

**Sharing the Love**  
**December 18, 2022**  
**Luke 1-2**  
**Rev. Laurie Crelly East Church**  
**Grand Rapids MI**

“Do not be afraid” – this is the common greeting from the Angelic messengers with each of the four people we meet in the Gospel story of Jesus’ birth. God had great plans to send the Messiah to redeem the world, but God’s work in this world requires people’s participation. Just as we are called to use the four weeks of Advent to prepare our hearts for Jesus coming. So, these four people show us how to actively await the coming of the Messiah and to be prepared to play an active role in God’s salvation plan. So, let’s see what it takes to be partners in the work of God in the world. What are some of the characteristics we need to be agents in God’s work.

We first meet Zachariah when the Angel appears to tell him “Do not fear, your prayers have been answered.” His wife Elizabeth will be pregnant and will be giving birth to a prophet. A voice of God crying in the wilderness making ready the way of God. Zachariah had held onto hope that God would hear his many prayers. But even then, his doubt jeopardized the plan. If he had not believed he may have lost out on this miracle happening before his eyes. Big changes were coming to his life, but he needed to have faith that God would be with them.

The same is for us. When God is about to move in our lives in a new way, we need to be ready to respond to God’s appearance. If God’s promises take longer than we expect so we need to guard our hearts from despair and keep hope alive.

Mary was also greeted by an Angel “Do not be afraid, oh favored one of God.” Mary was no a nobody, barely old enough to even be getting married, why would God choose her? She was tempted to deny the Angel’s words of praise. How could she be a chosen one. What has she done to earn this high praise? Often, we don’t see in ourselves what God sees in us. Mary believes the Angel’s words that she truly is

favored of God and so are we. We need to trust the wisdom of God and others when they see the potential within us. God calls on us to do things beyond our own abilities, not because we are special, but more because we are willing to be used by God. Mary shows us how powerful being open and willing to receive God's call.

When Joseph is greeted by the Angel it comes in a dream. The Angel tells him to remain with Mary and believe in her. He is worried about what others will think. He fears shame and judgment from others. His worries block the joy of the moment that a baby is coming. We too can be kept awake at night by our fears and worries about the future, about the way others will view us and potential rejection of others. Sometimes the call of God on our lives feels like a dream. How many times do we miss out on the joy of experiencing God's work in our lives, because we fear what it may look like to others. We are preoccupied by all of the What ifs in our minds. But our greatest joy comes when we take a risk to pursue a calling that takes us on new and uncharted paths. Our greatest joy does come when we are fully present and living into the dreams the God has planted in our hearts.

The Angels finally also appear to the shepherds. It seems odd that on this big important night that the Angels appeared to shepherds. Why not the king, why not appear to a crowd in the town square at least? Why shepherds? Shepherds were seen as the low life members of society, immigrant workers or day laborers. Men with questionable back grounds, not to be trusted usually. The message was simple, the messiah has been born. But the sign is not the bright lights of angels in the sky. No, the sign is a baby born in a manger. A vulnerable, poor, homeless baby. A family rejected by others in their time of need, but God's chosen one. They find love, the love of a mother doing all she can do to protect her baby and give it life.

Immanuel, God with us, is coming. Not to kings or the rich and powerful, but to a faithful old man who is struggling to hold onto hope. To a young girl who feels called to

do the impossible and finds peace in her unexpected calling. To a man who is challenged to take a risk and go against the norms of society and experience God's calling that brings true joy. Finally, to the outcast and forgotten shepherds who long for community. They are given the honor of being the first to witness God's love incarnate, treated as family by God when all others shun them.

All four of them were in a vulnerable state. Exposed at their point of weakness and affirmed by Messengers from on high. Reassured that this was a good thing by the words "do not be afraid". God was not bringing judgment, rather God was calling them to be a vital part of this important plan. A plan to bring more hope, more peace, more joy and more love into the world. To bring the Life of God into the world and to proclaim this news, giving glory to God.

People ask, Do you believe in angels? Yes, I believe there are angels among us. Messengers sent by God telling us, "Do not be afraid." For God is about to do great things among us and we play a vital role in it. But these messengers don't just come with a bright light and wings. No, we too are called to be God's messengers, messengers of love, flying in the face of fear, called to proclaim the Good News – Immanuel God is with us, spreading the Love of God to a world longing for truly Good News.