

December 25, 2017 Christmas

The Santa Claus at the shopping mall was very surprised when Emily, a young lady aged about 20 years walked up and sat on his lap. Now we all know Santa doesn't usually take requests from adults, but she smiled very nicely at him, so he asked her, "What do you want for Christmas?" "Something for my mother, please" replied Emily sweetly. "Something for your mother? Well that's very loving and thoughtful of you," smiled Santa. "What do you want me to bring her?" "A son-in-law."

There is a phrase that is spoken by God or his messengers when they appear to us humans. This phrase, "Do not be afraid" appears 88 times in the Bible. One of Jesus' titles is the prince of Peace. We are constantly praying and working for peace in the world. But this peace is based on other humans. And humans as we know are not reliable at all times. The peace we are really desiring is the Peace of Christ. A permanent lasting peace that the world and its inhabitants cannot take away. Jesus' peace is the only way around fear. If we look in the scriptures; be not afraid or do not fear, are used 365 times in the bible. One for every day of the year. There are books out there that have one for every day of the year, that you meditate on, reason not to be afraid, not to have fear. We see some of them in the bible; go all the way back to Abraham. Abraham, the father of many nations. Right before God made the covenant, he appeared to Abraham in the dark. Abraham waited all day for God and God finally shows up at night and he has to tell Abraham, "do not be afraid." Then he makes the covenant from which you and I are descended.

Daniel, one of the great prophets during the Babylonian exile, was able to read visions and dreams and translate them. He had a vision of evil in the world taking over and winning. God sent Gabriel the angel to him, and as Gabriel appeared, what did he say? "Do not fear, be not afraid."

Zachariah was the father of John the Baptist. He was in the temple area, alone offering sacrifice, it was his turn. All by himself in the temple and all of a sudden, this angel appeared, Gabriel again. "Do not be afraid." There are two reasons for these angels doing this by the way. One is that people who have seen angels, and there are many, describe them as about eight to ten feet tall, and very imposing figures. They say, "do not be afraid" so that you don't have a heart attack looking at them. The second reason is because they bring God's peace, the true peace. We pray for peace in the world today and we're really not praying for true peace. True peace already exists. We are praying for a temporary, earthly peace.

We read in our gospel, yesterday morning on Sunday, how the angel Gabriel came to Mary. Mary, a poor little girl in a backwater town, the lowest on the social order. And, remember, no special effects back then, no electricity, no movies. When an angel appears to people today they're like, "wow!" You know, Star Wars, Star Trek, all that stuff, all these holographic images and everything. Back then; nothing. He appeared to this little girl and he had to say, "do not fear, Mary, be not afraid." The shepherds, we read today; the angel comes as they are sitting there at night around the campfire, telling stories and eating. The angel appears out of nowhere, "be not afraid, do not fear."

Jesus, over and over and over again, told his disciples, who we are, "do not be afraid, I go before you always, do not be afraid, I am with you always." Do not be afraid when false prophets try to make you think the end times are here and follow them. Do not be afraid, was His big thing. Then, Mary Magdalene; she was looking for Jesus after the resurrection and she comes to the tomb and there's two angels, not one, standing on top of the tomb. "Do not be afraid," they have to say. Then, when Jesus finally appears in all His glory, He tells her, "do not be afraid."

God does not want us to be afraid of anything. He says, "do not fear those who can kill the body, but beware of the one who can kill the soul." Do not be afraid. This life is only temporary. We need to be concerned with the next life that will last for eternity. So, if something bad happens to you in this life, do not be afraid, you still have the next life. Many of the saints, the martyrs in the early church, they took this to heart during their persecution. Put in an Amphitheater with wild animals that were going to tear them apart. Did they cower and cry? Did they try to run away? No, they stood there, looking at the animals coming at them, and they praised God, because they knew they were going to see Him that day. They weren't afraid because God was with them. That's what Emmanuel means; God is with us. That's why we shouldn't be afraid. God is with us at all times. Jesus said, "if bad things happen, or hard things happen, you find life hard, remember, I'm carrying half of it with my yoke." "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." He is carrying half of our problems, half of our pain, half of our suffering, half of our anxieties, half of our depression. Can you imagine what your life would be, if he didn't? So, we have God with us at all times. And, another reason we should not fear; every god the human race ever conceived, from their minds, was not a good god; did not care about us. Always wanted to torture us, kill us, have all these bad things happen to us. The Greeks were always worried that if they said something wrong, Zeus would throw a lightning bolt at them, and swish, gone. But, all of a sudden, we have a God who loves us. A true God, not one we made up, but a true God who loves us. Loves us enough to give us a reason to celebrate. Gives us Christmas by sending His Son, to make sure our sins are taken away, and the gates of heaven are once again open to us. God loves us so much, He died for us on the cross. With all of that going for us, we should remember each and every day, be not afraid.

God bless you.