

ADVENT 4, 2007 FROM FEAR TO JOY

Luke 2 : 6-11

Today were focusing our attention the on the darkness of fear.
From the earliest time, human beings have known fear,

When is the last time you remember being afraid?
Maybe 9/11 has been responsible for more fear in America,
Because it changed us more than any other act.
We realized that great tragedies and terrorist attacks
Don't just happen in Israel or in Europe,
They happen here.

The shootings in this past month have left a bad taste in our mouths,
We are afraid to go to our malls, schools, and even churches,
As shooters come out and heedlessly take innocent lives.

Some face financial fear.
With the house prices and mortgages and foreclosures.
Fear of stock performance,
Fear of losing our jobs,
And there is
Fear of health issues, cancer, heart attacks and strokes.
We fear for our children, our grandchildren.

Take the mother who strapped her 18 month old son on her back to go shopping,
As she was rushing to catch the bus she misstepped and fell down an entire flight of
stairs, (13 to be exact). She said I was bruised, bleeding and I had torn my jeans... but my
main concern was, naturally for my child. My fears were alleviated when from behind
me said: "Again, Mommy, Again!"

We worry about our marriages.
We fear our own weaknesses that they might be made public..
We worry over our faith, and do we have enough to carry us thru
when the dark night of death comes.

Katrina my granddaughter likes to swing,
but she would not go downstairs at night,
because the dragon was down there.
So she would take my hand and
we would have to walk down together.
Turn on all the lights
And walk thru all the rooms.
Look in all the closets.
No dragon,

But a half hour later she wanted to go downstairs
And she wouldn't because the dragon was downstairs.
WHAT??????

We laugh at that as Adults, but
 We have our own adult version of dragons.
 That are just as irrational.

The Advent story would remind us that

“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

This is why Christmas is always such good news for us.

“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.” Luke 2:10

Joy overcome our fears in

I. ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCE

Joy comes to us in ordinary circumstances and overcomes our fears.

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

I don't know of any woman who enters the delivery room
 without some sense of fear, and great apprehension.

Here Mary was in a strange town,

The darkest time of the year,

The poorest place in town,

In a stable,

Delivering a baby

With only a man to help.

That would scare any woman.

Ann Landers was once asked by a husband:

My wife is five months pregnant and so moody that sometimes she's borderline irrational.

Ann replied: So what's your question?

Another Husband asked: Is there any reason I have to be in the delivery room while my wife is in labor? Not unless the word "alimony" means anything to you.

Ordinary Circumstance like having a baby can bring us a lot of fear.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father... So don't be afraid you are worth more than many sparrows." Matthew 10:28a

God knows the things we fear.

He knows how many sparrows fall to the ground,

He knows how many squirrels have been hit by cars in our neighborhood.

He certainly knows every single fear, real or imagined,

that you are facing right now.

God knows! And God cares about it.

That is the message of the Angels.

And God comes in very ordinary circumstances to the shepherds.

While they were watching their flock.
 Herding sheep.
 Boring circumstances.
 That is where he brings them great Joy and at great cost to himself.

And if God is willing to do that for shepherds?
 how much more of that same love
 is he willing to do for us?

**Joy overcomes fears in Ordinary circumstances,
 Joy overcomes our fears in**

II. EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

That's extraordinary circumstances!
 Shepherds were out watching their flocks.
 Looking at the stars.
 Tending sheep.
 That is an very ordinary circumstance.
 They still do it today in Israel and Palestine.

Than an extraordinary circumstances happened:

An angel of the Lord appeared to them.

Now that is an extraordinary event.

And the glory of the Lord shone around them.

That is an extra- extra ordinary event

Having the glory of the Lord shine around them?
 The Glory of the Lord is a light unlike any light we have seen.
 This isn't like a flashlight where there is a spot that lit.
 This is a light that doesn't cast a shadow.
 The edge of the light is as bright as the center.
 the Glory of the Lord.
 Called the Shekena Glory.
 Because there is no darkness nor hint of it.
 A light that encompasses them,
 An eternal light that overcomes them.
 This is the light of heaven that Jesus declares:
 There will be no more need of the sun or moon.
 God is light.
 They were terrified.

⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Luke 2:9

I have been to Bethlehem where the shepherds watched their sheep.
 It is a vast pasture area still today,
 where the winter rains cause grass to grow.
 Shepherds still take their sheep there to feed.
 The lights of Bethlehem are a comfort to them,

But their night will never be the same again,
 And fear is gone in exchange for the wonder of
 Having seen the Glory of the Lord
 And the Angel.

There is something else to notice here.
 It doesn't just say:
 An Angel appeared to them.
An angel of the Lord appeared to them.
 Why they clarification?

God wanted to clarify for us whose angels appeared.
 Because we have a whole host of dark Angels in this world
 That have signed up for the other side.
 They are just as real
 They can appear too.
 And when they do?
 We will feel fear.

But this was the Angel of the Lord.
 Although they were terrified.
 The angel said:
Don't be afraid.
 That's one word you won't hear from the angels of darkness.
 Because their power is in fear.

If they can just keep us afraid, full of fear, and doubt,
 Feeling like our faith is too weak,
 We're just too sinful,
 They can paralyze us.
 From ever experiencing the Joy of the Lord.

**verse 28. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.
 Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell."Matthew
 10:28**

God says there is one thing you can fear.
 Those who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
 Friend you don't want to end up in hell,
 Or even living near it.
 It's a black hole that sucks all life from us.
 And its realm and ruler are real.
 We do fight against the principalities and powers and ruler of darkness.
 We just don't talk a lot about it,
 But they are enemies of the Living God and of every Christian who
 Dares to name the name of Christ as their savior.

**Joy overcomes fears in Ordinary circumstances,
 Joy overcomes our fears in extraordinary circumstances.**

Joy overcome our fear in

III. UNIVERSAL CIRCUMSTANCES

JOY FOR ALL THE PEOPLE.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ^[a] the Lord Luke 2:10-11

If God allows danger to come close,
he's there to keep it from overwhelming us
or from doing any eternal, permanent damage to us.

And he is there in the midst of it.
He's not some distant God that's looking at us saying,
"Oh well, you suffer. You probably deserve it."
God is not like that.
He says that we belong to him and he is there with us.

'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'" Isaiah 43:2-3

We don't have a lot of control over ice and snow storms,
We don't have a lot of control over flooding river and raging fires.

But we do have control over who we will choose to go with us through them.
God wants the shepherds to know
That even in the darkness of the night
In the midst of their greatest fear,
God is there for them.
Watching over them,
Providing light for them.

Unlike the Wizard of Oz
He doesn't promise the shepherds courage,
Or a brave heart
Or a big brain to understand.

The antidote to their great fear,
Is Joy.
JOY that will be for all the people.
A joy that brings light to the shepherds,
dispels the darkness
and keeps them from being afraid.

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Bill Dieterle, wanted to do something for terminally ill children,
So in Chargrin Falls, Ohio he created a Santa's HideAWay Hollow.

And for over 20 years terminally ill children and their families can come and
 Spend their last Christmas together,
 decorating cookies, Singing Christmas songs,
 riding a sleigh, the little train out back,
 or playing with all kinds of dogs, horses, ducks, chickens and a cow.
 And no child goes home empty-handed.
 There are Barbies, trucks, basketballs signed by Michael Jordan and footballs signed by
 the pros. "It's a day of unreality where everything is fantasy. And there's no pain," says
 Bill.
 While seeing the kids, Bill playing Santa,
 would ask them what they wanted for Christmas,
 One day a little boy named Joey broke through the line and hugged him.
 When Bill asked what he wanted for Christmas, he said,
 "I'm dying. Just make my Mommy happy."
 He said it was a tearful time, his mother was crying, I was crying,
 Bill said; "That child changed my life."

Bill admits that he cannot meet every wish.
 When one little boy, 5, asked him to put him in his bag and take him to the North Pole
 where the angels couldn't find him and he wouldn't die and his grandmother wouldn't be
 alone, Bill said, "I told David he was going on a special trip. . . .
 and we'd be together some day."
 "I can't carry miracles in my bag.
 All I can do is to give them a day of miracles and a day of comfort."
 USA Today, 12-20-94, p. 1D, Life Section, "This Santa Grants Last Wishes," Nanci Hellmich.

The shepherds couldn't stop the pain of the world,
 They couldn't stop the sufferings that would come,
 But armed with the joy of Christmas,
 They could tell the world
 the Savior was born,
 And the Joy had come to the world,
 And because of this gift we don't have to be afraid any longer.
 We can stand against the darkness,
 Against the fear of cancer, grief, death and dying,
 And know that God is in the midst of us and we shall not be overcome.

That is the message of Christmas for every Herod
 and every heartache and every hatred and every hardship
 and everything which would destroy us!

Will you open your heart and accept this gift of joy this Christmas?