• The pleasure of sin lasts a season
  o but then it gives way to the terror of night.
• Joy can be found in good times,
  o but unfortunately good times always end
    ▪ and life is always waiting on the other side.
• Joy can be found in material possessions,
  o money, treasures, toys and trinkets,
    ▪ but that joy is always short lived.
  o The joy of material things never lasts,
    ▪ it always fades away.
• So it is with the joy that is derived
  o from position and pride,
    ▪ those things also prove to be
      • temporary fleeting visions of unfulfilling joy.
• Men and women, all around us,
  o have given themselves completely
    ▪ to the pursuit of joy
      • to overcome the fears of this life
  o but the pursuit of joy in this world
    ▪ is a never ending search
      • that never really satisfies the soul
        o or drives away the darkness.
• Jesus Christ is the only place
  o where real joy can be found.
    ▪ In him,
      • not in the pursuits of this life,
      • not in the pleasures of a moment,
        o but in the presence of God,
          ▪ there is fullness of joy.
• The kind of joy that conquers fear
  o is the joy of knowing Jesus.
• The kind of joy that overcomes or doubts
  o and settles our worried hearts
    ▪ is the joy that comes from knowing,
      • “My life is in his hands.”
  o He that watches over me,
    ▪ he never sleeps,
      • he never slumbers
        o and nothing in this world
          ▪ takes him by surprise!

Close
• During an earthquake some years ago,
  o the inhabitants of a small village
• were very much alarmed.

• All were afraid,
  • except one old woman
    • who had a smile on her face
      • that stretched from ear to ear.

• While everyone else was terrified,
  • she was beaming with joy.
    • Finally, one of them asked the old woman,
      • “Mother, are you not afraid?”

• “No,” said the woman.
  • “It fills my heart with joy
    • to know that I have a God
      • who can shake the world.”

• Even church folks are not immune to fear.
  • Sometimes it paralyzes us,
    • just as we stand on the precipice
      • of the will of God for our lives.
    • It robs us of faith and confidence,
      • causing us to cling to the boat
        • when God is calling us
          • to step out into the storm
            • and walk on the water.

• I have a simple message for someone this afternoon,
  • the same God who controls the storm,
    • the same God who causes the earth to shake,
      • He is the One who watches over you!

• I want to remind someone today
  • that joy of knowing
    • that Jesus holds us in his hands
      • conquers the fear of not knowing
        • what the future holds.

• The joy of walking with him,
  • conquers the fear of walking
    • through the valley of the shadow of death.

• The Joy of standing with him,
  • conquers the fear of the storm that rages
    • and the wild wind that blows.

• I want to challenge you this afternoon
  • to come to an altar
    • and let the joy of the presence of God
      • wash away the doubts and fears
        • that have haunted your sleepless night.
• He holds the whole world in his hands,
  ○ surely you can trust him with your life!