

## Christmas Day 2020 Devotions

### 1

**“Do not be afraid, Mary.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.... For nothing is impossible with God.”**

(Luke 1:30, 35, 37)

Living in fear is compared to living in a prison -- a prison without walls perhaps, but every bit as confining. The dictionary says that **“Fear is a distressing emotion triggered by a perceived threat, real or imagined.”**

We all have certain fears: fear of spiders. Fear of snakes, like Indiana Jones. Fear of heights. Fear of public speaking. Some even have triskaidekaphobia (fear of #13).

But can you imagine how you would react if you were going about your business and suddenly a real, live angel appeared to you? When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary it says, **“She was greatly troubled!...”** She was startled. So Gabriel said to her, **“Don’t be afraid, Mary...”**

We would be afraid too. Angels are holy beings sent by a holy God. And we are not holy. Our sinful condition would stick out like a sore thumb against such glory!

After Gabriel announced the coming birth of Jesus to Mary, there would be more fears for her to overcome. A virgin expecting a child? Who would believe her? What would people think? She didn’t want to bring shame to her family or her God! But Gabriel reassures her.

**“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”**

Did you see what the angel used to remove Mary’s fear? It was the Word and promise of God. He adds, **“For nothing is impossible with God.”** His Word restores calm. In effect Gabriel is saying, **“Everything is going to be OK. God loves you, and he is with you.”**

I’m sure Mary would have some anxious moments in the coming 9 months, and plenty later in life as she saw her dear son suffer so greatly. She was human just like the rest of us, dealing with fears and doubts every day. But she came to believe that God does the impossible. She saw him send his Son, through her, into a fallen, dysfunctional world, to bring peace - peace with a holy God and freedom from the prison of fear.

As we sing in Hymn 416, *“How firm a Foundation”* (v. 3):

**“Fear not, I am with you , oh, be not dismayed,  
For I am your God and will still give you aid;  
I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,  
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.**

We’ll sing the response: *“Joy to the World”* (62 v. 1-2)

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### 2

(The angel said to the shepherds) **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”** (Luke 2:10,22)

Angels delivered all these messages we’re looking at today. They must be imposing figures since they are continually telling people, **“Don’t be afraid!”**

But there is even greater reason that fear doesn’t need to dominate our lives and emotions. It’s the **“Good news of great joy!”** the angel brings them. **“A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord!”** Without Jesus I have every reason to live in fear. My sins cause guilt. My sins make me fear the punishment of a holy, righteous God.

But this Child, born in the town of David the angel is speaking about, was born expressly for this purpose: to be *executed* for my crimes. That may sound terrible, but it is actually wonderful news! Because he loved us so much, Jesus became the lightning rod that absorbed the full force of God’s holy wrath against our sins. The Apostle John once wrote, **“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment”** (1 Jn 4:18). Jesus took our punishment, even suffered in hell, so we no longer have to fear it.

Henry Scougal, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish minister wrote, **“God hath long contended with a stubborn world, and thrown down many a blessing upon them; and when all his other gifts could not prevail, he at last made a gift of himself.”** If God loved me enough to give me the greatest gift of his Son, then I can be sure that he loves me enough to guide me through the troubling issues, trials, and challenges of today. As the Psalmist says, **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear!”** (Ps 46), and again, **“The Lord is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid?”** (Ps 27).

As the angel said to the shepherds, so he also says to you, **“Do not be afraid.... A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord!”**

We’ll sing the response of joy: 62 v. 3-4

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### 3

**“Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.... When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him...”** (Matthew 1:20, 24)

An angel appeared to Mary, then 9 months later to shepherds. In between, an angel also appeared to Joseph in a dream.

How confused and conflicted this young man Joseph must have been! Had Mary been unfaithful? His whole life had been planned with this young lady, and now it came crashing down around him. He had not used his body impurely with her. How could Mary be expecting a baby?

God sent an angel to minister to Joseph in his need. He needed to hear the truth. The angel told that truth, and you can imagine that Joseph must have breathed a huge sigh of relief. God is good!

And because God is good and was sending the Savior through Mary, the angel said to Joseph, **“Don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.”** *“Don’t be afraid to show your gratitude to God. Follow his will. Obey him.”*

When God removes the oppression of our fears he lifts us up to be able to serve him thankfully. How do children show their love and gratitude toward their parents? By obeying them. *“Thank you for all you do for me, Mom and Dad! I’ll gladly clean my room, not fight with my sister, and get my homework done!”* How can we show our gratitude to God for Jesus? By obeying his Commandments, which means, seeking to love as Jesus loved.

I ran across this list of suggestions for gifts you can give this Christmas that go beyond those of mere monetary value. This Christmas...

- Mend a quarrel, dismiss suspicion, and tell someone “I love you.”
- Forgive someone who has treated you wrong.
- Turn away anger with a soft answer.
- Apologize when you are wrong.
- And most importantly, share the message of the angel: ***“I bring you good news of great joy! ... A Savior has been born to you!”***

Friends, with good reason God says, **“Don’t be afraid!”** Christ the Savior is born. Sin is gone! New life has come!

Let’s sing the praises of our beautiful Savior with: 369 v. 4.