

**Fear Not: Sore Afraid**  
Luke 2:8-20  
Small Group Discussion Guide

**Opening Question** (get everyone involved in discussion):

- Do you remember visiting Santa Claus as a kid? What was that experience like for you—scary, exciting, both?
- If you never visited Santa Claus as a kid, was there any aspect of the holiday season that was scary to you?
- Transition: For kids, a shift in perspective must take place, from seeing Santa as a threatening stranger to seeing him as a trusted giver, in order for them to delight in his presence. On Sunday, we talked about how a similar shift must happen in our relationship with God.

**Read** Luke 2:8-9 and then discuss the following.

- What do you know about shepherds in ancient Israel—either from your previous studies or from Sunday’s sermon?
- Pastor Josh drew a comparison between 1<sup>st</sup>-Century shepherds and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century undocumented, immigrant workers—based on the fact that both are necessary to their society’s way of life, and yet both are largely viewed as undesirable. Do you think this comparison is accurate? If so, how does it help you grasp the significance of the shepherds’ role in this story?
- Why are the shepherds so afraid in the presence of the angel?
  - Read 1 Kings 8:3-5, 10-11; and 2 Chronicles 7:1-5, to see what you might gather about people’s reaction when the “glory of the Lord” shows up.
- On Sunday, Josh suggested that there is an “under-current of fear” in our lives, which affects our relationship with God and other people. Before going further, would you say that this premise is true of your life—either in the past or present?
- We heard Sunday that this fear results from the lie of Satan, believed by Adam and Eve in the very first sin, and perpetuated in all of our hearts. The lie says that we cannot trust God, and thus we have to be our own masters. That lie—and the resultant sin of taking control of our own lives—has produced hostility between people and God, and hostility in human relationships. Looking at your own story, would you say that this observation has been true in your life?
- When we try to act as our own “god,” trying to control life, we end up with an undercurrent of fear at two levels.
  - On the one hand, we experience “normal” kinds of fear—fear of the future, fear of rejection, and fear of death, because we don’t believe God can be trusted to have control of these things. Do you live with these fears?
  - On the other hand, this explanation is why people—including the shepherds in this story—experience terror in God’s presence.

- What do you think of Tim Keller's description of this experience (below)?  
*As our own "masters," ... we have taken the job of running our lives and we are unqualified for it. This is the reason we are afraid... And when God comes near, his beauty shows our ugliness, his power shows our impotence, his glory shows us our darkness, and we can't take it.*

**Read** Luke 2:10-14 and then discuss the following.

- How does the angel's announcement of "good news" put the shepherds' fear to rest?
- Pastor Josh pointed out that the very fact that this announcement of good news came to shepherds, instead of to priests or kings, helps us to understand how the good news is "for all people."
  - How is that so?
  - What's the big deal that the good news came to shepherds first?
  - How does this observation affect the way we receive the good news?
- What is the message of good news that the angel delivers? (See Vv. 11-12)
  - What is paradoxical about the fact that this baby is Savior, Messiah, and Lord, and yet is lying in a manger, wrapped in cloths?
  - What good news does this paradox reveal to us?
  - How does this observation show us that we can trust God with control of our lives?
- We heard Sunday that if we grasp the good news in this angelic announcement, it can replace our great fear with great joy.
  - How does this transformation happen in our hearts and minds?
  - How does "peace to those on whom his favor rests" (v. 14) relate to our becoming joyful instead of fearful?
- What keeps you from believing that God's favor rests on you, and from receiving his peace?

**Read** Luke 2:15-20 and then discuss the following.

- Based on these verses, what effect did the angel's message have on the shepherds?
- What caused the reaction that we see in vv. 17-18?
- Luke, who probably wrote originally for a sophisticated, well-heeled audience, shows us the shepherds as being the first human proclaimers of the gospel. What is the significance of this fact?
- Do you find yourself eager to share with others the good news that has freed you? Why or why not?

**Prayer:**

- If any fears have surfaced in your discussion today, pray for one another accordingly; especially pray that by coming to trust God, those fears will be replaced with joy.
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time praying for them.