

*Fear Not*  
**Luke 2:10**  
John Breon

Our Scripture reading tonight is by Linus, in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. For more than fifty years, this program has been broadcast at Christmas time. And, of course, it's available year-round in various media. This year, someone pointed out an interesting moment in Linus' recital of the story from Luke. Maybe you've noticed it. I hadn't.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s74pvLWoYzU>

Just as Linus says, "Fear not," he drops his blanket. Now, this illustration isn't perfect because he picks up his blanket at the end of the speech. But think about the fact that he drops it just when he repeats the angel's message to the shepherds: "Fear not." "Don't be afraid."

Linus' blanket is part of his identity. It comforts him. It's his security blanket. But, for a little bit anyway, he's able to let it go when he's telling the good news of Jesus' birth.

What are we afraid of? What fears surround us and make us look for security and comfort somewhere? What do we hold onto for protection? What's our security blanket?

There is valid fear, intelligent fear. That's why there are yellow lines painted in the center of a highway or why a bottle of poison is marked and identified. But there are other fears that rob us of life, that keep us from living life as God intends. It's those kind of fears that need to be replaced by trust in God who loves us and gives his Son to us.

Jesus was born in a very real place at a specific time in history. There was a lot of fear in the world then. The Romans kept the peace, but they did it through intimidation and fear of military power. Joseph and Mary must have been a little scared making this trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem while she was almost due to have a baby. Then to have to give birth in a stable and use a feed trough for a crib must have been unsettling.

The shepherds out in the field were protecting the sheep so they didn't have to be frightened of predators or thieves. The shepherds were working together and had no reason to fear—until something amazing happened. "An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, *and they were terrified*"—or, "sore afraid" as the King James Version puts it. They were afraid with a great fear.

Why? For one thing, the angel wasn't a chubby little cherub that we sometimes imagine. The angel was a powerful being who appeared from the heavenly dimension of reality. This wasn't something the shepherds were used to. They were exposed to a power that could undo them. And the glory of God wasn't a soft, warm, comforting glow. God's glory is God's presence, God's importance and authority. It's a blazing radiance that cuts through the darkness and exposes everything. The shepherds were being exposed to a reality they normally couldn't see. Heaven and earth were coming together there and the shepherds were dazzled and disoriented, exposed to something vast that showed how small they were. So they were terrified.

But the angel's first words to them were, "Fear not." "Don't be afraid." Angels always seem to be saying that to people. Just in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, we hear that assurance repeated. Zechariah is serving in the temple when an angel appears to him. "He was startled and gripped with fear." But the angel says to him, "Fear not, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard" (1:12-13). Later the angel appears to Mary of Nazareth. When he greets her and says that she is highly favored and that the Lord is with her, she is greatly troubled. But the angel says to her, "Fear not, Mary; you have found favor with God" (1:28-31). Matthew tells us that when Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, he tries to decide how to get out of the situation and set Mary aside. Then an angel appears to him in a dream and says, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

Many times throughout his ministry, Jesus will say to his disciples or to people seeking healing, "Fear not." Often he calls them to believe and to trust God's generosity instead of being afraid (see Luke 8:50; 12:32). On the

day of his resurrection, an angel says to the women at the tomb, "Fear not, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said" (Mt 28:5-6).

The angel tells the shepherds to trade their great fear for great joy. God coming near and God's glory being revealed, God's kingdom and power being displayed are not reasons to fear but to rejoice.

Wouldn't you like to believe that your fears can be replaced by great joy? Maybe you fear for your own safety or your family's. Maybe you fear for the country. Maybe you fear what terrorists might do. That's the purpose of terrorism—to cause terror, to create fear. Maybe you fear what might happen financially. The list can go on and on. Maybe you have a just a sense of unease, fear of the unknown. You might be like Charlie Brown earlier in the show. Lucy is trying to identify his problem. She finally suggests that he has fear of everything. He shouts, "That's it!"

Wouldn't you like to trade your fear for joy? You can because God does come near. God's kingdom, power, and glory are real. They may frighten us in some way because they're so vast and amazing, because of the change they bring—they transform everything. But that fear is more awe and reverence. It's not like the fear that sin and death bring.

You can trade your fear for joy. You can drop the security blanket and trust God to be your security. You can trust God's goodness.

The reason for joy here in Luke is good news. The angel says, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

News is an announcement about something that has happened. Nancy and I still like to send out a Christmas newsletter. With social media and everything online, paper Christmas cards and printed newsletters aren't as prevalent as they once were. But we still like to use them. We try not to go on and on, but we do like to let family and friends from across the years know how we're doing and a little bit of what we've been up to. We tell some news. We let people know what has happened.

That's what news is. The news, the good news, the angel brings is that something has happened in Bethlehem. The Messiah has been born. Israel's King and Savior has arrived. And he is the Lord of the world, the Savior for

all. Now we're called to organize our lives around him. This is news that is cause for great joy. It's news that drives out fear.

News announces something that has happened. And it tells about what will happen. And it calls us to live in the new reality created by the event that's happened. The gospel is about what God has done in Jesus. It creates a new reality and calls us to live in light of it. It's in this new reality that we can exchange great fear for great joy.

That joy pours out in celebration. Joy causes rejoicing. The angels lead the way here. Suddenly the angel speaking to the shepherds is joined by a multitude of angels. They are praising God. The text says they are speaking, but we usually imagine them singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Glory and praise to God in heaven and peace to God's people on earth. God is glorified when we receive God's grace and peace. We receive and reflect God's glory to each other and to the world.

Having heard good news that brought them joy, the shepherds hurried to see the baby they've heard about. Then they tell other people the news that they've heard, the news about the reality they've witnessed. They return to the field, "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

When we trade fear for joy over what God has done and is doing, we become messengers of the good news we have heard. We spread joy as we tell God's news. We become agents of grace and peace. We give glory to God by being his people who trust him and work for his purposes in the world.

The author Philip Yancey tells about a friend of his who was in the beginning days of faith. She had started reading the Gospels and was fascinated by Jesus. She worked in Manhattan and would even stop to listen to the street preachers there. One day, she and a friend were hurrying to catch a train when they saw one of those preachers with a sign that read "The end is near!" As they walked past him, she heard him say, "Jesus is coming. Start singing." She stopped her friend and said, "Did you hear what he said? 'Jesus is coming. Start singing.'" The friend told her she needed to get her hearing checked. He actually said, "Jesus is coming. Stop sinning."

<http://philipyancey.com/joy-fear-filled-world>). But what if Philip's friend really got it right? What if we really can have joy in a fear-filled world? What if we can rejoice and sing because the world's true Lord has been born, he is here now, and he will appear again with all his glory to put the world right?

As you hear God say to you, "Fear not," drop your old security blanket and enter the new adventure of life with the One who was born and who is Ruler, Savior, and Lord.