

Christmas Day 2020 – Luke 2:8-20

Clint Le Page

Main Point – Like the shepherds we don't need to fear God's presence, for by trusting Jesus Christ we have peace with God.

Fear is not normally a word that comes to mind at Christmas.

But in this true story from one of the biographies, the Gospels of Jesus, we see fear.

In the beginning some shepherds are fearful.

Then they heard about and went to Jesus, then went out to share the joyful news of peace with God.-----

By looking at their example, we can learn how we should be responding, to the Christ who came that first Christmas.

And we can experience joy and peace ourselves.-----

And peace is attractive to those who are fearful.-----

I think 2020 has brought our *fears* to the front of our minds.

With corona and the restrictions we've feared losing jobs and income; financial security, and many have experienced *real* hardship.-----

We've feared sickness and the future;

feared being stuck at home, or alone; stuck with difficult relationships, with kids or parents, or going without love and friendship.

Maybe we've feared losing our lives, or losing loved ones; and many have.-----

And maybe the rise in cases in NSW this week brought some fears back?-----

I wonder what it is you've feared this year?-----

In the face of our fears the message of Christmas is, Fear Not.-----

The shepherds are watching their sheep at night when suddenly an angel appears.(**SLIDE**)

And the first thing he says is, '*Do not* be afraid'; 'Fear not.'-----

Why not be afraid?----

I mean a shining angel appeared before then and they were terrified.

I think *I would have been too*.-----

But something *more than the bright lights* is going on here.-----

In the Bible people always experienced traumatic anxiety and fear when they got near to God, or near *angels* who came from God's presence.-----

At the start of the Bible we learn that humanity was designed for perfect relationship with God.

And it makes sense that if you have a perfect relationship with the all-powerful, loving Lord of the world, you'd have *no fear at all*.

You would not be afraid of him, or anything.-----

That was the original plan for humanity.-----

We often fear rejection and failure. But if you were totally sure of n' filled with God's love, you would not worry about what people thought.-----

Fear comes from thinking that somewhere God's love will end.

But God's love for his people will never end.

It's unbeatable, unstoppable, unwrappable.-----

We fear the future and circumstances. But if we knew God perfectly, that he is good and in control, we would trust him.-----

Since God gave his only Son, he really will give you everything else you need.-----

And you wouldn't be afraid even of death, because you would know you'll be with God forever.-----

But when human beings chose to reject God's rule in their lives, it broke relationship with God, and they were filled with fear.-----

For the *first* man and woman, Adam and Eve, the presence of God became something to hide from.

And the lie of the serpent went into *their* hearts and ours.

Satan said: "*You need to be* in charge of your life. Don't let anybody else be in charge – including God – because then you won't be happy. You will *miss out on* what's best for you."

That distortion, and lie, has been passed down into every human heart, and it created a fear of trusting God.-----

These shepherds in Luke ch2 know fear, but it's not just of the supernatural.

Notice **v9** says, 'an angel of the Lord appeared to them', and 'the glory of the Lord shone around them.' The glory and holiness of God makes them fearful.

In the words of the preacher and author **Timothy Keller**, 'People are truly *threatened* by the presence of the holy.---- When God's glory appears it always accentuates and intensifies our fundamental fearfulness, because *we are alienated from God*'.-----

And the angel has an astonishing message:

'You *wont have to be afraid anymore* if you look at what I'm showing you:
 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.'
 And the news about Jesus, the angel says is good news of great joy for all people.---
 God can replace our fear with joy.-----
Joy is the gigantic secret gift that God gives us, and we never stop unwrapping.-----
 The fear that inhabits the deep place in our souls, can be dispelled *for good*.
 How?-----
 If we find peace with God through Jesus Christ.-----

Make Peace is our next point.(SLIDE)-----

In **v14** the great company of angels appear and praise God saying:
 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
 When you hear *peace* I don't know what you think of?-----
 Maybe peace & calm in your heart n' mind.
 Maybe you think a trouble-free *life*. Or the end of conflict or war.
 But 1st century Jews living under the foot of the Romans, *knew that* the absence of war doesn't guarantee *peace*.-----
 The Jewish word for peace 'shalom' means much more than a *truce* in the battles of life.-----
 It means well-being;--- prosperity, security, harmony;--- fullness, completeness.-----
 It can speak of peace in relationships.-----
 And the Bible says the most fundamental and important peace is peace with God.----
 The problem is, our heart wants to be King, and so it is *hostile* to God's lordship over us.
 The Bible talks about it as sin, and sin is rejecting God and his rule over our lives.
 We see it in the two year-old tantrum, the teenage rebellion, and adult's greedy materialism. They all show our *hostility* to God.-----
 We want to be in charge of our own lives. We want to live our own way.
 And we do that, as much as it's within *our power*.-----
 The non-religious person may openly assert their independence from God and say,
 'I want to live the way I want, doing whatever makes me happy'.-----
 Though the religious person more *covertly*, or subtly, asserts their independence.
 The *religious* person says, 'I'll obey the Bible, I'll turn up to church once in a while.'

Maybe at Christmas ☺

The religious child or adult says, I go to church every week *and am nice* to others, and so God will bless me and be good to me.-----

This is an effort to control God, *not* trust God.

When you obey God to earn his blessing and heaven, you are effectively seeking to be your own saviour.

Both of these strategies are hostile to God.

They don't allow *God* to be your Lord or Saviour.-----

The wonderful message of *Christmas* is however, 'God and sinners reconciled'.

It's in the famous carol, Hark the Herald Angels Sing: 'God and sinners reconciled'.--
Jesus is the perfect mediator, and only **mediator** between God and people.-----

Esther was an orphaned Jewish girl living in Persia in 480 BC, and somehow she was chosen to be Queen to King Xerxes

Esther's people, were threatened when the King was tricked into making a law which would kill all *God's* people.-----

And Esther was encouraged to use her life to give others life;---- to risk her life, to approach the King.-----

For without his asking to see her, he could decide to have her killed.-----

But Esther decided Yes, she would be a bridge from God's children to the king.(**SLIDE**)

She decided, "I will go. And if I die, I die".-----

She risked her life to be the bridge, and save God's people.-----

Then there's Jesus, the Son of God.

But Jesus didn't only risk his life, he gave his life, to save God's people.-----

Like Queen Esther, Jesus made a bridge back to God the King.

He said, "So I die, I die". And he saved us.-----

In the birth of Jesus, the Son of God took on human flesh.

Jesus, the God-man, bridged the gap, the gulf; *between us and God*.(**SLIDE**)

He died on the cross, to pay the price for *us rejecting* God.-----

Jesus used the life he'd been given, to give others life.-----

Jesus died for our sins, he made peace.-----

How can we *have* this peace with God for ourselves?-----

As **Timothy Keller** says in his book, *Hidden Christmas*.(**SLIDE**)

The first step toward peace with God is to recognise that there *is conflict*.

One way to do that, is maybe you could say to God in a prayer:

'Not only have I done bad things, but even the good things I have done fall short, and I did them for the wrong reasons, and to get to God my way. I need a Saviour who will save me by sheer grace, undeserved kindness. I need to rest completely on Jesus' work on my behalf.'
I choose to rely completely upon Jesus Christ.'-----

When we say that, we finally admit the full extent of our sin and hostility.

You've confessed that you *can't* save yourself.

You rest-in and rely-on what Christ has done, and you turn away from your old way of living.

That is making peace with God.-----

I encourage you to take your hands off the steering wheel of your life,

and make peace with God, through trusting in Jesus.-----

The momentous news of Christmas is that we don't need to fear, peace with God is on offer.-----

My final point this morning is Hearing well. The shepherds **Hear Well**.-----

In **v15** the shepherds hear this marvelous message about the birth of *Jesus*, the Saviour and Lord.

Once the angels disappear, they hurry off to see him for themselves.

Then in **v17** the shepherds spread the word.**(SLIDE)**

They conveyed to others what the angel had *told them*, and I'm sure they added their own eye-witness testimony as well.

The result was that people who heard them were 'amazed'.-----

And the shepherds returned praising God for all they had heard and seen.-----

In these verses Luke is telling us about the importance of Hearing well.-----

In another part of the Bible, in Romans ch10, it says, Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.-----

One of the ongoing issues in my marriage is **my frequent failure to really listen to** my wife.

Often I'll ask Kirsti a question, like What the kids are doing today? And she might respond: 'I did tell you already, *weren't* you listening?'

So-often the answer is "Yes but no".

Yes I remember you saying something about it; I heard it. But No, I didn't really let it sink in. I didn't give you my full attention, or listen well.-----

Kids, have you seen the movie, **Finding Nemo**?

In Finding Nemo, Nemo's Dad, Marlin is searching for his son, and Marlin comes across Dory, (**SLIDE**) the blue fish.

Dory suffers short-term memory loss.

Marlin says to her, "*They took him away. I have to find the boat*".

And Dory replies, "*A boat. Hey, I've seen a boat.*"

'*You have?*'

'Yes, it passed by not too long ago.'

Marlin says, '*Where? Which way?*'

And Dory responds,----- '*Hi I'm Dori.*'

Then when they're on their way to the boat, Dory forgets what's she's doing and wonders why Marlin is following her.-----

Kids, do you ever forget? Or forget to listen well?-----

If you're like me, we can forget to listen well to what God says in His word too.-----

When it comes to the message of Christmas, we all need to hear well.

Not really hearing people can damage relationships, but it is destructive to our relationship with God.-----

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a great example for us here, in **v19**.

Two words describe how she listens to the word of God. (**SLIDE**)

She 'pondered' what she heard from the shepherds.

That means thinking it through, throwing it around in your mind.-----

She thought deeply about it.-----

Mary also 'treasured' what she heard.

It means to keep something alive, to savour it, or keep remembering it as precious.

Treasuring engages our heart and emotions.

Mary takes *in the message about Jesus*, to relish it.-----

The shepherds were told that the baby Jesus is the Messiah, the King, and the Saviour, who can bring us peace with God

For **us** to treasure that message requires that I keep speaking its truth to myself, reminding myself of its preciousness.-----

It's asking, How would my life be different if I really believed this?-----

To truly hear the Word of God about Jesus, we need to ponder, *and treasure it*.

Whether you're 9, 29, or 79yo, If you don't ponder *and treasure* this message, you won't hear it properly.

It wont sink in, comfort, or change you.-----

The God who sent his Son to save us wants us to hear *well*, and believe his word.

I place my trust in Jesus, by trusting *in* what God's word says *about* Jesus.-----

A few years ago I was with a woman called **Mary** in her late 70's, and she didn't have long to live.

But she came to trust in the true words about Jesus for the *first time*.

And her fears about the future melted away.

She found real peace.-----

I could see it in her face.-----

You don't have to be *70 to find* this peace, and peace with God.

God offers it to all of us, this Christmas day.-----

Let's pray.