

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE: GOD'S FEAR NOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Part I: God's "Fear Not" For Family Problems

(Matthew 1:18-25)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Christmas Season, a vast need exists for God's intervention to address family problems:

(1) In her letter to the Republican-American, November 13, 2022, p. 11A, Angela Hipp of New Milford wrote, "I have never written to the paper, but with the way our country is going, I felt the need to . . . I am a widow and a senior citizen. The way our government is acting, I worry about my children and grandchildren . . . Drugs are coming in rapidly and kids are dying. Crime is bad; people are getting beat up in Chicago, Seattle, New York, etc. Innocent people are losing their lives or getting beaten up so badly that they can't take care of their family."

(2) Family problems are making life increasingly dangerous for the most vulnerable among us – the unborn: (a) Christine Flowers in her piece, "The real reason Fetterman beat Oz" (Ibid., November 16, 2022, p. 9A) claimed, "(A)bortion was the big issue in this election . . . the hysteria after Justice Samuel Alito stated the obvious fact that there was no 'right' to abortion in the U. S. Constitution was apocalyptic." (b) The editorial, "Democrats' cynical exploitation" (Ibid., November 19, 2022, p. 8A) added that in the ire raised over abortion rights during the election, a "troubling falsehood" was "the omission of any reference to the other party to every pregnancy – the unborn baby."

(3) Family life is getting more dangerous even for many young children: Tracy O'Shaughnessy's article, "Jane Doe No More organization reaches out to abused men" (Ibid., November 25, 2022, p. 4B) told how "the state Department of Education" claims "14% of Connecticut residents report that they have personally experienced childhood sexual assault. Nearly one in 14 boys and one in five girls has been a victim of sexual abuse in the state, and one in every seven of those victims was under the age of 6."

(4) The demise of normal family life is even causing many young Americans to shift to the political left: The editorial, "The shepherds of socialism" (Ibid., November 20, 2022, p. 10A) cited "John O. McGinnis, a law professor at Northwestern University" who "revealed that young voters are flocking to the left . . . What has turned so many young people so firmly against the conservatism of their parents? Mr. McGinnis offers a plausible explanation: '(D)uring the lifetime of these young people, educational systems have shifted even further to the left in every respect.' Yet, the paper's editor added, "What Mr. McGinnis leaves out is the persistent failure of the traditional family. According to the Pew Research Center, 'Almost a quarter of U. S. children under the age of 18 live with one parent and no other adults.' One might deduce from these data, then, that young people effectively are rebelling in a vacuum – that is, a lack of parental guidance – by seeking that guidance elsewhere," even from leftist educators, Ibid.

Need: *So, we ask, "What hope is there for the troubling family problems that many people face this Christmas?!"*

- I. When God's angel appeared to Joseph in a dream in Matthew 1:20 to encourage him to "Fear not" regarding a family problem he faced, he lived in a troubled world that was adverse to healthy family life:**
 - A. A deep division existed between Gentiles and Jews where the Jewish people under the influence of rabbis had a "bitter hatred" of Gentiles. (Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah, 2004, p. 63-64)
 - B. In addition, Joseph's country of Galilee (Luke 2:4) had been a hotbed of "wild, irregular resistance to Herod" the Great when he rose to power, and thieving "guerilla bands" had "traversed the country," Ibid., p. 165.
 - C. Herod subdued these bands in 47 B. C., but tensions still remained. (Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib., vol. Two, p. 642)
- II. Joseph was engaged to Mary when she was discovered to be with child, so he believed that she had been immoral, Matthew 1:18. Since breaking a wedding engagement at that time required a divorce (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Matthew 1:19), Joseph thought of quietly divorcing Mary, Matthew 1:19.**
- III. After he considered this action, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to "Fear not" to take Mary in marriage, that her pregnancy was a supernatural work of God in bringing the God-Incarnate Lord Jesus Messiah into the world, Matthew 1:20-21.**
- IV. Significantly, God's "Fear not" directive came because of the RIGHTEOUS actions of Joseph and Mary that EXAMPLE how we are to handle troubling family problems that we face in our own unsettled era:**
 - A. Joseph and Mary were selected of God to be the earthly parents of His Son, Jesus, because they were upright:
 1. Mary cited 15 Old Testament quotations in just ten verses of her Luke 1:46-55 Magnificat, "showing how much the Old Testament was known and loved" by her, Ibid., Ryrie, ftn. to Luke 1:46-56.
 2. Joseph was a "righteous" man (Matthew 1:19a), for he desired to treat Mary well by handling what he had thought was immorality on her part by quietly breaking their wedding engagement, Matthew 1:19b.

- B. Joseph had obviously taken the responsible initiative to arrange for the marriage seen in his consideration of taking the initiative to end the engagement in private, Matthew 1:19. Accordingly, he was following the Genesis 2:24 Biblical pattern of a man's taking the responsible initiative in forming his marital union.
- C. Regardless if Joseph first thought that Mary had terribly wronged him by becoming pregnant by immorality, he still exhibited cautiousness in proceeding to initiate his divorce against her, Matthew 1:19-20a. He ruled his emotions well instead of acting in wild, impulsive fury that was typical of his fellow Galileans!
- D. Then, when God's angel explained that Mary was with child through the Holy Spirit, that the Child she would bear would be God Incarnate, Joseph rose from sleep and immediately took Mary as his wife to protect the reputations of her and her Child, Matthew 1:24. Joseph then even refrained from being physically intimate with his wife out of respect for God's work to bring Christ into the world until after Jesus was born, Matthew 1:25. Thus, Joseph exemplified thoughtfulness and self-control for the interests of God, of Mary and of Jesus!

Lesson: *God gave Joseph an edifying "Fear not" to take Mary as his wife since (1) Joseph and Mary were upright, (2) Joseph took responsible initiative as a man to arrange for their marriage, (3) he cautiously planned though he thought Mary had badly wronged him and (4) he exercised self-control in respect for others around him.*

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 enjoy God's edifying involvement to ease our fears over family problems, may we live righteously, take responsible initiatives in our family roles, cautiously plan even if we think we have been badly wronged and exercise self-control in respect for others around us.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply the sermon lesson to our lives in view of the issues we face that we noted in our introduction:

(1) Like Joseph and Mary who functioned righteously in their unsettled world in Galilee, (a) we must live righteously in contrast to our unsettled world today by relying on the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:16, 22-23) (b) Since Mary had a working knowledge of Scripture, we need to saturate our minds with Scripture in contrast to dwelling on the unsettling issues of today's world! (cf. Deuteronomy 17:18-20)

(2) As drugs are making life hard for many families, we must (a) rely on the Holy Spirit instead of drugs and alcohol for behavior control, Ephesians 5:18-20. (b) Then, we must take responsible initiatives in our roles in the family: (i) Wives must submit to their husbands while (ii) husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). (iii) Children must submit to their parents and (iv) parents must rear them with consistency in the discipline and instruction of the Lord that they not frustrate their children (Ephesians 6:1-4 ESV). (v) Employees must obey their employers, knowing that they are accountable to God for their work on the job and (vi) employers must not threaten their employees since employers are subject to God Who in turn is their Employer, Ephesians 6:5-9!

(3) With crime rising, like Joseph and Mary, we must live righteously in contrast to today's troubled world by (a) not committing useless acts, by (b) cautiously avoiding trouble, by (c) filling our time with productive acts, and by (d) avoiding company with evil people to avoid being negatively influenced by them, Ephesians 5:11, 15-16.

(4) Since the welfare of the unborn, of young children and of children in single-parent homes is at risk due to the deteriorating culture of today's world and the unedifying influence of leftist educators, we must (a) heed Exodus 21:22-23 and not practice abortion, (b) rely on the Holy Spirit to rear our children righteously (Ephesians 5:5:18, 21, 6:4) and (c) heed Scripture (i) in staying celibate until marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-2), (ii) in heeding Bible guidelines on who to marry (1 Corinthians 7:39), (iii) in staying wed for life once we marry (1 Corinthians 7:3-11), and (iv) in exemplifying godly living before our children at home that has far more influence than leftist educators. [In 1 Timothy 3:6, Paul taught that a church leader must manage his own home well to know how to manage the church of God, and Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-3 wrote that management by elders in the Church is not to be done by lording it over people, but by exemplifying. Also Dr. Howard Hendricks, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, once said, "Your home is the number one influence in the life of your child." ("Number One," Progress magazine, International Reform Federation, November 2022, p. 9) Indeed, "(t)he average church has a child 1% of his time, the home has him 83% of his time and the school for the remaining 16%," Ibid. We must take advantage of the great exposure our child has to our home life to example godliness in our home, what will far outweigh the impact of leftist educators in schools.]

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we then enjoy God's edifying guidance that eases our fears regarding family issues by living righteously, by taking responsible initiatives in our roles in family life, by cautiously planning even if we think we have been badly wronged and by exercising self-control in respect for the welfare of others around us.