

Christmas Cards from God:

Do Not Be Afraid Miscellaneous Texts

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Text Introduction: Do you still enjoy getting Christmas cards? With the use of e-mail and social media, I suspect there is an overall decline in sending and receiving traditional Christmas cards.

People, of course, do Christmas cards in different ways. Some cards have rather generic messages related to Christmas. Others take the Christmas season to send family updates of the past year. We get a lot of picture cards which are also nice, especially when those cards are of people that we do not see often.

This December, I have titled my sermon series “**Christmas Cards from God.**” We are going to explore some passages which give to us messages from angels, which are messages from God. Therefore, just as Christmas cards send messages, angels send messages from God.

I want to begin with this message that we hear from God: Do Not Be Afraid. That seems to be a message that we need to hear for a lot of different reasons. It is one of the messages of Christmas—Do not be afraid! We will let the text of Scripture guide us to a specific application, but please note that this is a phrase that we get in an abundance from God.

4 Characters, 1 Message: Do Not Be Afraid

We need to put several stories in front of us today. This message “Do not be afraid” is a message spoken to several individuals in the traditional Christmas story. So, bear with me as we first of all put all of these stories before us.

Text:

The Message to Joseph

Matthew 1:18-21--The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰ But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

The Message to Zechariah

Luke 1:5-17--⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

⁸ When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and overcome with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him:

Do not be afraid, Zechariah,
because your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,
and you will name him John.
¹⁴ There will be joy and delight for you,
and many will rejoice at his birth.
¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord
and will never drink wine or beer.
He will be filled with the Holy Spirit
while still in his mother's womb.
¹⁶ He will turn many of the sons of Israel
to the Lord their God.
¹⁷ And he will go before Him
in the spirit and power of Elijah,
to turn the hearts of fathers
to their children,
and the disobedient
to the understanding of the righteous,
to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.

The Message to Mary

Luke 1:26-30--²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ Then the angel told her:

Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.

The Message to the Shepherds

Luke 2:8-11--⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around

them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David.

Introduction:

4 Characters, 1 Message: Do Not Be Afraid

Do Not Be Afraid . . .

Now, in order to be faithful to these Scripture readings this morning in a contextual sense, let’s be clear about the matter. The message from the angels to each one “Do not be afraid,” was first and foremost just that. In the most immediate sense, “Do not be afraid” was what they needed to hear because an angel was appearing to them. They did not wake up that morning with the sense that mysteriously out of nowhere, the angel of the Lord would begin to speak to them.

I have always wondered if each of these got more or less afraid when the angel said, “Do not be afraid.”

But, might there be other reasons that the angel said, “Do not be afraid?” Might it be that each needed this message “Do not be afraid” for the messages that were going to come?

I believe so, and I believe that some of you need to hear today “Do not be afraid.”

Do not be afraid . . .

When God Changes Your Plans.

For Joseph, Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds, God changed their plans. Joseph was excited to be getting married soon. A pregnant fiancé, not of his doing, was certainly not his plan. For Zechariah, he had wanted a child for a long time, but now that he and his wife were beyond child-bearing years, having a child was not in the plans. For Mary, she too was excited about getting married. The announcement from the angel about the child she would deliver, conceived by the Holy Spirit was certainly not in the plans. And the shepherds, they were just doing what shepherds do. They surely did not need an interruption from a heavenly choir.

- God’s plans always trump our plans.

For some of you, God has definitely changed your plans in recent days. The report from the doctor is not what you planned. The note from HR indicating you no longer had a job was most definitely not in the plans. For some of you, even living in Lafayette was not your plan. But today it is the plan.

What does God want you to hear? Do not be afraid.

- Our plans tend to focus on us; God’s plans always involve bigger purposes.

Again, for each one whom we have read about today, God’s plan for their individual lives was for a bigger and even better purpose.

Consider Zechariah. He got one shot to be the priest to go into the sanctuary of the Lord, to be the priest to offer the sacrifice. Think about everything lining up in God's timing. Now was the time for Zechariah and Elizabeth to have a baby, because now was the time for the long waited Messiah to be revealed. For years, their prayer had been about them; now they would see that the answer was about more than just them.

When People Mischaracterize You.

Everyone to whom God spoke these words "Do not be afraid" could have been mischaracterized in some way.

Zechariah—He and Elizabeth were looked at with disgrace because they had no child. (1:25)

Joseph and Mary—They could have been looked at with disgrace because they were going to have a child.

Shepherds—They could have been looked at with disgrace because of what they did.

But in God's plan, they all become a part of the story.

- God knows your heart.

So What?

Resist worry—that is a sign that you are unwilling to believe that God will do what is right in the future.

Resist bitterness—that is a sign that you are unwilling to believe that God did what was right in the past.

Be faithful right now!

Replace your fears with an appropriate fear of God.