



MESSAGE GUIDE

CHRISTMAS EVE, 2024

FEAR NOT-5: GOD WITH US



ISAIAH 41:10

**RICK GROVER,
LEAD PASTOR**

1. FILL IN THE BLANK. CHRISTMAS IS A TIME OF _____. WHAT WORD WOULD YOU USE TO FILL IN THE BLANK.

How about this word: FEAR. Christmas is a time of FEAR. Really? For whom? Fear for whom? What's interesting is that every major character in the original story of Christmas experienced fear.

Mary, the mother of Jesus: "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God'" (**Luke 1:30, ESV**). Why would someone be told not to be afraid? Because they are afraid!

Joseph, Jesus's earthly father: "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife'" (**Matthew 1:20, ESV**).

The shepherds who were watching their flock out in the field: "And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear" (**Luke 2:9, ESV**).

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin: "And Zechariah was troubled when he saw [the angel], and fear fell upon him" (**Luke 1:12, ESV**).

How is it possible that this is such a central part of the Christmas story, and yet we miss it. Maybe it's because we jump right to the "good stuff"—you know, the heart of the Christmas story...Jesus born in a stable in Bethlehem to a poor, young couple. The shepherds come and worship. The wise men sometime later come and worship. Jesus, the fulfillment of the OT Messianic prophecies such as Is. 7:14—"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (**Isaiah 7:14, ESV**).

Or, Is. 9:6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (**Isaiah 9:6, ESV**).

Maybe we get so caught up in the theology of the Incarnation—God taking on human flesh, that we forget about the emotion we face when all of a sudden something changes drastically, and we're completely caught off guard. We feel threatened, we feel overwhelmed, we're confused, and we become AFRAID.



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2. WHAT HAVE YOU GONE THROUGH IN YOUR LIFE THAT CAUGHT YOU OFF GUARD, THAT CAUSED YOU TO FEEL THREATENED, OVERWHELMED, CONFUSED, AND AFRAID?

This is imbedded in the Christmas story. Joseph and Mary were just going about their normal lives—betrothed to be married, maybe just hoping for some small relief from their poverty and oppression under the Roman occupiers in first-century Israel. The shepherds were out in the countryside just doing their job! Zecharaiah was a priest just fulfilling his priestly duty. And in each of their stories, God rocked their world out of the blue, and they were afraid.

There are all kinds of things that cause fear:

- Fear of what's going to happen in our country politically, economically.
- Maybe it's fear over a health crisis.
- Maybe you experience fear when you think about your kids at school when there's that remote thought that what if another school shooting happens, but this time at your kid's school.
- Maybe you're afraid you're going to be rejected, lose your job, your retirement will tank.
- Maybe you're afraid of your spouse.

All of those fears are real, understandable, and can be horrific. But what I want to propose to you based on all of the examples of fear we see in the biblical story of Christmas is that: When God interrupts your life, He can overcome your fears.

God interrupted Mary's life, Joseph's life, the shepherds' lives, Zecharaiah's life—and in each time that interruption led to fear. But in each encounter, the message was, “Do NOT be afraid,” and God's interruption led to the elimination of fear.

But in each interruption, there had to be a submission to God's plan. And that's the hard part, isn't it? Mary had to submit and so did Joseph. So did the shepherds, and so did Zecharaiah. And...so... should...we.

But you might ask, will submitting to God keep me from doing what I want to do? Will I lose my independence, my freedom? Will I just be some “Jesus freak,” or will people see me as some “right-wing Evangelical” who's considered out of touch with the real world? But what you might find is that by submitting to God and His plan that not only do those fears start to go away, but other fears start to lose their influence in your life. Following Jesus doesn't eliminate all of our fears, but it gives us His strength to overcome them.



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Isaiah the prophet, the same one who prophesied about a Child being born who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, also wrote this: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (**Isaiah 41:10, ESV**). That is why God took on human flesh in the Person of Jesus. Immanuel: God with us. The only way, ultimately, to not be dismayed or afraid is by the presence of God. God will strengthen us. God will help us. God will uphold us with His righteous right hand.

I don't know where you may be in your relationship with God, but here's what I do know. You're either coming out of a season of fear, going into a season of fear, or you're in a season of fear right now. And whatever that fear may be, allow God to interrupt your life. Let your heart become open to Him. Be shocked by His presence in your life this Christmas. It might not even be what you've been asking for, wanting, or even thinking about. Maybe for you Jesus is just some religious figure who founded the religion called Christianity. But according to what we find in Scripture in the ancient stories and in the real-life testimonies all throughout history and even in the lives of hundreds of people sitting all around you tonight, Jesus is God with us, because He died for our sins and then He rose again. He's not just the founder of a religion; He's the Lord of the universe, and He wants to interrupt your world even right now. And When God interrupts your life, He can overcome your fears.

3. HAVE YOU RECENTLY COME OUT OF A SEASON OF FEAR? ARE YOU GOING INTO A SEASON OF FEAR? ARE YOU IN A SEASON OF FEAR RIGHT NOW? WHATEVER SEASON YOU ARE IN, ARE YOU READY TO ALLOW GOD TO INTERRUPT YOUR LIFE AND HELP YOU OVERCOME YOUR FEARS?

NEXT STEPS:

If you would like to talk with someone about what it means to pursue a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we encourage you to stop by the Next Steps Room, where people will gladly talk with you!