
Be - Not Afraid

**A sermon by the Rev. Salmoon Bashir
Christmas Day – Year B**

A few years ago, I was celebrating Christmas with a religious community at Hautecombe Abbey, on the shores of Lake Bourget, surrounded by the mountains of Savoy in France. The beauty of this location invites worship and contemplation. At Hautecombe Abbey, brothers and sisters from all over the world come together to celebrate Christmas and it is a joyous time to meet with people from all over the world in this beautiful place. On Christmas Eve and Christmas day it hosts celebrations for hundreds of people but at the same time, it also provides time and space to sit in silence and pray. It was the Christmas time, and I was there sitting and praying in silence. I was in the middle of my discernment journey, with lots of things running through my head, worries of having to leave so much behind and fears of the unknown, uncertain future. The nativity passage and specifically these few words “Do Not Be Afraid” were coming back to me over and over again. Once I grasped the meaning of these words - “Be Not Afraid. Do Not Be Afraid” the meaning of these word for my life at the time and the message God was sending to me, it changed my life and compelled me to say Yes to God.

Year after year, we hear these words “Be not afraid for I am with you.” In fact, throughout the whole Bible these few words are repeated over and over again: Do Not be afraid or Be not afraid. One of the most commonly repeated phrases in the whole Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament, is “Fear not, Have no fear, Do not be afraid, or Be not afraid!” [\[1\]](#) From Abraham to Moses, From Joshua to David and then from Mary to Joseph, to Shepherds to Jesus’s disciples and apostles and today, to all of us. All of these people in the Bible and particularly in the Christmas story faced fears of life like we do.

Our lives are not so different from them in the midst of the world’s chaos and busyness, some of us are scared too, including myself. We all have different ways to deal with our fears and worries. Some of us like to talk about it openly and some keep it to themselves and deal with their fears more privately. In any case, battling with fear and anxiety is not easy and probably one of the most difficult things to deal with in our lives. These fears are valid for each one of us. And like all the people in the Bible, like Mary and Joseph and Shepherds, as they all receive the same message: ‘Do not be afraid.’ This message is the same for us today. Be not afraid. These words have the same power in them, used again and again to bless people.

These words provided comfort and joy to our forefathers and to many for centuries. Isn’t it fascinating that every time the words “Do Not Be Afraid” are used, these words always lead to promise and something big, even bigger than our own lives, bigger than we can ask or imagine. The obedience to “Do Not Be Afraid” leads to joy and celebration. From the beginning of the world to us and beyond us ‘do not be afraid’ leads to miracles.

Today we have come together to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, to share the same joy which the shepherds felt when they heard the good news – the good news of the birth of Christ and peace and goodwill on earth among all. The good news of comfort and joy. The good news for all the people. To all of humanity the savior is born. Do not be afraid because the Son of God enters into our flawed world to make us whole; the birth of the Son of God brings peace and goodwill to all.

When the angel shared the good news with the shepherds, they heard the words “Do not be afraid for I am bringing the good news of comfort and joy. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Good news is that the Messiah is born for you and for all. Shepherds believed and said yes to that miracle. To hear the good news about the birth of Jesus Christ was a privilege for the shepherds. These simple ordinary

people were fulfilling their responsibilities by keeping watch for their flocks. When suddenly everything seemed chaotic and frightening, the angel coming down from heaven right in front of them, not from afar, the first thing the shepherds heard were these comforting words “do not be afraid.”

These words ‘do not be afraid’ and the good news of the birth of the Messiah led them to leave everything behind and to go to see the prince of peace with their own eyes, see God who was among them and is with us. This journey took them from deep fear to great joy.

On this Christmas morning, we are rejoicing that Christ has been born and that God is with us, and we do this after busy weeks of preparations, parties, gifts, promise of incarnation and lots of celebrations. But sometimes in these joyous moments there can also be a sense of emptiness caused by our own fears and anxieties of Christmas and generally, of life. However, in these moments of emptiness for some, yet there is hope. Hope of do not be afraid. Hope of I am with you. Hope that obedience to ‘be not afraid’ leads to greater purpose than our own beings and lives. Hope of everything is possible with God. Hope in incarnational joy! Hope in the love of the incarnated Christ who came to us in a lowly place lying in a manger among those who were outcasted and dismayed. A child, Son of God, lying in a lowly, humble place, in a manger on a dark night completed thousands of years of dark history of scarcity, separation and fear.

“Be not afraid” the angel proclaims. The story of Christmas is not a fairy tale, but it is a story that tells us that Hope is born in the midst of stigma, dishonor, scandal and real fear. That hope is born in the midst of broken lives and fearful people. In the midst of scandalous birth, hope is born. The son of God is born and brings hope to the meek and lowly, to the powerful and wise and to the rich and to the poor. “Do not be afraid” these are the words that changed and sustained my life over and over again.

And today, Brothers and Sisters, be not afraid, if your Christmas isn’t perfect, “Be not afraid.” At this moment when we look around and things seem unsettled in and around us, be not afraid for the prince of peace brings the good news for all. Love has come down to us eradicate the fear. Trust in the power of the command “Be Not Afraid.” “Be Not Afraid.”, for there is good news for us all. For all! Amen!

[1] Fr. Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.