

Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2009  
Luke 2:8-11

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*“Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

*“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”*

What do you fear tonight?

Today, as others in my family were out running errands, I feared a collision; and I feared the extra challenges that the loss of a car might bring. •Millions tonight fear the more serious prospect of catastrophic illness that will bury them in debt. •Hundreds of thousands in the U.S. each month fear home foreclosure.

What do you fear tonight? Job loss? Loneliness? The after-Christmas bills? Getting home?

The shepherds too were filled with fear on that first Christmas night.

But it wasn't over the little stuff, in the grand scheme of things. It wasn't over the price of sheep, or the unseen dangers that lurked in the darkness, or the decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. It was the angel of the Lord (who appeared to them), and the glory of the Lord (that shone around them), that caused the shepherds to fear, as they were out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. They were *“filled with fear,”* Luke tells us. *“Sore afraid,”* the King James Bible says. Filled with fear because of the glory of the Lord that shone around them when God's angelic messenger spoke to them.

This was a godly fear that the shepherds had. It was a fear that recognized and acknowledged the presence and holiness of God. It was a fear that tacitly confessed their utter unworthiness to be in the presence of Holy God, because of their unholy sin. It was a fear that left the shepherds naked and exposed before God, whose glory surrounded them, when His messenger appeared to them, on that cold winter night.

And what about you and me? We may not be shepherds. But we do each have our own vocation: father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker... state employee, medical technician, nurse, school teacher, accountant, road worker, fireman, paramedic. We each have our vocation, just like the shepherds did; and we live and move and have our being in whatever “field” and over whatever “flock” God has placed us.

And as often as we are confronted by God's Word, the angel of the Lord appears to us, and the glory of the Lord shines around us. For what are angels, but God's messengers, whom He sends to do His bidding and to declare His Word?... that Word which is *“living and active”* and *“pierces to the division of soul and of spirit”*... that Word which *“discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart,”*

and makes it so that *“no creature is hidden from God’s sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the glory of the Lord shines around us whenever and wherever our lives come face to face with Him who meets us in His Word. *“For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>2</sup> And that glory of God which shines around us, as often as His Word breaks into our comfortable lives... that glory of God should rightly leave us, like it left the shepherds, filled with fear, utterly exposed, and sore afraid because of our sin.

But for you who are filled with fear at the prospect of standing before God alone on Judgment Day... for you who have been led by God’s Spirit to a godly repentance of your sin... for you who are searching for cover for your nakedness, and are craving the love, mercy, and affection of our gracious God, that Adam and Eve knew in the beginning... for you, the message of Christmas—God’s good news to you tonight—is *“Fear not!”*

Fear not! For God Himself has acted decisively to save you from your sin. He who created you, and was grieved by mankind’s turning away from Him, but who wants all people to be saved and to know life again as it was in the beginning... this loving Lord of heaven and earth has sacrificed Himself to buy His creation back from the curse of sin. He has done what only God could do to right the situation! God the Father has sent His one and only divine Son into this world, to assume our human nature, to become sin for us, to live up to God’s Law perfectly for us! And then to give His life into death, also for us and for all people, to silence the accusation of the Law forever! We frail humans are sometimes forced to cancel Christmas; but on that first Christmas, God gave birth to His plan to cancel sin, forever! *“Fear not [the angel said], for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

And in Christ there is no need to fear when surrounded by the glory of the Lord. In Christ there is no need to fear at the prospect of standing before your Maker on the Last Day. Because in believing that Word of the angel to the shepherds, you will not stand alone! Instead you are always in Christ! And in Christ—that is, fearing and loving and trusting Him above all things—God’s final Word to you is good news. It is grace, and mercy. Because Jesus Christ has borne in His own naked body, exposed and hung on a cross, the full wrath of God over your sin.

So *“Fear not!”* on this cold and howling winter’s night. Fear not any day of your life, including your last. *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:12-13

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6