

Do Not Be Afraid  
December 25, 2011

“The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.

“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid.’”

I don't know about you, but my first reaction to this is, “What?! Really?!”

Mystical beings from heaven appear to simple-minded, lowly shepherds out of the blue and in the middle of the night and they are told not to be afraid!

What exactly are they supposed to be then...how are they supposed to react?

Excited? Happy? Overjoyed?

Well, yes, that's exactly how they should have reacted.

If those shepherds knew why the angel of the Lord was there...what had just happened on that holy night...the significance, the importance of that very night...they should have been jumping for joy and celebrating!

Instead, they hesitate...they shy away...and who could blame them?

An angel of the Lord – a messenger of God – suddenly appears to them and tells them that their Savior has just arrived. And what's more, this Savior is not a king...he's not a prince...he's not anyone of nobility. Rather, he's an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger...a feeding trough for animals.

Then, if that's not enough, a multitude of heavenly hosts – in other words, an army of heavenly beings – appear singing and rejoicing and giving glory to God in the highest!

It's a miracle the shepherds didn't turn and run away in fright, screaming.

But, they didn't, did they? No. They were intrigued, sought the new born babe, Christ the Lord, and found him with his mother and father – Mary and Joseph – in a manger in the middle of a field.

The shepherds did not fear.

And neither did Mary or Joseph for that matter.

Both Mary and Joseph encountered the angel of the Lord themselves...and both Mary and Joseph were told the same message that the shepherds heard, "Do not be afraid."

Mary heard this right before she agreed to be the Mother of God...right before the Holy Spirit came over her and she conceived in her womb the Savior of the world.

And Joseph heard this message in a dream, which gave him the strength to take Mary as his wife and believe in God's word; thus, helping to bring the Savior into the world.

Ever wonder what would have happened if Mary, Joseph, or the Shepherds had said, "No, I will be afraid"?

What would have come if Mary gave into the fear and rejected God's invitation to be the Mother of our Savior?

Well, I think it's pretty obvious...we wouldn't have Christmas...and thus, we wouldn't have the opportunity for salvation.

But, fortunately for us, Mary said, "Yes!"

She refused to give into the fear and trusted in God's goodness and love. Thus, we have the opportunity and the invitation for salvation with God.

Fear is not of God.

Rather, the opponent, Satan, uses fear to trick us, to make us say things and do things that are not true to our character...our identity as Christians. Thus, fear is used to pull us away from Christ.

I remember when I was about 6-7 years old. Mom and dad left me and my younger brother home as they went out one evening.

Those with little children can imagine what happens when 2 young boys are left home as they go out...bad things happen.

That night, we broke one of the chairs in the living room.

We were so afraid of getting into trouble that we tried to glue it back together before mom and dad got home.

And when they did return home, we lied and said everything was ok and nothing got broke.

We even went to bed early that night – very uncharacteristic of us – in hopes that mom and dad wouldn't find out and wouldn't punish us.

Fear makes us do things and say things that don't help us get to heaven...that don't help us grow in holiness.

When have we given into the fear in our own lives?

When have we lied to our boss at work, come in late, leave early, or lied to a teacher at school out of fear in an attempt to avoid being disciplined...to avoid getting into trouble...to avoid a negative consequence?

When have we avoided talking with a friend – even though we knew in our heart that we had to talk with him / her – because we were afraid of the fight / conflict that would most certainly arise from confronting him / her?

When have we avoided prayer – talking with God – or avoided going to Mass on Sunday because we were afraid of what He might ask of us...or reveal to us...or because we were afraid of the Truth?

Once again, I ask, what would have happened if Mary gave into the fear and said no to God?

My brothers and sisters, fear is not of God.

As such, and because we are children of God, each and every one of us has the courage, strength, and grace to accept and live the message of the angel, "Do not be afraid!"

The only question is: How will we live this? How will show this...that we trust, believe, have confidence in God?

I think it begins with prayer...praying and having faith in God our Savior because after all, our hearts are restless until they rest in God, our Lord.

The challenge before us: Do we have what it takes to faithfully respond to God's invitation to: "be not afraid?"