

Proclaimed by the Armies of Heaven

Luke 1:30-38

Matthew 1:18-24

December 20, 2009

“Area Prepares for Winter Storm.” That was the headline in our area on the Raleigh news shows and on their websites. Something big was brewing. This kind of thing didn’t normally happen. In fact, it was downright unusual for something like it to happen so early. This was what I was hearing on Friday. It’s coming!

However, the truth of the matter was nobody – not even “The Fish” – code name for the area’s exalted one, meteorologist Greg Fishel – could say for sure what was going to happen in Raleigh much less Holly Springs. My point is that weather prognosticators are notoriously wrong when it comes to accurately reporting what is going to happen with any certainty.

This time of year the prospect of snow can be big news – can you imagine how the headlines would read if we had a white Christmas?! It would be huge. However, even snow on Christmas Eve couldn’t eclipse the biggest news of all.

I’m talking about news that took the Armies of Heaven to proclaim – the birth of Jesus the Christ. The news started with one angel, Gabriel, the top messenger angel in heaven coming to a startled young girl. You can imagine how she felt – not only was she being told she was going to have a baby, but God’s son, and she was being told by this magnificent angel. I can’t imagine what an angel would look like when they were coming with such a message, but it was enough to cause Gabriel to tell Mary, “Be not afraid.”

Again, the angel appeared – this time to Joseph in a dream. He had come to comfort one who was finding it fearsome that God was descending into his midst in such a manner.

Finally, we hear in Luke 2:

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

The shepherds were terrified, as they should have been. They were surrounded not only by angels, but by the Lord's glory – His very presence. One cannot be confronted with God's very presence and not stand in awe! Right?

Something big was brewing. This kind of thing didn't normally happen – not then, not now. It was going to be awesome – I don't mean really cool – I mean it was going to be the kind of colossal event that would take your breath away and boggle your mind. It would take everything you knew and turn it on its head. The Son of God was coming into the world; not with a fanfare of trumpets and a blast of sunlight, but as a simple baby.

I think the baby thing is what causes us to overlook the terror and awe aspect of the Christmas event. I think it would help us if we regained a little of the fear and awe that the shepherds had that night so long ago. Now when I say *fear* I don't mean *scared*. I mean fear in the biblical sense, as in *fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. In the Bible, to fear the Lord means to be exceedingly overwhelmed by the awesome presence of the divine, to revere that which is vastly superior to you, to venerate in the highest way the God who has the power to speak the world into and out of existence – that's the kind of fear I'm talking about.

How do we reclaim that kind of fear as we look at the nativity scene on our altar? How do we find that depth of awe that the shepherds must have felt as their bodies shook at the sight and sound of the very armies of heaven proclaiming the good news of Jesus' birth? Perhaps we need to slow down a bit. Perhaps we need to heed the words: *Be still and know that I am God*.

It was in the midst of stillness that the angels came – not stillness as in the lack of activity, but stillness of spirit. Neither Mary, Joseph nor the shepherds lived life at the kind of frenetic pace you and I do. This Christmas see if you can slow down to the pace of a shepherd. Stand in one place for a while and stare into the night sky, and strive to hear the angels. Light a Christmas candle and be still as you lose yourself in the flame, contemplating the Light that came into the darkness.

If our hearts don't find a way to tremble at the news that God is among us, then we may miss the good news. Babies are born every day, but this one was proclaimed by the Armies of Heaven – give heed to their message.