



MESSAGE GUIDE

DECEMBER 22, 2024

FEAR NOT-4: SHEPHERDS AND MAGI



LUKE 2; MATTHEW 2

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SENIOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR**

Do you know the Christmas song, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” It originally was released in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, when people feared nuclear war. The songwriter was a former soldier who had seen the horrors of World War II. That’s why a line in the song says, “Pray for peace, people everywhere.”

This month, we’re in a series of messages called “Fear Not.” So maybe the song should say, “Do you fear what I fear?”

Fear comes in many forms:

Some fear is a reasonable response to danger. That’s why you lock your doors at night, and don’t give financial information to scammers. This kind of fear moves to make wise decisions. Courage doesn’t mean you have no fear. Courage is doing what’s right in spite of your fear.

Some fear is a result of guilt and shame. The first time that fear is mentioned in the Bible is when Adam and Eve were afraid and tried to hide from God after they disobeyed him. Shame prefers the cover of darkness. If we do something wrong, we fear detection and punishment. This kind of fear can be fully resolved only by receiving God’s forgiveness and grace. First John 4:18 says “perfect love drives out fear.”

Some fear comes from respect and awe for God. The Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” It’s wise to approach God with reverence and wonder.

1. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF EACH OF THESE THREE FORMS OF FEAR?

Today we’re going to try to hear what the shepherds heard, and see the star that the Magi saw, and learn how faith helped them to face their fears. The shepherds’ story is in Luke chapter 2. The Magi are mentioned in Matthew chapter 2. Most of the shepherds’ story took place on one dramatic night. The Magi’s story unfolded over time, and required a long, hazardous journey in search of truth.



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Luke writes, “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night” **(Luke 2:8, NIV).**

That sounds nice on a Christmas card, but tending sheep was a dirty and boring job—especially during the night shift. Shepherding isn’t glorious. But God often show his glory to ordinary people. And to make the message clear, God turned on the lights!

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified” **(Luke 2:9, NIV).**

“They were terrified.” It was scary to encounter God.

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid.’ I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” **(Luke 2:10-12, NIV).**

God turned on the lights. And then he amped up the volume! A huge crowd of angels appeared, saying, “Glory to God in the highest!” “This will be a sign to you.” The shepherds probably expected something the sign to be something big, like parting the Red Sea or making the sun stand still in the sky. But no, the sign was going to be something little— “a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Did the shepherds think, “That’s unimpressive, Lord. If you’re going to give us a sign, shouldn’t you do something bigger than that?” What the shepherds heard wasn’t flashy, but it was exactly what they needed—and what we need. “Don’t be afraid. Good news. Great joy. All the people.”

2. WHEN HAS GOD REVEALED TO YOU A NOT SO “FLASHY” SIGN, BUT IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEEDED?

The shepherds rushed off and found Joseph, Mary, and the baby. And afterward . . . “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told” **(Luke 2:20, NIV).**

“Just as they had been told.” We shouldn’t be surprised when God tells us something, and it turns out to be true. The Lord has every right to say, “I told you so!” What he says always turns out to be true. “Do you hear what I hear? Do you see what I see?”



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However, it's sometimes hard to communicate. If communication is hard for us, how can God get his message across? He communicates through creation, for nature shows his power and design. He speaks through Scripture. But to make the message even clearer, God came to earth in person.

John's Gospel says . . . "The Word became flesh . . . We have seen his glory . . . full of grace and truth" **(John 1:14, NIV).**

Jesus was born in the real world. Bethlehem is a real place. The shepherds and the Magi aren't religious myths and cartoon characters like flying reindeer and elves who make toys at the North Pole. Joseph and Mary were real people. They even had ordinary names: Mary and Joe! They didn't know that 2,000 years later, people would make them into little figurines for nativity scenes.

Luke, who wrote this book of the Bible, was a medical doctor and a historian. Look how Luke introduces the ministry of John the Baptist... "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee" **(Luke 3:1, NIV).**

There were real government leaders... "Herod, tetrarch of Galilee." A "tetrarch" was someone who ruled over a region divided into 4 parts. Herod ruled for about 34 years. He was evil and power-hungry. To protect his own throne, he killed his wife Mariamne, his mother Alexandra, and 3 of his sons, Antipater, Aristobulus, and Alexander. The emperor, Caesar Augustus, joked that it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son! One of Herod's sons beheaded John the Baptist, and another relative, Herod Agrippa, had the apostle James killed with a sword. This was a brutal family!

The real-world story of King Herod is interwoven with the story of the Magi in Matthew chapter 2. It's important to distinguish between what the Bible says about the Magi and traditions that have been passed down. The Magi were scientists, astronomers, and philosophers. "Wise men" is an accurate title. They were serious-minded seekers.

Why does the story of the Magi matter to us?

Fear makes us skeptical; faith makes us search.



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3. ARE YOU SKEPTICAL?... WHAT ARE YOU FEARING? DO YOU HAVE FAITH?... WHAT ARE YOU SEARCHING FOR?

The Magi came searching. "... [they] asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him'" (**Matthew 2:2, NIV**).

Something inside us can compels you to search for Jesus. Something makes you know it's right to worship him. If you wonder how God could lead people with a star, it's no problem for God to make stars! He makes them by the gazillions. God led the Hebrews through the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It wasn't hard for him to send a special star to guide the Magi.

"... The star ... went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed" (**Matthew 2:9, 10, NIV**).

"Do you see what I see?" The Magi found a bright spot and pursued it. And throughout their story in Matthew chapter 2, the Lord continued to lead them.

Corrie ten Boom, whose family rescued Jews from the Nazis during WW II said: "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at Christ, you'll be at rest." (**Corrie ten Boom**). If you have doubts about God, don't just wallow in cynicism and despair. Find the bright spot and pursue it!

Fear makes us prideful; faith makes us humble.

Even wise, well-educated people need the Lord. Christmas isn't just a story for kids. You'll never outgrow your need for Jesus. You'll never become so rich and successful that you don't need the Lord. Success can make a person arrogant. Some of us treat God like a pilot treats his parachute. He's glad it's there for emergencies, but he hopes he never has to use it.

Matthew 2:3 says when King Herod heard the Magi were looking for the new King of the Jews, he was "disturbed" or "troubled." This powerful king was afraid of a baby! He appeared successful, but deep inside, he was scared and insecure. "And all Jerusalem with him." Despite Herod's threats, the Magi kept searching. "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him" (**Matthew 2:11, NIV**).

If you're wise, you know when it's time to bow down. And before WHOM you should bow!



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Fear makes us selfish; faith makes us generous. Our custom of gift-giving at Christmas began with the Magi. But what do you give the person who has everything? Or who CREATED everything?

“. . . they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” **(Matt. 2:11, NIV).**

That’s what the Lord leads us to do—open our treasures. The Magi brought:

- Gold: A gift fit for a king. The gold probably helped to pay for Mary and Joseph’s expensive trip to Egypt soon afterward.
- Frankincense: A gift fit for a priest, for priests burned incense in the temple when offering sacrifices to God.
- Myrrh: a spice used to embalm the dead. After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, and packed Jesus’ body with the spices, wrapping him in strips of cloth.

He was wrapped in “swaddling clothes” when he was born, and again when he died. 33 years later, the baby laid in a manger was nailed to the cross. To get God’s message across, it took . . . A CROSS! “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” **(John 3:16, NIV).**

“Do you hear what I hear? The Child, the Child sleeping in the night, He will bring us goodness and light. He will bring us goodness and light.

4. WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO MOVE FROM FEAR (THAT BRINGS SKEPTICISM, PRIDE, AND SELFISHNESS) TO FAITH (THAT BRINGS A DESIRE TO SEARCH, HUMILITY, AND GENEROSITY)?

NEXT STEPS:

- If you struggle with fear and anxiety, our E91 Counseling Center is here to assist you. You can contact our church’s Counseling Center by sending a message to Counseling@e91church.com.
- If you would like to talk with someone about what it means to pursue a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, text **“FOLLOW”** to 317-707-6462, and we’ll reach out to you. Or, if you’re ready to talk with someone right now or have someone to pray with, we encourage you to stop by the Next Steps Room, where people will gladly talk with you

