



The Third Sunday of Advent
Do Not Be Afraid: #MoreJoy

Prelude

O Come, Emmanuel, Martha Main and Judy Prosch

Gathering— Every angel seems to use “do not be afraid” as an opening line. But perhaps no one needed to hear it more than Joseph. What was happening to him was the stuff that ruins lives. As a man in that time, he had all the rights to abandon Mary and preserve his dignity when he learned of her pregnancy. The stakes were high. But the angel’s message of encouragement was to see a difficult circumstance not with dread, but with joy.

We Light Our Advent Wreath

Murphy Bennington Family

There are angels among us that may not meet the eye. There are messages of joy coming from a choir on high, but don’t just look up; for the way God works is to plant more joy right here on earth just like it was with Jesus’ birth.

Today, as we light this candle of joy, we commit our lives this Advent to bringing more joy to this despairing world. With this light we proclaim the message of the angels, “Do Not Be Afraid.”

Advent Wreath Prayer—Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of joy this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more joy in the midst of fear. Amen.

A Time of Prayer—Holy God, in this moment we give thanks for all the ways we experience your presence among us, including in our worship. We give thanks that you offer words and actions that bring joy in the midst of sorrow. Today we pray for all those who are longing for signs of joy, and we pray that you might guide us to opportunities where we can be messengers of your joy...

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us

this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

We Hear God's Word *Matthew 1:18-25 (adapted from The Voice Translation)*

Narrator: So here is the story of the birth of Jesus the Anointed... it is quite a remarkable story:

Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, son of David. [*Joseph acts like he is asleep.*] They hadn't married. And yet, some time well before their wedding date, Mary learned that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, because he was kind and upstanding and honorable, wanted to spare Mary shame. He did not wish to cause her more embarrassment than necessary.

Now when Joseph had decided to act on his instincts, a messenger of the Lord came to him in a dream.

Messenger: Joseph, son of David, [*say the next repeated phrase slowly, like in a dream*] do not be afraid, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to wed Mary and bring her into your home and family as your wife. She did not sneak off with someone else—rather, she conceived the baby she now carries through the miraculous wonderworking of the Holy Spirit. She will have a son, and you will name Him Jesus, which means “the Lord saves,” because this Jesus is the person who will save all of His people.

Narrator: Joseph woke up from his dream [*Joseph wakes up, rubbing his eyes and looking around*] and did exactly what the messenger had told him to do: he married Mary and brought her into his home as his wife (though he did not consummate their marriage until after her son was born).

Joseph: When the baby is born, I will name him Jesus, Savior, Emmanuel, God with Us.

Narrator: Years and years ago, Isaiah, a prophet of Israel, foretold the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in this way: A virgin will conceive and bear a Son, and His name will be Immanuel (which is a Hebrew name that means “God with us”).

Scripture Song

Surely the Presence, #131

*Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can hear the brush of angel's wings,
I see glory on each face;
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.*

Once Joseph overcame his fear, once the message of the angel began to sink in, I imagine he was filled with great joy. He would help raise Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. What a tremendous honor and blessing. What a joy to witness the incarnation of God's love born among us. Today, we relish in the joy of this season and the gift of Christ in our lives. To add to that joy, we will now hear the Christmas story from the perspective of the angel Gabriel, who had a whole lot of messages to share in helping people prepare for Christ's birth. A big, joyful thanksgiving to all our play participants.

Christmas Play—*Angels Inc.: A Mystery Play Based on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, by David Coleman

Hymn

Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child, #219

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—Today we have witnessed gifts being shared, gifts of time and talent, gifts that bring great joy. It is with joy that we bring our gifts to God.

December Benevolence—Christmas Fund

Doxology

We Give Thanks—God of joy and wonder, we offer these gifts so that they may be transformed into your good news for the sake of the world. Amen.

Hymn

Joy to the World, #179

Benediction—As you go forth into the world this week, find ways to carry the message of joy to those you meet. Carry in your hearts the message the angels proclaimed: Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Amen.

Postlude

The Trumpet Shall Sound