

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE: GOD'S FEAR NOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Part III: God's "Fear Not" For Personal Dangers

(Luke 1:26-40)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Christmas Season, many people face multiple temptations to fear personal dangers:

(1) Many people face the temptation to fear being harmfully deceived by the mainstream media: The editorial, "Journalists serve unholy alliance" (Ibid., Republican-American) noted the work by "independent journalist Matt Taibbi" who has been reporting on "the so-called 'Twitter Files'" that expose how social-media giant Twitter, heavily staffed by political progressives, squelched the free expression of many conservatives for years. The editorial summed that the "Twitter Files . . . has exposed, in the most explicit manner possible, that many journalists can *never be trusted* to accurately report (sic) on the alliance between government and corporations." (Ibid.) Indeed, "(h)eadling into 2024, Americans need to understand" that "the news media now operates" by "treating false narratives as facts and characterizing actual facts as 'right-wing narratives.'" (Ibid.) The Republican-American editor concluded, "We have urged readers of this column to rely on local and independent sources for coverage of important political matters. The Twitter Files show just how crucial that advice has become." (Ibid.)

(2) Many people face the temptation to fear the loss of religious liberty: The Republican-American editorial, "'Tolerance' or coercion?" (Ibid., December 13, 2022, p. 6A) reported that "with the passage by both chambers of Congress of the Respect for Marriage Act, a bill codifying gay marriage nationally . . . individuals and institutions – whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim – are even more at risk than they were previously . . . John McCormack noted in a Nov. 16 piece for National Review" that "'while the Senate's bill affirms a right to same-sex marriage, it does not affirm the rights of conscientious objectors . . . Nor does it prevent the government from discriminating against religious nonprofit adoption agencies that uphold the belief that marriage is a union between one man and one woman . . . (s)o it is simply not true to say that the bill protects religious liberty.'"

The editor of the Republican-American concluded, ". . . (T)his is . . . a top-down imposition of values and an erosion of religious liberty, one of the most fundamental tenets of the United States' founding." (Ibid.)

(3) Many people face the temptation to fear being under-served even by religious leaders: Roberta M. Crispino's letter to the Republican-American (Ibid., December 7, 2022, p. 6A) reported, "Recently, the Palace Theater here hosted a forum on comparative religion in which an imam, a rabbi and a Catholic priest each had an opportunity to present their beliefs . . . However, I went away feeling that . . . considering the state of the world . . . they needed to address how each faith met the challenge [of] instilling virtue in an increasingly spiritually neglected society."

What greatly amplifies the spiritual plight of society is the letter writer's added testimony to have "identified late in life as a female" opposite his birth gender, and the editor's note that the writer is also a retired Naugatuck public school teacher. (Ibid., p. 6A, 7A) One wonders about the welfare of a society where a retired public school teacher who has influenced many children for years also walks in deep spiritual darkness as to even gender self-identity and seeks vainly for insight from religious leaders for help for "an increasingly spiritually neglected society."

Need: So, we ask, "What is God's solution for the varied personal dangers that many people face today?!"

I. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus, the circumstances of Gabriel's appearance left Mary stunned and concerned about her personal physical welfare, Luke 1:26-29:

- A. Mary was betrothed to wed Joseph (Luke 1:26-27), and any sexual activity during this betrothal time was viewed by society as adultery (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume Four, p. 107).
- B. When Gabriel then appeared to Mary to announce Jesus' birth, he "went into" (*eiserchomai*, Abbott-Smith, A Man. Grk. Lex. of the N. T., 1968, p. 134-135) the house where she lived, appearing as a strange man in her private quarters and greeted her, so Mary as "greatly agitated" (*diatarasso*, Ibid., p. 111) and "inwardly questioned" (*dialogizomai*, Ibid., p. 109) "of what sort" (*potapos*, Ibid., p. 374) of greeting it was, Luke 1:29. She as a young virgin was very upset and confused at this strange man's invasion of her private abode.

II. Accordingly, God's Angel Gabriel told Mary to "Fear not," and added information to put her at ease:

- A. Gabriel settled Mary by stating facts that she could use to verify that his intentions were good, Luke 1:30a, 36:
 1. God's angel addressed Mary by name (Luke 1:30a), what indicated that though she did not know him, he certainly knew her, and that he was interested enough in her welfare honorably to call her by name.
 2. Gabriel also told Mary of the pregnancy of her elderly relative Elisabeth, noting that she had been barren, facts that Mary could use certify the angel's credibility by visiting Elisabeth herself, Luke 1:36, 39-40.

- B. Gabriel also settled Mary by giving her Bible facts and teaching that validated him and his word, Lk. 1:30-39:
1. Mary's use of 15 discernible Old Testament quotations in the ten verses of her Luke 1:46-55 Magnificat meant that she had a great knowledge of Scripture. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Luke 1:46-56)
 2. When Gabriel then told Mary to "Fear not," adding that she had "found favor with God" (Luke 1:30a,b KJV), she knew this "favor" description that was used of Noah in Genesis 6:8 and Moses in Exodus 33:17, indicating that she was going to be blessed on the level of these great spiritual giants in Scripture!
 3. Gabriel's description of the greatness of Mary's Infant Jesus in Luke 1:31-33 recalls a similar description of Israel's predicted Messiah in Isaiah 9:6-7, a passage Mary would have readily known and loved.
 4. When Mary asked how she would be with child though she as a virgin had not been intimate with a man, and Gabriel explained how the Holy Spirit would overshadow her, producing the Child (Luke 1:34-35), Mary would recall the Genesis 1:2a reference to the Holy Spirit's hovering over the unformed earth at creation in preparation supernaturally to create life on the earth! This teaching would be evidence that Gabriel was a messenger from God, for he explained her special pregnancy in light of a Biblical precedent.

III. As a result, Mary accepted Gabriel's credibility as God's messenger, believing his message, and settled in spirit, she excitedly rushed to Judaea to visit her relative Elisabeth for mutual edification, Lk. 1:38-39.

Lesson: *Though Mary was initially upset at the Angel Gabriel's threatening appearance to her as a strange man in private, Gabriel settled her (1) by stating facts that she could use to verify his good intentions and (2) by giving her Biblical facts and teaching that validated him and his message as being from God.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) To handle any temptation to fear for our personal safety, may we (a) pay attention to circumstantial facts that we can validate that God provides to guide and settle us and (b) rely on Scripture precedents and Bible teaching that clarify God's leading in addressing what causes us alarm.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply this sermon lesson to the issues mentioned in our sermon introduction for God's settling directives:

(1) On handling the fear of being harmfully personally deceived by the mainstream media, Paul prophesied in 2 Timothy 3:13 ESV that "evil people and imposters" would go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The mainstream media's efforts to treat false narratives as facts and facts as right-wing narratives certainly fits Paul's prediction in this verse. To handle this problem, Paul in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 told Timothy to (a) continue with what he had learned and had (b) firmly believed, (c) knowing the credible people from whom he had learned those beliefs, and (d) that from childhood he had known the Scriptures that (i) are divinely inspired and (ii) profitable for discipling and (iii) for every good work God had for him to do regardless what the mainstream media asserts!

(2) On handling the fear of the loss of personal religious liberty, (a) we have Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His Church, and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. The "gates of Hades" may refer to Satan's efforts or to physical death, perhaps both (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 252), but the point is that Christ will build His Church regardless of all obstacles to the contrary. (b) Also, Ephesians 2:10 clarifies that we believers in Christ are His workmanship created unto good works that God has already ordained in eternity past that we should perform them. (c) Accordingly, God will provide what liberty we need to be able to achieve the objectives that He has eternally preordained that we are to achieve regardless what human governments do to try to limit our religious liberties! Our part is simply to follow and obey the Lord!

(3) On handling the fear of being personally under-served by religious leaders, (a) after predicting in the Parable of the Sower that there would be varied responses in hearers to the proclamation of God's Word (Mark 4:13-20), Jesus in Mark 4:21-23 warned His audience to pay heed to what they had already heard of God's truth, for the way they responded to it would become evident to everybody else, either embarrassing or honoring them! (b) Then in Mark 4:24-25, Jesus urged His listeners to be careful how they hear God's Word, for to the degree they heed it, God would give them more spiritual truth. To the one who had some truth, more would be given, but from the one who did not heed the truth he already had, what he had would be taken from him! (c) So, we need not worry about a lack of adequate Bible teachers or teaching if we act on the truth that God has already given us. If we apply the truth we have, God will in some way give us more, but if we do not heed what we have, we will lose it to our shame!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. In handling concerns over what may harm us, may we heed the facts in life that God provides to settle and guide us and rely on Scripture to address what tempts us to fear.