

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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FEAR NOT SERIES: WHEN THE FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN

Luke 1:26-49

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We will be answering four questions about fear today.

1. What happened to cause the fear?
2. Who was afraid?
3. What happened to abate the fear?
4. What can we learn from the experience?

**INTRODUCTION:** Fear. It's something that all of us have experienced at one time or another. When we feel threatened, our brain releases a series of chemicals and hormones that throws our bodies into fight or flight mode. While it starts in our head, the reactions are very real and physical. Our heart rate and blood pressure increases. Our pupils dilate. The veins in our skin constrict, and nonessential systems such as our immune system and digestion system slow down or turn off. We have a hard time concentrating on anything other than the object of our fear. While some people are fear junkies, most of us do not particularly like the feeling. A rollercoaster ride or scary movie now and then might be fun, but to live in fear is a miserable thing. It's also the reason that the Bible says *fear not* about 80 times (in the KJV).

For the next few weeks, we are going to talk about fear. We are going to examine why we fear, what we fear, and what we can do about it. We are going to consider various people in the Bible who experienced fear and what helped them to move past their fears. At the onset, I want you to know this. Fear is an emotion, and God gave us our emotions. Healthy fear is beneficial. It motivates us to avoid harm. It alerts us to potential danger. Fear, like many other things in life, becomes sinful when it prevents us from doing the things God wants us to do or living the kind of life God wants us to live. Fear is a natural response. It's what we do with or in response to our fear that matters.

Today, we are going to talk about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Of course, we are most familiar with this passage of scripture being read during Christmas, but I want us to look at it from a different perspective. I want us to think about who Mary was and what it must have felt like for her to receive the news that God had an unexpected plan for her life.

## **1-WHAT HAPPENED TO CAUSE THE FEAR?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:26-28

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

**EXPLANATION:** From these three short verses, we can discern a lot about Mary. Mary was a young virgin. Based on what we know about the culture, we estimate that she was around 14 or 15 years old when Gabriel visited her. We think of our teens as children, but at this time, a girl of childbearing age was considered an adult. The Bible explicitly says that Mary was a virgin so that no one can accuse her of sexual impropriety in relation to the birth of Jesus.

Mary was pledged to marry a man named Joseph. Though this was similar to our engagements, it was more binding. This contractual arrangement was likely made between the two families. Joseph may have been preparing a home for the two of them before the final wedding ceremony and consummation of the union. Breaking this pledge was a serious matter akin to divorce.

Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David. This is an important detail because the Savior was prophesied to come from the lineage of David. Joseph, though an earthly father to Jesus, was not his biological kin. Because Mary was in the same lineage, Jesus was descended from David both physically and through adoption.

Galilee was a hilly area with a large lake in Northern Palestine. Nazareth was an obscure village in Galilee. When we think about what this means for Mary, we can discern that she probably lived a rather rural, sheltered life.

When the angel greeted Mary, he called her highly favored. In the original Greek, it comes from the word (khar-ee-to'-o) that means “to make graceful or to endue with grace.” In other words, the angel was telling Mary that she was highly favored because she was receptive to God’s grace. The word is only used one other time in scripture (Ephesians 1:6) where it refers to those who put their faith in Christ.

From these three verses, we can discern that Mary was a Godly young woman with little worldly experience, who had never been with a man physically but was committed to marry a man named Joseph. That’s what happened to cause the fear.

## **2-WHO WAS AFRAID?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:29

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*

**EXPLANATION:** The word translated troubled here actually means greatly agitated. We are not talking about a little bothered. Mary was genuinely distressed. Notice that the angel had not yet relayed the news about the pregnancy. So, why was Mary distressed? From our perspective, it seems that the angel’s greeting should have made her feel good. Obviously, God valued her enough to send an angelic messenger to speak with her. So, why was Mary afraid?

First of all, I doubt that she had seen an angel before. If one popped up in your backyard, I’m sure you would be agitated as well. The mere sight of this supernatural being would be terrifying.

Second, I’m sure Mary had never received a personal message from the Lord before. In fact, God had been relatively quiet for the last 400 years. He had not spoken through the prophets since Malachi about 400 years before.

Third, Mary probably knew a little about previous angelic visitations from the stories she had heard from her elders. Most of the time, it was the men who received such messages. For a woman to receive such a message was odd indeed.

Although Mary did not yet know what God had in store for her, she was aware of the importance of this event. She knew enough about God to know that angelic messengers often foretold big changes. Why would God send an angel to someone like her? What did it mean for her life? The angel's appearance marked a monumental change for Mary. She was afraid of what it might mean. She was afraid of what might come. She was afraid of the unknown.

1-What happened to cause the fear?

2-Who was afraid?

### **3-WHAT HAPPENED TO ABATE THE FEAR?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:30-40 and 46-49

*But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.<sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”<sup>34</sup> “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.<sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.<sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.”<sup>38</sup> “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,<sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth...<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.*

**EXPLANATION:** Given the circumstances, Mary’s fears were a natural response to the event. Many older and more seasoned God-followers like Isaiah and John

covered when confronted by angels. Still, Mary did not camp out in her fear. Let's look at what happened to abate Mary's fears and give her the courage to move forward.

- Mary respectfully listened to what the angel had to say. Although her fear was evident to the angel, she did not initially say anything.
  - Mary asked for clarification and wisdom when she did not understand. Note that Mary's question was not a doubt. When the angel delivered news that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a child, Zechariah asked, "*How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.*" (Luke 1:18). The angel struck him mute. The difference between Mary and Zechariah's questions are not readily apparent when we read about it because it was the difference between their hearts. Zechariah, who was old enough and spiritually seasoned enough to know better, doubted God's ability to work the miracle. Mary asked a legitimate question based on a lack of knowledge.
  - The angel offered words of comfort and insight into what was going to take place and promised a future full of blessings. Notice, although the angel gave some insight into what was going to happen, he did not give Mary all the details. There was still much about her situation that was unknown.
  - Mary submitted to God's will. She did not argue or make excuses. She recognized God's authority in her life.
  - Mary sought human companionship from Elizabeth. Elizabeth was someone Mary trusted. She was older than Mary and had more spiritual and worldly experience. She was also in a similar situation to Mary. Elizabeth had experienced a miraculous conception.
  - Mary praised God. She believed the promises that were given to her about her future, even though she could not have understood how they would come to pass. She praised him for choosing her for this assignment even though she had to recognize how difficult it would be. She trusted God to help her accomplish the task she had been given although she had no idea all that would entail.
1. What happened to cause the fear?
  2. Who was afraid?
  3. What happened to abate the fear?

## 4-WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

**APPLICATION:** Like Mary, we often face an unknown future. While we do not receive messages from angelic visitors, we do receive frightening and confusing messages. Maybe you can relate to how Mary felt.

- Maybe a doctor told you that you are ill, and you do not know how long you have to live.
- Maybe you found out that you are going to have a baby, and you do not know how you can afford another child.
- Maybe your boss told you that the company is cutting back, and your job has been eliminated.
- Maybe the news anchor's forecast of gloom and doom has you worried about how you are going to survive.

No one knows the future, but sometimes our personal unknowns can overwhelm us. What can we learn from Mary's experience?

1. **There is a time to remain silent.** Lamentations 3:26 and 28 says, "*It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD...<sup>28</sup> Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him.*" There is wisdom in giving yourself time to process the message. When the words are hurtful, when the circumstances are harmful, or when you just do not understand, take time to listen and digest what's happening.
2. **There is wisdom in asking the right questions with the right attitude.** Matthew 7:7 says, "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*" We will not always receive the answers that we want, but asking the right kinds of questions with a heart to truly hear may help us understand better what is taking place and why.
3. **Look for words of comfort.** Psalm 119:81 says, "*My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word.*" Search the scriptures for verses of hope. Choose and memorize a verse that reminds you of the hope you have in Christ. Listen to positive songs and messages. If you are a family member or loved one of someone who is struggling with fear, follow the angel's example. Speak words of affirmation. Send encouraging cards and texts.

4. **Submit to God's will.** Hebrews 12:9 says, *“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!”* The circumstances of our lives should not define our faith. Like Mary, we need to submit to God's will for us even when it means hardship and regardless of how we feel.
5. **Seek companionship from someone who will understand.** Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”* The Bible indicates that we are sometimes given difficult circumstances so that we can later use our experiences to help one another. Look for Christians who have gone through similar trials. Find fellowship and support with other believers who have been there, done that.
6. **Praise God through it all.** In Psalm 34:1-4 David wrote, *“I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. <sup>2</sup> I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.<sup>3</sup> Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together <sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”* Like Mary, David knew what it was to be afraid. He fought enemies larger than himself. He ran from men more powerful than him. He even faced God's wrath for his own disobedience. Through it all, he praised the Lord. There is power in praise from God's people. No matter what is happening in your life, no matter how troubled you are, God is still worthy of your praise.

**CONCLUSION:** The opposite of fear is courage. Courage is not the absence of fear; it's doing what needs to be done in the face of whatever it is that makes you afraid. If you are afraid of what's ahead, if you are afraid of what you do not know, follow Mary's example. In the words of Peter, *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”* (1 Peter 5:7). The altar is open if you want to come forward today.

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