

Sermon Series: “Bethlehem’s Light Still Shines”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—12/23/2007

Title: “In the darkness of fear, there is the Light of Salvation”

Text: Luke 2: 6-11

Intro.: *Ills.: The Nativity story – Fear happens when we think we will teach God something*

Theme: When we find ourselves becoming fear-driven in our lives, we need to turn the light of Christmas’ message back on and remember how Christ appeared to take away our fear for good.

All of Us Face Fear in Our Lives

- All the characters in the story of Jesus’ birth faced fears
 1. Mary and Joseph as new parents faced the fear of being new parents and not being able to provide (**vs. 6-7**)
 2. The shepherds were "*sore afraid*" (**vs. 8-9**)
 - a. *feared a great fear* – A Hebrewism in Luke’s writing — translated scared to death
 - b. The sudden surprise--of an angel and the blinding glory of heaven
 - c. The confrontation of their sinfulness with God's holiness
 - d. "*I'm doomed. Every word that passes through my lips is sinful. I live among people with sinful lips. I have seen the king, the Lord of Armies!*" Isaiah 6: 5
- What phobias do you have?
 1. Fear of what the world has to throw at you (taxes, bad economy, high oil prices, job layoffs, sickness, terrorism)
 2. Fear of being out of control
 - a. shepherds were "*guarding the watch*" (**8**) – sometimes things are just out of our control in a broken world
 - b. **Illus.: Hire Tree Cutters Land Tree on House**
 3. Fear of loneliness
 4. Fear of being caught red-handed and judged
 - a. **Illus.: the Painting "The Verdict"**
 - b. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 1 John 4:18*
 5. Fear of dying---we all have to confront it
 - a. *In death, no one remembers you. In the grave, who praises you? Psalm 6:5*

What Do You Do with Your Fear?

- We do so many things to deny, cover up, excuse our fear . . .
 1. The shepherds wanted to hide . . .but in the end only intensify it
 2. **Illus.: a Noisy Conscience**
- God's solution is to confront it with "good news" (**print vss. 10,11**)
 1. He wants to "*evangelize*" us — "*stop being afraid*"
 2. This good news is for ***each of you*** (*all the people*) no matter how different your life-situation might be
 - a. Allow Jesus to deliver you from it (**Savior**) — that means surrendering control which did not have in beginning
 - b. **Ills.: Driver’s training for my sister**
 - c. Accept Jesus as the only way (**Christ–Messiah—Anointed One**)
 - d. Let Jesus be the Lord of your past, present, future (**Lord**)

Jesus Can Be Your Reason to Stop Being Afraid (Vs. 10)

- Because he took on our human flesh and fears to bear their weakness and curse in our place
 1. "*To you is born this day*" (vs. 10)
 2. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us. Galatians 3:13*
 3. **Illus.: the Touch of God's Hand**
- Because he took on our worst nightmares and addressed them
 1. "Wrapped in cloths (rags) lying in a manger" (vs. 12)

2. He lived without home, rejected by all (including family), betrayed by friends, died an excruciatingly painful death
3. What is your worst fear?– Jesus has faced it and conquered it
 - a. *God didn't spare his own Son but handed him over to death for all of us. So he will also give us everything along with him. I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love which Christ Jesus our Lord shows us. We can't be separated by death or life, by angels or rulers, by anything in the present or in the future, by forces or powers in the world above or in the world below, or by anything else in creation. Rom 8:32,38,39*

Fear when we think about teaching God something

The Nativity Story chronicles the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. One scene captures well the predicament of Joseph. Throughout the movie, Joseph is portrayed as hardworking and faithful—the unsung hero who courageously leads his family, endures hardship, and does God's bidding even when the future is uncertain. In this scene, Mary and Joseph are traveling the long, arduous road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They have stopped for the evening by the Sea of Galilee and have just roasted a fish for supper. Mary looks up from preparing the meal and says with a smile, "The baby is moving." As she rubs her hand across her belly, Joseph looks on with a mixture of excitement and concern. Mary says, "You never really told me of your dream." Joseph looks as if he might answer, but turns away. "No, really." Mary insists. "Tell me." Joseph leans toward her and says, "The angel came to me. He told me the child within you had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and that I should not be afraid." Mary asks, "Are you afraid?" "Yes," Joseph whispers. "Are you?" "Yes." They both laugh nervously, and Mary continues, "Do you ever wonder when we'll know? When we'll know when he's more than just a child. Will it be something he says, a look in his eye?" Looking helpless, Joseph says, "I wonder if...if I will even be able to teach him anything." **Elapsed time: 00:55:56-00:57:35 (DVD Scene 14) The Nativity Story (Newline Cinema, 2006), directed by Catherine Hardwicke; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California**

Hired Tree Cutters Land Tree on House

A man in the state of Washington was concerned about a 100-foot fir tree that was located next to his house. Fearing it would topple over in a storm, he employed experienced tree removers to cut it down. The wisdom of his decision became doubtful, however, when these “experts” made an error in judgment. They brought the tree down all right, but it falls the wrong way and cuts the man’s house in half.

Painting: “The Verdict”

Perhaps you have seen the painting entitled “Waiting for the Verdict.” It depicts three people in a small corridor outside a courtroom. A look of intense pain is etched on their faces. A man and a woman sit with clasped hands, bearing the agony of not knowing the outcome of their son’s case. The young man’s sister, frightened and tearful, stands peering through the half-opened door into the courtroom where her brother is on trial for a serious crime. Looking at that painting, you can almost feel the tension as they await the verdict. Many people see themselves in a similar position in their relationship to God. They go through life without a relationship with Jesus Christ, awaiting the final decision, hoping that in the end they will be acquitted.

The Touch of God’s Hand

Jim Hancock writes: “The toddler boy was stuck in a bathroom, the cabinet drawer pulled out in front of the door and the door was locked making it impossible for his mother to open, crying hysterically. The mother tried repeated attempts to explain to her little son that he needed to close the drawer to open the door. At a loss of what to do next the mother did the one thing that she knew would make a difference. She slides her fingers through the one-inch space underneath the door and told her terrified little boy to bend down and find them. Seeing her finger he grabbed them. She wanted to call the fire department or something, but also knew that her touch was critically important to her son’s comfort in his fear. She called out to him and calmed him by her

touch and her voice. Then she said quietly, “Push the drawer close.” Calmed enough to hear and obey the little boy did as he was told. “Now jiggle the handle,” his mother said. The little boy reach up and was able to jiggle the knob enough that the lock popped open and the door was free to swing wide open.” Hancock comments, “ I keep thinking of that story. How often I feel like I’m the two-year-old in the locked bathroom and God is outside wanting to embrace me. God could break down the door—if that struck Him as being the best way—and meet all my needs directly, forcefully, and at once. Rather, instead, he send his Son to take on my very human flesh and to come into my world. He calms me by his empathy and presence and touch. He speaks out with calming and clear direction for how I can be delivered from the ravages of sin in my life. All he wants me to do is to hear his voice, to listen, and to follow His way. He is waiting on the other side of the doors of my life to wrap me in his loving arms.

Luke 2:6-11

⁶ While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (NASB)