



Fear Not!

Finding Faith & Strength During Advent

Jean Ann
Duckworth

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to

Nancy Blake

Who makes Advent a joyous celebration every
year!

INTRODUCTION

Jesus came to live among us for so many reasons, not the least of which was to help us control our fear and strengthen our faith.

I believe God calls each of us into service for Him. We are in this life to accomplish something special, something unique for Him. Unfortunately, too many of us are afraid to step up and answer His call. This Christmas season, I want to help you overcome the fear that may be holding you back.

Throughout the Christmas is the message “Fear Not!” The angels that appeared to various people in the story always

began by telling them not to be afraid. This message is for you also.

Advent is a time for you to prepare yourself for the coming of the Lord. This year, I want to help you receive Him fully into your heart, to overcome the fear that is prevent you from hearing all He is saying to you, to help you feel the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Each Advent lesson is meant to help you overcome the obstacles preventing you from answering God's call. Each of the Sunday lessons tells the story of someone who thought they were the wrong person for the job:

- ◆ Zechariah: who thought he was too old;
- ◆ Mary: who thought she was unqualified;
- ◆ Joseph: who thought it wasn't his problem;
- ◆ The shepherds: who thought they weren't good enough;
- ◆ The women on Easter: who thought it was too late.

Nothing is impossible for God so nothing is ever TOO anything. I encourage you to spend time each day during

Fear Not!

Advent, reflecting on the restlessness you feel and the call God is placing on your heart. It's time to step up and step out!

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
LACK OF TIME
ZECHARIAH

When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

Luke 1:12-13

Lesson Verse

Luke 1:5-25

Introduction

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth never had children and, with Elizabeth past the age of childbearing, they thought they would never have children. God had other plans for them, though. God was waiting for the right time to finally bless the couple with, not just a child but a son that would play an important part in the story of the Messiah.

You must always remember that God's timing is perfect and it is never too late for Him to fulfill His plans.

Key Points

- Zechariah & Elizabeth are just like Abraham & Sarah
- Like Abraham's son, Zechariah's son ushered in a new age
- Time is not a factor with God

Zechariah & Elizabeth are just like Abraham & Sarah

Abraham and Sarah had waited decades to become parents. Yet the years passed and they had no children. Although God promised Abraham that he would have children, neither he nor Sarah believed because they were too old. Still, when the time was right, God gave them a son, Issac.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were also well beyond the age when couples had children. This was especially true of Elizabeth who was beyond the age when women were able to bear children. Elizabeth was unhappy because she had not be able to have children. As with Abraham and Sarah, though, God was waiting for the right time, His time, to bless Zechariah and Elizabeth with a son.

*Like Abraham's son, Zechariah's son ushered in a
new age*

The birth of Issac brought the birth of God' Chosen People. Issac was the first of many descendants of Abraham, the beginning of a tradition that continues through today.

Zechariah's son, John signaled the beginning of a new age. John was the voice in the wilderness foretold in the Old Testament. John would be the one preparing the way for Jesus, talking about the one that would follow him. John helped turn the eyes of the people to the Kingdom of God, telling them they needed to turn from the old ways, their

sinful ways. John was one of the original voices of Advent, speaking of the coming of the Lord.

Time is not a factor with God

Zechariah and Elizabeth never thought they would have children. They knew Elizabeth was past the age of childbearing. Yet the angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth were going to have a child, a son. Such a blessing on the elderly couple who never would have dreamed such a thing could happen to them. Yet God's timing is always perfect. Elizabeth may have been too old in human terms but not in God's terms. God knew the part Elizabeth's son, John would play in the ministry of Jesus. John was born at the right time to fulfill his role in Jesus' story.

Fear Vs Faith

We often let the idea of time frighten us. We worry about being too young. We worry about being too old. We are concerned there isn't enough time for us to accomplish all that must be done.

Zechariah's story is about time. Although it had seemed the time had passed for Elizabeth to bear any children, God thought the time was just right. God's timing is always perfect. Even when it seems to you that the time for something has come and gone, if God is saying "Now!" then now is the right time. You are never too old to accomplish God's plan is that's the way He wants it.

The Bible has stories of people that thought their time had passed but God had other ideas. Sarah and Elizabeth gave birth when they were old women. Simeon spent years in the Temple, waiting to see the Messiah as God had promised. The promise was fulfilled when Simeon was a very old man. There are even stories of young people who didn't seem qualified to do the job and yet God disagreed. Young

Fear Not!

David defeated the Philistine when grown men were too afraid to step up. Young Jesus debated the Law with Temple elders as a young boy. Timothy was thought too young to continue the ministry of Paul.

Time has no meaning to God. He only knows when there is a need and the perfect person to fulfill that need. When He says "Now!" it is not for you to question. It is time to step up like young Samuel and say, "Here I am, Lord!"

For Today

You worry that the time has passed for you to accomplish anything special, to fulfill the work God has called you to do. You must remember that time has no meaning to God. Even if you have put off answering the call God has placed on your heart, this doesn't mean it's too late. God keeps molding you to fit His need and, when the time is right, He will give you what you need, including the courage and faith, to step up and answer His call.

How can you calm your fear over time?

How can you keep faith that God is still calling you when time goes on, when you are getting older?

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
MONDAY

*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but
gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

2 Timothy 1:7

Give Me a Bold Spirit

It can be tough being strong. Sometimes, it seems you can only function in crisis mode. On a normal day, life is hectic. At Christmas, it can become chaotic! Add to this a often lack of self-discipline and you have problems. So many treats and sweets available everywhere you turn. Not to mention the goodies you yourself make. After all, you have to taste one, or two, to make sure they turned out all right, don't you?

Today's verse reminds you that God has given you a spirit that makes you strong; a spirit that fills you with power, love and self-discipline. You don't have to be strong all by yourself. The Spirit of God wants to help you be as strong

as you need. Whether it's having the strength to face a new day after a late night of Christmas events or having the willpower to resist the fattening food laid before you.

When you feel your mind and body growing weak, take a moment to call on that bold spirit within you and remember that you are not alone.

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
TUESDAY

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

Anxious? Not Me!

Do you feel anxious as each day brings you closer to Christmas? Wow! There always seems to be so much to do and so little time in which to do it. The Holidays can be overwhelming even on the best days. You are already so very busy and you simply add all your Christmas activities and tasks to your busy lives. I remember one Christmas when I began to cry because I didn't have time to grocery shop!

In today's verse, the apostle Paul reminds you that you should never be anxious, not about anything. Instead, you need to go before the Lord in prayer, asking Him about

your needs and thanking Him even before He has done anything. You are simply to have faith God will provide for you no matter what. So today, cast aside your anxiety and have faith God is in control.

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
WEDNESDAY

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,
because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears
is not made perfect in love.*

1 John 4:18

Perfect Love

Jesus has given us so many gifts. One of these is His perfect love. I remember when I first met my husband. I was so filled with love, I felt I could do anything. I feared nothing. This is the way the perfect love of Jesus should make us feel. Unfortunately, we let our overactive imaginations take control. We imagine all the things that could go wrong. Then we become frightened. Fear is such a terrible thing because it drains us of our energy, our creativity. Perfect love increases our energy. It helps us become more creative as we consider ways to tackle the tasks and events that lay before us. How are you able to let the perfect love of Christ overcome your fear? Well, I

believe we must first work to eliminate our fear by having faith that everything is going to work out for us. As the fear leaves us, we must pray to have the void filled with the love of Christ. As that love makes us stronger, more of our fear is driven out until, at last, we are only filled with love.

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
THURSDAY

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose
word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid What can mere mortals do
to me?
Psalm 56:3-4*

God is for Me!

I LOVE Christmas but sometimes it feels like everyone is tugging at me! I remember when I worked at the church, it seemed as if everyone wanted something and it was becoming more impossible to provide for them. It can become terribly overwhelming when all the people around you need something from you. Eventually, you feel you have nothing left to give.

In this verse, we are reminded that God is not only with us, He is working for us. We can put all our trust in Him and stop worrying about letting the people around us down. this verse specifically tells us that we never have to be afraid of

people because there is nothing they can do to us as long as God is with us.

When you feel everyone is coming at you from all directions, take a moment to step back and catch your breath. Remind yourself that God is with you and there is nothing anyone can do to you.

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
FRIDAY

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.*

Psalm 34:4

Special Delivery

There are nights I lie awake in the dark, considering all the work I need to get done. I'll admit it. Sometimes, I have a panic attack as the dark surrounds me and I feel things are out of control. How will I ever get everything done?

In the past, I have turned on the light and tried reading until I become sleepy. Then I am tired in the morning. Not good. Now instead of reading or tossing and turning, I lie in bed and pray. I talk to the Lord, spilling out my concerns, my worries. Sometimes, I imagine putting all my troubles in a large box, closing the box and wrapping it in paper with a pretty ribbon. Then I give the box to God. When he opens it, He always tells me it is exactly what He wanted.

The Lord wants to deliver us from our fears but first, we must surrender our fears to Him. All our fears, big or small. Only then can He answer our prayers.

Fear Not!

WEEK ONE
SATURDAY

*So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.*

*I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

You Are Not Alone

It's very easy when we feel overwhelmed to feel alone. Oh we may have all sorts of people around us but we feel they don't understand what we want or need. Perhaps we think they are too busy to be bothered with our problems, too busy to help us get ready for Christmas. These thoughts and feelings can leave us feeling dismayed, just like the verse says. Eventually, we become afraid we might not be able to accomplish everything we need to get done by Christmas.

In the verse, God tells us not to be afraid. He reminds us that He is always with us so we are never alone. He tells us that He is providing the strength we need to complete the

tasks before us. He even says He will help us! And if we feel we can't go on, He holds us up! This is the promise we must remember and rely on whenever we feel overwhelmed. We are never alone for the Lord is always with us!

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
LACK OF EXPERIENCE
MARY

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Luke 1:28-31

Lesson Verse Luke 1:26-38

Introduction

The Father was preparing to send His Son into the world. His Son was to live the entire human experience, including childbirth, being born. This meant He had to chose a woman to give birth to His Son. He selected a very young woman named Mary. Mary was, as her cousin, Elizabeth said, "Blessed among all women." While this was a

tremendous honor, it didn't mean things would be easy for Mary for some small reasons and one very, very big reason.

Key Points

- Mary was very young
- Mary was unmarried
- Mary was not anyone special (or was she?)

Mary was very young

Such a very young woman to have such a large responsibility placed upon her. I would think most young women would have been out of their minds with fear when told they were carrying the Son of God. Yet Mary was such an incredible woman that she accepted the call God had placed upon her with grace and tremendous faith. Elizabeth accepted her pending motherhood with grace in spite of her advanced age and Mary also accepted motherhood in spite of her young age. The Father chose a young, unmarried woman so there would be no doubt this child was a miracle.

Mary was unmarried

This is very important. In Mary's day, women were not able to speak for themselves or defend themselves in any way. They had no rights of their own. A woman need a man to speak for her. Mary had her father however, she had recently become betrothed to Joseph. During the time of betrothal, Mary was in limbo legally. Her father was no longer able to speak for her and Joseph had no legal obligation to speak for her.

When it became known that Mary was expecting a child, by law, she would be stoned for having sex outside of marriage. Mary was in a very dangerous position. You might think God had poor timing. He should have waited until Mary and Joseph were married. Yet God's timing is always perfect. This betrothal time is exactly when He needed events to unfold. There would always be those with questions about the father of Mary's child. Mary, however, had no doubts and ,eventually, neither did Joseph.

Mary was not anyone special (or was she?)

I have often wondered, “why then?” Why was Jesus born at that time? There were other times in the history of Israel when things were bad, very bad both before Jesus’ time and after. What was different about that time?

While there may be many factors, I believe one of the most important is Mary. Elizabeth was right. Mary is blessed among ALL women. Mary was the one chosen, out of all the women of all time, to be the Mother of the Messiah. In Ephesians, Paul tells us that God chose us in Him before the creation of the world. Before God made anything, He knew exactly what would happen, when He would send His Son, and who was to be chosen to be His Mother.

Yes, Mary was very, very special indeed.

Faith Vs Fear

Imagine how frightening it must have been for Mary to be called to carry and give birth to the Son of God. She had to know what people were going to think. She had to know the risks involved. Yet she didn't argue. She had complete faith in God, stepping up to accept her call without any questions or fear. Well, she did wonder how she could have a child when she had never known a man in the Biblical sense. When this was explained to her, she had no more questions. She had no fear. She was filled with tremendous faith and courage, ready to face whatever came.

Mary faced many challenges as the mother of Jesus. Years later, when Jesus was an adult, a comment is made about Him being born in Nazareth, that nothing good ever comes out of Nazareth. The people mocking Him knew the story about His birth. They knew His mother was pregnant when she got married. All her adult life, Mary probably came across people that knew her story, that talked about her behind her back. She knew the truth. Her Son knew the truth. God knew the truth. That is all that mattered to her.

For Today

We spend a lot of time worrying about what other people think about us. Mary had every reason to be concerned about the opinion of others. Their opinion could have gotten her put to death yet she stood up and told God, “Here I am!”

God called Mary to do something that she felt she was unqualified to do. Still, Mary stepped up and answered God's call even though it might have cost her her life. God may be calling you to do something special. You might not recognize the feeling. It often comes as a restlessness, a feeling there is something you need to do but you might not be certain just what that something is. Take time to listen to God the way Mary listened to the angel.

You might understand what God is asking you to do yet you feel unable or unqualified to do the job. Would God call you if He didn't know you were able to do what He asked? True, you might not be ready right now. When He called me to ministry, I wasn't ready. It took years of study

to prepare myself for the task at hand. The Lord provided me with everything I needed to do the job He wanted. Even today, He still provides so I am able to focus on the work ahead.

Like Mary, you must have faith that the Lord would never call you if He didn't know you were able or would be able to do what He asked. Even if you can't have faith in yourself right now, have faith in Him. Keep listening to His call, moving forward one step, one day at a time.

How can you have faith in God's call when you feel unqualified?

What can you do to help increase your preparedness?

WEEK TWO
MONDAY

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9

Fear Not!

It is so easy to become discouraged. Life can be overwhelming. You try so hard to do things right, to be things done but it just doesn't always work out the way you hope. If this happens over and over, you might be ready to give up.

Read today's verse again. God doesn't suggest you remain strong and courageous. He commands you to be strong and courageous. Now, I know this might seem impossible some days, especially during the Christmas season. There is so much to do. There are so many things going on. You begin to feel you are fighting a big battle and you are the only one on your side! Well, you're not! God tells you not to be

Fear Not!

afraid, not to be discouraged because He is with you wherever you go! No matter how tired, frustrated, overwhelmed you might feel, you are not alone. Lean on the Lord and let Him give you the strength and courage you need to face whatever is ahead of you!

WEEK TWO
TUESDAY

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

I Am Strong!

Let's go over this again. God is telling you not to be afraid. In fact, in this verse, He goes a step farther, telling you not to be terrified! I know how it is. Waking up in the middle of the night, lying in the dark grinding on all the things that absolutely, positively must be done before Christmas. You barely have enough time in the day to do the usual things on your list or schedule. Now you have half again as many things to accomplish. Now what?

It's simple, really it is. Be strong! How can I do that, you ask! You must remember that the Lord is with you. This verse tells you that He not only is with you. It says He will

NEVER leave you or forsake you. Believe me, there have been many times when I felt the Lord had deserted me. I was WRONG! He never left me. I just refused to draw near to Him.

If you feel overwhelmed and alone, take a moment and determine just how far away from the Lord you have moved. If you are afraid, you need to move closer to God. You need to listen to Him so He is able to help you remain strong and courageous. He is with you everywhere, helping you tackle the things that come your way.

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WEEK TWO
WEDNESDAY

*Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
Psalm 23:4*

Lead On!

OK. Maybe things aren't so bad that you feel as if you are walking through the darkest valley. I do know, however, that you sometimes feel rather bleak. As the days go on in December, your life gets busier. When I feel overwhelmed, I often have trouble determining what I should work on first. I begin working on one project only to worry I should be working on another. So I abandon the first and jump to the second only to have doubts again. It becomes exhausting!

This verse is part of the 23rd Psalm. The passage tells you the Lord is your Shepherd. This verse assures you that His rod and staff will give your comfort. At one time, I thought the rod and staff should comfort me because the Lord could use them to fight off any enemies. Nope! A shepherd uses the rod and staff to guide the sheep. They keep the sheep on the right path so they go where they need to go.

When it is difficult to determine which task should be done, which way you should go, that's the time to spend some quiet time listening to the Lord. Let Him guide you, leading you the way you should go. He is ready to comfort you by helping you in all things, big or small.

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WEEK TWO THURSDAY

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:34

Just Today

During the Holidays, you might worry that things are going to fall between the cracks. It's bad enough when something fairly small is overlooked but what if you forget something BIG? I create lists and then lists within my lists to help me remember all the things I want to do.

Focus is one of the keys to making certain you accomplish the tasks you must get done... or even want to get done. Here's the problem: when you are worried about the things you need to do tomorrow, you lose your focus on the things you want to do today.

Fear Not!

God is the God of today. When Moses asked God His name, He responded , “I am!” God wants to help you with all your concerns, your tasks today. He wants you to focus on today, not tomorrow. One day at a time. Take it one day at a time and you will find your tasks, your concerns, your life much easier to handle.

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WEEK TWO
FRIDAY

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me?

Psalm 118:6

Can't Hurt Me

I talk about fear a lot. I'm not going to give a detailed breakdown on my message however, I want you to understand my feelings on guilt and fear. So often women, especially moms, talk about how guilty they feel about something. I don't believe the problem is guilt. I think it's fear. We just think that feeling is guilt. Now, let's look at this verse!

Fear may be a big part of your life during the Holidays. You're afraid you won't get everything done. You're afraid things won't be right. You're afraid what other people, especially extended family members, might think or say about you and the way you do things. It's hard to remain

confident when you are always concerned that others, especially other women are going to criticize you.

In the last few devotions, I've discussed not being afraid because the Lord is with you. He is never going to desert you. Not ever. This verse takes that reassurance a step farther. If you are taking time to listen to the Lord to help you stay focused during Christmastime. When you stay close to Him, when you listen to what He is telling you, when you follow His leading, then He is with you. He is definitely and completely with you. Not just close to you. He is on your side.

Now tell me, if God is on your side, if He is supporting you, if He is the one leading you, then what can people do to you? Sure, they can still criticize but you have the satisfaction of knowing you did the right thing. Does this mean you can quickly point out to others that they are wrong because God told you what to do? Well, I wouldn't advise doing that if I were you. No, you can just have the satisfaction that the Lord is pleased with you, He is with you. That is enough.

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WEEK TWO
SATURDAY

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God
is for us, who can be against us?*

Romans 8:31

All by Myself

Some days, it feels like everyone is against us. We can't seem to do anything right. Add to that the pressure of the Christmas season and it's enough to drive us to bed, pull the covers over our head, and stay there until after the first of the year. When we feel everyone is against us, we become not only frustrated but frightened. It is scary when we are made to feel all alone even when we are surrounded by others.

Today's Scripture verse reminds us that it doesn't matter who is against us because God is ALWAYS with us, no exception. Even if everyone we know is against us, if God is for us, He overcomes the opposition of everyone else.

Fear Not!

When God is for us, we are never alone, we have no need to be afraid.

We also may gather strength knowing Jesus is not only FOR us, He has lived among us. He understands how tough life can be some days. I'm sure Jesus got frustrated. I know there came a time when the majority of people were against Him. Jesus overcame all of that and came out victorious. He is always with us. Jesus is always on our side.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT
LACK OF FAITH
JOSEPH

While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:20-21

Lesson Verse Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction

Joseph is often the forgotten person in the Christmas story. Yet, he played a very important part. From the beginning, Joseph was the figure in the background yet he had an impact on Mary's life and on Jesus'. In the birth story, Joseph shows us what an incredibly faithful man he was. He was ready to stand by Mary in unusual circumstances

even before the angel came to him in a dream. Joseph had faith even when everything told him to believe otherwise. Joseph cared for Mary during her pregnancy and then for her and the baby, keeping them safe and moving them away from harmful situations. To understand the importance of Joseph to the birth of Jesus, you must look at three aspects of the story:

Key Points

- Joseph had no legal obligation to Mary
- Mary would have been stoned if Joseph had denounced her
- The angel came to Joseph in a dream (He came to Mary when she was awake)

Joseph had no legal obligation to Mary

Joseph was not yet married to Mary. They were only betrothed. As a betrothed woman, Mary was not under the protection of her father or her future husband. She was in

limbo, with no one to speak for her, to defend her. Joseph cared for Mary and was considering his different options that would not cause Mary any harm.

*Mary would have been stoned if Joseph had
denounced her*

Under Hebrew Law, Mary would have been stoned to death if it was found she had sex with a man other than Joseph. If Joseph was the father of the child, he would have been compelled to marry her. Joseph knew he was not the father because he had not had sex with Mary yet. He could have walked away and let the law deal with Mary. Instead, he was going to quietly break their engagement and send her to live with relatives in another town so Mary would not be shamed.

*The angel came to Joseph in a dream (He came to
Mary when she was awake)*

I have always been fascinated by the fact the angel appeared to Mary when she was awake but to Joseph in a dream. I believe God wanted Mary to know beyond a doubt that an angel had appeared to her and what his message had been. In Joseph's case, however, there had to be room for doubt. God need Joseph to decide for himself if he believed the angel and the message was real or only his imagination. Joseph could have awakened, only to decide the dream was just part of his overactive imagination. Instead, when he awoke, Joseph accepted the message as the Word of the Lord. He married Mary and prepared for their life together.

Faith Vs Fear

Joseph had to be concerned about the situation with Mary. He knew she was expecting a child that wasn't his. He cared for Mary and wanted to handle the situation in a way that did her no harm. Then, an angel appeared to him in a dream.

Scripture says when Joseph woke up, he married Mary. It makes it sound as if he got up the next morning and immediately got married. Perhaps they did however, I believe Joseph needed to think a bit more about all that had happened. It's easy for us to sit here now and think Joseph should have been ready and willing to marry Mary after the angel appeared in his dream. This was such an unusual situation, though, I can't help but feel Joseph had to think a bit more. He need some time to process all that he had heard. He may even have needed time to consider whether or not he was prepared to raise the Son of God.

Joseph had to be afraid. This was a tremendous responsibility he was being asked to take on. I can see

where he might need some time to think. Whether he needed a few days to mull over all these things or just a few hours, Joseph had enough faith to not only go ahead and marry Mary but also raise the Son of God as his own. What an incredible man!

For Today

Joseph could have walked away from his betrothal to Mary without any recourse. Joseph could have quietly sent Mary away to keep her from harm but she still would have been an unmarried woman with a child. Instead, Joseph married Mary and raised the child as his own.

You may find yourself in situations when it would be easy to walk away. You tell yourself, “it's not my problem.” or “it's not my place.” No one would criticize you. After all, why is it your problem?

It may not be your problem and you might have every right not to become involved. Yet, like Joseph, God may be asking you to step up anyway, to take control of a situation in a way only you are able.

Joseph may have had no idea how he ended up in the situation in which he found himself. Yet, stepping up turned out to be the greatest thing Joseph did in his life. You never know the outcome of any situation when God calls you.

Fear Not!

You may think the situation is one of the worst things that ever happened to you. It may only be years later that you are able to see how God turned it into one of the greatest things you every did!

Are there tasks God has called you to do and you felt it wasn't your problem? How do you overcome that fear?

What is an area in your life where God is calling you but you hesitate to answer because you think it's not your responsibility?

WEEK THREE
MONDAY

*I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.*

Psalm 3:6

Surrounded

As moms, we often find ourselves surrounded. Spouses, kids, bosses, friends, school, organizations, and more. During the Holiday season, we have even more people surrounding us: church, extended family, and more. It's easy to become overwhelmed, stressed and even scared. We worry we will be unable to meet the needs of everyone wanting something from us.

Today's verse reminds us that we have nothing to fear no matter how many people are tugging on our sleeve. God is there for us, protecting us from all those demanding, or even asking, for something from us. We also have the Holy Spirit to keep us strong and joyful from within.

Fear Not!

Never let anyone suck the joy out of you during Christmas. Rely on the strength and love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Tackle your tasks as you are able. Rest so you remain well. And celebrate the birth of our Savior with joy.

WEEK THREE
TUESDAY

*You came near when I called you,
and you said, "Do not fear."
Lamentations 3:57*

Near My God to Me!

Our God is not simply a distant being that never interacts with us. Not only does He interact, He cares enough for all of us to come to us when we are afraid and He reassures us.

There are so many things that frighten us during the Christmas season. We think we feel guilty but I believe that feeling is not guilt but fear. We are afraid we won't get everything done. We're afraid someone will be disappointed or angry. We're afraid what they might think, what they might say, how we might react. Fortunately, we not only have God drawing near when we call out to Him. We have Jesus within us to bring us peace and we have the Spirit within to keep us strong.

Fear Not!

Rather than letting the things on the outside scare us so much, we need to quietly listen to the Father tell us not to be afraid and then feel what Jesus and the Spirit are saying to us. Be still and know that they are all God.

WEEK THREE
WEDNESDAY

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
Psalm 46:3-4*

The Sky Is Falling

I don't know about you but if the earth gave way, the mountains fell, and everything else mentioned in today's verse were to happen, I'd be at least a little bit afraid! Let's, however, look at this in terms of Christmas stress. :)

Moms have so much to do on a normal day and at Christmas, our to-do list seems to grow like bread rising! It's just crazy! Shopping for gifts, shopping for food, decorating, mailing cards, attending parties and concerts, church, not to mention all the normal tasks we do everyday of the year. I remember one year when I completely forgot

to cook dinner because I was so focused on everything I had to do to get ready for Christmas. It's easy to see why we might feel as if the waters are roaring and foaming and the mountains quake with their surging.

We must focus on the first line of the verse. No matter how crazy things get, even if it seems as if the sky is crashing down around us, we needn't fear because God is always with us. He offers us protection, saving us when things fall apart. He gives us strength and focus when we need it most. And, with the Spirit and Jesus, He offers us peace and comfort. So, celebrate with joy and fear not!

Jean Ann Duckworth

WEEK THREE
THURSDAY

*to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear*

Luke 1:74

May I Serve You?

I assume your friends and family aren't enemies. And if they were, you probably wouldn't spend much time with them. I do know, however, that families can be trying. Even more so when we're tired from all the rush of the Holidays. People push us, just a bit and we are ready to go to war! Not good!

Today's verse tells us that the Lord wants to rescue us from our enemies. He wants to help us remain strong in the presence of those that attack us. Unfortunately, that includes family. Too often, during family gatherings, you find yourself on the receiving end of criticism or “helpful” advice.

If your extended family causes you stress, you need to spend time in prayer before you meet with them. Ask the Lord to deliver you from the stress family causes you. Ask Him to eliminate the fear you may feel when you are around them. Ask for His protection during family celebrations so you are able to enjoy the season, serving your family with joy and the Lord with praise and thanksgiving.

Jean Ann Duckworth

WEEK THREE
FRIDAY

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:7

Lord Grant Me Peace!

You may find yourself saying this, or some version of this statement, throughout the Holiday season. You must remember that you already have His peace within you. In the Gospel of John, during the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples that He was leaving them 3 things: A Helper, in the form of the Holy Spirit, His joy, and His peace, which He told us He was giving us but not as the world gives.

When someone gives you something, they hand it to you. It exists outside of you, in the physical world. Jesus gives you His peace, not outside of you but within you. You already have the peace of Christ within you, waiting to serve you in

a way that "transcends all understanding," guarding your heart and mind.

Unfortunately, you may be fighting against this peace. You let the chaos of the world affect your life rather than allowing the peace of Christ to guide you, comfort you. It's time for you to get control of your life and feelings. When things seem out of control, find a quiet place. Yes, I know it is difficult but there must be SOMEWHERE you can hide or go where no one else wants to follow. Take deep breaths. Feel yourself relax and the stress leave your body. Then allow the peace that lives, all the time deep within you, come to the surface, allowing you to focus and continue with your Holiday and regular activities.

Jean Ann Duckworth

WEEK THREE
SATURDAY

*So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many
sparrows.*

Matthew 10:31

How Much Are You Worth to God?

I mean it. How much do you think you are worth to God? Yes, it's easy to recite the verse above that tells you that God takes care of the needs of sparrows and you are worth more than them so He will take care of you. Reciting the verse, knowing the verse, however, is not the same as believing the verse.

The Lord sees to the needs of every creature on Earth and this includes YOU! You are made in His image. His Son died for YOU! Why would you think for a moment that there is ANYTHING He wouldn't do for you, as long as it was in keeping with His rules?

Fear Not!

No parent wants to see one of their children suffering. This is true for God as well. He doesn't want to see you suffer. He doesn't like to see so much stress in your life. He wants to help you ease your stress, to help you enjoy the season. Remember the sparrows and know that He cares for you even more than He does them.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT
LACK OF STATUS
THE SHEPHERDS

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:8-12

Lesson Verse Luke 2:8-20

Introduction

On the night Jesus was born, the angel appeared to one of the most under appreciated groups in the community. The angel had appeared first to Zechariah, a priest. Then to

Mary, the mother of Jesus. Then to Joseph, husband of Mary and father on Earth of Jesus. The three of them are held in high regard. We understand why the angel appeared to all of them, why the angel had a message for them. Why did God send His angel to the shepherds? For me, this is the most important appearance of all.

Key Points

- The shepherds were considered unclean
- They lived on the fringe of society
- The shepherds were welcomed at the stable

The shepherds were considered unclean

The shepherds lived outside of town, staying with their sheep. They lived and worked with animals so the shepherds were considered unclean. They were not allowed to associate with other people in the community because they were unclean. If they touched someone else, it would make that person unclean, a condition that could only be

corrected through a cleansing ritual. Therefore, the shepherds kept to themselves.

They lived on the fringe of society

Like most people who are scorned and held in low regard, the shepherds lived on the fringe of society. They stayed with their sheep, keeping them safe from harm. Living on the fringe, the shepherds might not have known much about their faith. We don't know what their background might be. Did they come from a family of shepherds? Did they have no family? Did their family stay with them? Shepherds didn't seem to associate with the people in the cities. They stayed out in the wilderness where their sheep could find food and water. The shepherds never left their sheep, allowing them to protect their flock from any harm.

The shepherds were welcomed at the stable

I imagine the shepherds hesitated to go into town. The angel, however, told them where they would find this very

special child so they went to see Him. If there had been room at the Inn, if Mary had given birth to the baby in a room there, the shepherds might not have felt comfortable going inside. They might have been stopped from entering. The baby was born in a stable, though, as place the shepherds felt very comfortable in. Not only did they feel comfortable entering the stable, they found they were welcomed by Mary and Joseph.

Even as a new born child, Jesus was able to reach out to the lowest in society and the highest, with the Kings. Everyone was welcome into the presence of the Child.

Faith Vs Fear

All of us find ourselves in situations where we feel intimidated. Your fear in the situation, the people may overcome your faith in yourself. You might have a strong desire to simply stay home. I'm sure some of the shepherds hesitated to seek the newborn child. They found comfort in the hills with their sheep. Then they took a breath and stepped out to see this baby for themselves. And what a wise decision that turned out to be? Who knows how their lives were impacted by their encounter with the Christ Child.

Like the shepherds, you have no idea what you might encounter when you step out of your comfort zone this Holiday season. Even if you don't have a life changing moment like the shepherds, you may experience something you never imagined happening. None of us know what awaits us on the other side of the door, the other side of our comfort zone. Like the shepherds, you need to step out in faith, having confidence in, if not yourself, then the Lord who only wants the best for you.

For Today

The shepherds were outsiders yet God, through the angels, invited them to be among the first to see the Christ Child. Leaving the safety and comfort of the fields, they took a bold step and went to find the Child.

You may find God calling you to go somewhere outside your comfort zone or to do something that makes you uncertain. Time to take a breath and step out boldly!

The lives of the shepherds had to have been changed by their encounter with Jesus. Such a small act had such a deep impact on our society. Even as an infant, Jesus was in the company of everyone in society, even those seen as outcasts or those on the fringe.

Your life may be changed by stepping out into the world and going where God leads. This doesn't mean He is going to send you anywhere dangerous just somewhere outside your comfort zone. Perhaps a women's group in another church or working at a shelter. Wherever it might be, you

can rest assured you never go alone. Just like the shepherds,
wherever God leads you, you always find Jesus there!

How do you control your fear so you are able to step out of
your comfort zone?

What can you do this season to step out of your comfort
zone and serve others in a new area?

CHRISTMAS DAY
LACK OF FEAR
THE WOMEN AT THE TOMB

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

Matthew 28:5-7

Lesson Verse Matthew 28:1-7

Introduction

I know this is an Advent study for Christmas. This is also the story of fear, how it came into the world and how Jesus, even before He was born, worked to eliminate fear from our lives forever. In order to fulfill God's call on your life, you must first learn to control your fear and strengthen your faith. Overcoming your faith to do as God asks may reward

you in ways you can't imagine, just like the women at the tomb!

Key Points

- When Adam & Eve ate the fruit, they not only sinned, they brought fear into the world
- From the beginning, the message of Jesus has been "Fear Not!"
- With the resurrection of Jesus, not only are our sins forgiven, our fear has been eliminated

When Adam & Eve ate the fruit, they not only sinned, they brought fear into the world

Many people think Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, a tree whose fruit gave the two of them wisdom. They did not. Adam and Eve ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good from Evil. The fruit gave the two of them discernment. I believe before they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve did not understand the difference e good

and bad. After creating everything, God looked at His creation and declared it all GOOD! To Adam and Eve, everything was good. Like very small children, they had no understanding of bad.

Now, I know God told them not to eat the fruit of the one tree, however, when someone else came along and said it was alright to eat the fruit, they accept his opinion. Much like children following the instructions of adults even when those children have been told not to, Adam and Eve simply didn't know any better.

Once they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve could see and feel evil. Where once everything was good, suddenly they saw things that were not good at all, things that were very bad. Eating the fruit didn't simply bring sin into the world. Eating the fruit brought FEAR into the world and with fear came sin. Sin does not exist on its own. Sin is a powerful symptom of fear. How do we know they were suddenly afraid? Scripture tells us right after eating the fruit, Adam and Eve covered their nakedness because they were

ashamed and when they heard someone walking in the garden, they hid because they were afraid.

Once Adam and Eve ate the fruit, once fear and sin had been released into the world, the books of the Old Testament are filled with stories of people being overcome by their fear and, as a reaction to their fear, sinning.

*From the beginning, the message of Jesus has been
"Fear Not!"*

Each time a person encounters an angel in the birth story, the first words the angel says to them is, "Fear Not!" or don't be afraid or some other variation. Even before Jesus was born, His story was one of faith, not fear. Jesus came to eliminate, not just your sin but also the fear that often causes you to sin.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shares a message of hope, telling people not to be afraid, not to worry about anything. His message was meant to strengthen your faith and turn your energy and faith to working for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus offered ways to help you grow spiritually and focus on God's call on your life.

With the resurrection of Jesus, not only are our sins forgiven, our fear has been eliminated

Finally, the story comes full circle. When the women arrived at the tomb on Resurrection Sunday, they find Jesus is gone and an angel is waiting for them with a message, "Fear Not! He is not here. He is Risen." The first words that announced the coming of the Baby Jesus were Fear Not. The first words heard by the women following Jesus' resurrection were Fear Not!

On Easter Sunday, the women and the world learned that with the resurrection of Jesus, not only was your sin eliminated but your fear had also been eliminated. You have no reason to be afraid any longer.

Faith Vs Fear

The opposite of fear is not courage. The opposite of fear is faith. You can be very afraid and still do something courageous. The way to eliminate your fear, or at least control your fear is to strengthen your faith. You do this through prayer, reading Scripture, Bible studies, church, fellowship with other Christians, and with your family.

You are the heart of your family. You have an obligation to help them grow in faith so all of you become stronger and less fearful. It is important to clarify the difference between guilt and fear so you are able to recognize when your fear is out of control and take steps to overcome it. You must also remain strong in faith to help your family overcome any fear they might have. It can be difficult, I know. You are often concerned about your children and this can grow into fear. Recognize when this is happening so you can stop it right away.

Fear Not!

Discover ways to identify your fear, grow your faith, and use that faith to conquer your fear. Then you are able to grow into the Empowered Woman God sees!

For Today

Christmas comes at the end of the year & this is the perfect time to consider the message of Fear Not! It's too easy to live in fear. Fear is sneaky. You don't always realize how frightened you are, especially if this is a normal way of life for you. Time to overcome fear. Time to step out boldly. Time to strengthen faith and say' "Here I Am, Lord!"

How can you overcome the fear in your life?

How can you give yourself the gift of faith?

ABOUT JEAN ANN

For over 20 years, Jean Ann Duckworth has been helping women simplify areas of their lives to help reduce their stress & increase the joy in their lives. Currently, Jean Ann is developing a new ministry, designed to help women empower their lives through faith, family, and fellowship.

Jean Ann is a veteran of the United States Navy where she served as a diesel mechanic (yes, you read that right!) and training officer. She has a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Communications and a Master of Divinity in General Ministry.

Jean Ann is a prolific author, writing all the Bible studies and training material she presents in classes and programs as well as her books. She is an inspirational speaker, podcaster and video producer. Jean Ann is married to the infamous Mr. D, Terry Duckworth. They have one daughter, The Child, Katherine.