

“DO NOT BE AFRAID”

Rev. Kurt H. Asplundh

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

In this season of the celebration of the Lord's birth, we remember the glad news the angel announced to Mary, and later, to the shepherds keeping watch over their sheep, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." We remember this glad news, but I would like you to also remember something else that the angel said, "Do not be afraid!"

Notice how many times this was said in the time of preparation for the birth of the Lord. When the angel of the Lord first appeared to Zacharias in the Temple "he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Fear not, Zacharias'" (Luke 1:13). When the angel appeared to Mary she was also troubled at his saying. "Then the angel said to her, 'Fear not, Mary'" (Luke 5:30).

And, on the night of the Lord's birth, when the angel appeared to the shepherds, they were "greatly afraid." And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

It may seem a strange thing to speak of fear and of being afraid, at Christmas time. It is a time of great joy and gladness. But the fact is that we cannot feel joy and gladness while we are afraid. So it was important for the Lord to teach people not to fear. He first took away their fears and then they were able to feel the great joy of His coming. Let us now think of things that make us fearful or afraid see how the Lord has taken away our fears by His coming.

First, there is fear of the unknown. We are afraid of what we do not know. So in ancient times people were afraid of God because they did not know what He was like. Even when angels came to visit people on earth, they were afraid because they thought this meant they would be punished or die.

When the angel came to visit Zacharias, he was troubled and fearful. He did not know what would happen to him. But the angel said, "Do not be afraid!" and told him that he and his wife would have a son—a wonderful event that they had longed for. This child would help prepare the world for the Lord's birth.

As long as God was unknown to people, they feared Him. But the birth of the Lord brought Him close to us, so we could know Him and not be afraid of Him. Therefore, one of the fears that the Lord's birth has removed is the fear of the unknown. He has shown us how wonderful He is. When the prophet Isaiah spoke about the Lord who was to come, he said His name would be called "Wonderful."

And so it is, for He is wonderful and He has shown us the wonders of His love and wisdom.

A second fear we all have is fear of being lost. Every child has had the experience of losing his parents, perhaps in a crowd of people. He then becomes afraid, not knowing where to turn, where to look, or how to be safe again. Adults have a similar fear when they feel a separation from the Lord. Sometimes, we feel as if He has let go of our hand, and we are wandering by ourselves, not knowing where He wants us to go.

When the Lord came on earth, the evil spirits of hell had risen up like a great crowd to separate the Lord from us. But remember the angel's words, "Do not be afraid!" For the Lord came on earth to be with us, and not be separated from us. He has come on earth to lead and guide us by His wisdom and truth. And so the prophet Isaiah said the Lord's name would not only be "Wonderful," but also "Counselor," or guide.

A third fear we may feel is the fear of evil. Some evil is easy to see. As children, we fear the pain and suffering caused by bullies. We may read of robbers, kidnappers, even killers. These evil things frighten us. But even more frightening are the things that evil spirits can do to us. The Lord came on earth to remove our fear of evil, to protect us, and to give us strength against evil spirits. So the prophet Isaiah said that the Lord's name also would be "Mighty God." For as a mighty God, He protects us from evil.

A fourth fear is the fear of death. Most people fear losing their lives. The Lord came to show us that there is life in heaven after the death of the body. We need not fear death because the Lord showed by His resurrection that everyone lives after death in the other world. Therefore Isaiah called the Lord's name, "Everlasting Father" because He is our Father to eternity.

A fifth fear is the fear of going to hell. The Lord overcame this fear by His birth because He came on earth to save us from our sins, and to bring us into the peace and happiness of heaven. For this reason the prophet called Him, "Prince of Peace."

At Christmas, as we think of the Lord's birth, we can think of all of the things He has done to take fear out of our lives. We should rejoice that the Lord has come to take away our fears.

So the angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). "And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Amen.