

## Don't Be Afraid

Luke 2:8-20.

Tonight we hear Luke's story about the first Christmas. Last Sunday we heard Matthew's story. Matthew's story was more from Joseph's point of view. Luke centers more on Mary's experience. For Luke the story is first and foremost the bringing together of seemingly incongruent pieces like the holiness of angels and the scum of shepherds, the glory of heaven and the poverty of Mary and Joseph. Luke's story turns the normal expectations of the day upside down. All assumptions about wealth, power, prestige and influence are completely undermined in the story. Those who should not be trusted (shepherds) become the ones who tell everyone what has happened. The grace of God is given not to the rich but to a poor peasant couple. Luke is the only gospel writer to call this baby that is born a "savior." This story is all about God making a way for broken humanity to bridge the gap. For Luke, the infant Jesus is the one who brings real peace – peace on earth and goodwill towards all.

Have you ever wondered what the first Christmas would have been like if Mary and Joseph lived in the digital age, like us? Well, someone has. Here is what they came up with. [\[Video: Happy Digital Christmas\]](#)

The Christmas story encompasses glory and poverty, humanity and God, holy angels and scoundrel shepherds. It is a story that takes place in the context of human history. There is no "once upon a time" in this account. This is our story – for and about us as human beings in search of meaning. Every time the presence of God is revealed to humans in this story, the same caution is given, "Don't be Afraid." The shepherds are told, "Don't be afraid." Mary and Joseph are told, "Don't be afraid." I don't know about you, **but if someone kept telling me, "Don't be afraid," I would start wondering if there is something that I don't know about yet that I should be afraid of.**

The juxtaposition of the term] "fear" is fascinating in the Christmas story because the Bible uses the term in both meanings of the word. It

uses it in terms of being afraid and it uses it in terms of “awe”. Awe is the appropriate response to being in the presence of the Holy. When I stand with a family at the bedside of a dying loved one, we are filled with awe. When a couple stands before friends and family and promises to live their life together faithfully, there is awe. When the Elders laid their hands on my head and prayed for me at my ordination, I was filled with awe. When the President signed the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell on Wednesday, there was an “awe” moment because something significant just happened that would change the world. Those are appropriate responses to the presence of the Holy. God’s Spirit was present in each of them.

But the angel was telling Mary – and us by extension (**all the Marys in the world!**) – not to be afraid. This was a different kind of fear. Mary, you are experiencing the in-breaking power of God’s grace into your life. That is amazing and awe-inspiring. Don’t be afraid. God’s grace is available to you as you go about your work life, your school schedule, your family time, so don’t be afraid. God’s presence is near you when you speak justice to power, when you take stands that require courage, when you challenge the assumptions that kill the spirit of the powerless, so don’t be afraid.

Our world is changing fast. It was just a few Christmases ago that nobody knew what a Tweet or a Poke or a Bing was. The first response to change is often fear of the unknown. This Christmas we are being encouraged to listen for the sound of angel’s wings – to change our fear into awe. Nothing that the future holds is greater than the grace of God. Nothing that the powerful can do is greater than the peace that passes all understanding. Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and know the awe of God.

Sources:

[www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com) St. Nicholas Nicked, December 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZrf0PbAGSk> Happy Digital Christmas