

FAR ABOVE RUBIES:

*Insights on living the Christian life –
from a female perspective*



Fear not!

I love Christmas and the atmosphere of joy and happiness that is in the air. It's a time when we can enjoy all of the festivities with family and friends as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For some, however, Christmas is not always a happy time. There will be those, believers and unbelievers alike, struggling with health issues, loneliness, family relationships and financial matters, and are fearful about the future.

God does not want us to live in fear and the Bible is full of encouraging words and promises for the fearful. In the King James Version the words "*Fear not*" or "*Do not fear*" appear 365 times - encouragement for every day of the year! Familiar as we are with the birth of Jesus, we can sometimes overlook the fact that fear played a significant role in four of the main characters. It was a very challenging and fearful time for those involved.

In Luke 1:6 we read of a priest called Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth (Mary's cousin) who were "*both righteous before God*". Although they were elderly and Elizabeth was barren, they continued to pray for a child. In Luke 1:13 we see that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and told him to "*Fear not*", that his prayers had been heard and his wife would bear a son, and they were to call his name John. When Zacharias had great difficulty believing the good news, Gabriel told him that because of his unbelief, Zacharias would be struck dumb and unable to speak until the birth of his son John, all of which came to pass.

Like Zacharias we may begin to doubt and even lose hope when our prayers appear to go unanswered. That's when we need to remind ourselves that God is faithful and always answers prayer. There may be times when we will have to wait for the answer and times when God may say "No" when our prayers don't align with His will (remember Amy Carmichael). In Psalm 91:15 we read, "*When he calls me I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honour him*".

In Luke 1:29 we read that when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she was highly favoured, "*she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be*". A visit from an angel would strike fear in anybody's heart! When Gabriel explained that Mary was chosen to give birth to the Son of God by the Holy Spirit, she responded "*Be it unto me according to thy word*". Mary chose to believe and obey God in spite of the cost. This would change her life forever, as she would have to deal with the shame and scandal of having a baby outside of marriage. Who would believe her? What would Joseph think? Would he believe her? We will never be asked to do what Mary did, but when we step out in faith to do something for God, there is usually a cost. The most important place to be is in the will of God, whatever the price!

In Matthew 1:18-19 we read that when Mary was betrothed to Joseph and before they came together, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. Unwilling to put her to shame Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly. As Joseph faced the reality of the situation, fear of the future and thoughts of personal betrayal no doubt entered his mind. When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, however, and told him not to fear but to take Mary as his wife. Joseph obeyed *“but knew her not until she had borne a son, and he called His name Jesus”* (Matt.1:24-25). You know the story well, but we need to remember that both Mary and Joseph had to choose faith over fear, and believe the promises of God. It takes courage to overcome fear and put your trust in God. Although God promises Joshua that He would never fail him nor forsake him, *God also tells him to “Be strong and of good courage...”* (Joshua 1: 5-6)

In Luke 2:9 we read that when an angel appeared to some shepherds who were tending their sheep by night, they were *“sore afraid”*. Allaying their fears, the angel told them to *“Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). Usually when an angel appeared in Old Testament times it was to deliver a warning from God reminding people of their sins, so it’s no wonder they were fearful. His message was different, however, as the angel told them the good news of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. *“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger”* (Luke 2:16). God chose some humble shepherds to be first to hear of Jesus’ birth and to worship Him!

This is a reminder that you are important to God and He can use anyone, fearful or not. He will help you overcome fear. *“Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10).