



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

December 4, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

The Second Sunday of Advent: Mary is visited by an Angel (Luke 1:26-38)

Fear is big business. Keeping people afraid keeps people tuned in. Fear gets clicks. Fear sells product. Fear raised ad revenue. The term “clickbait” is used for online news headlines that get people’s attention and draws them in to “click” the link. Often the clickbait headline and the content of the article don’t align very well, but most people don’t read the full article, anyway. TLDR is a common abbreviation for “Too Long Didn’t Read.” A TLDR summary is an attempt to get the gist of a story, but even these often fall short of reaching a deeper, nuanced appreciation for an issue.

The angel appears to Mary and says, “Rejoice favored one! The Lord is with you!” The buzzfeed editor would reject this headline. It is terrible clickbait. No one clicks on “Rejoice! Fear Not” If there’s nothing to fear, there’s nothing to read. If there is only rejoicing, then I have nothing to be outraged over. The Outrage Machine does not run on “rejoice.”

Even though the angel seems to be bringing good news to Mary, she is “confused,” and some translators say she was “greatly troubled,” or “disturbed” by this encounter. First of all, this is a common experience in the Bible. Most encounters with the divine presence (called a ‘theophany’ by serious students) are met with confusion and fear. Mary does not stand out in this aspect. Her fear and confusion is understandable.

What I want to consider though, is how the angel responds. Twice the angel says, “Look.” Perhaps “Look” is the antidote to fear. Pew Research backs this up. According to polls, people are more afraid of crime than reality suggests that they should be. Pew research has shown consistently that a majority of people believe that crime is getting worse even while the actual crime data shows that it is not. These surveys have also shown that fear is political. Fear of crime among self-identifying Republicans peaked in 2016. Conversely, fear among Democrats peaked in 2006 with only a slight dip in 2007. Both of these years were on the cusp of an election that saw that party take control of the White House.

The thing about fear is, when we take the angel’s advice and look, the fear may subside. Like the parent who looks in the closet for the frightened child, looking at what you are afraid of can actually disarm the fear.

Pew research shows that while people believe crime is a problem nationally, the numbers drop dramatically when asked about crime locally. Consistently over time, people are twice as likely to believe crime is a problem nationally than it is in their own neighborhood. When people are able to look around and see what is actually happening, their lived experience tells them that they are safe. Even while the national story is that we need to fear, what we see in our lives tells us otherwise.

One survey asked the question, “Would you be afraid to walk to a destination within one mile of your house at night?” The all-time low for this question occurred in 2020. In other words, people are less afraid now than they were 50 years ago.

Mary was confused and greatly disturbed. The angel said “Look! God is with you.” Then the angel said “Look, something impossible is already happening.” The angel points to Mary. Then the angel points to Elizabeth. Look—you are highly favored! Look—you are blessed! Look—God is already at work! Look—God is with you!

This after all, is the TLDR version of the good news, “Fear not! God is with you.”

It may not be great clickbait. It may not feed the outrage machine. It may not get great ratings, but it is the good news that so many need. In the midst of confusion, even when you are greatly disturbed, God is with you. Perhaps especially when you are greatly disturbed, God is with you.



From the artist, Carmelle Beaugelin : "In Mary's 'yes,' uttered in her Magnificat, we see the transformation of a young teenage girl from fearful to determined, from simply accepting to deciding, from passivity to agency, from betrothed to surrogate mother of God—an honor rarer than gold. Perhaps the most remarkable annunciation in this passage is not the messenger's revelation to Mary, but Mary's 'yes' to the call."