

Journey to Christmas with the Midwives of the Messiah

The Best Present

By Sharon W. Betters

TODAY'S TREASURE

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Luke 1:28-30 ESV

The angel and the message of the angel terrified Mary. How do we know? Because the angel commanded: *Do not be afraid, Mary*. These few words reminded Mary of those who walked before her who heard the same message. She was now in the company of the patriarchs and matriarchs of her faith.

I love how the Scriptures let us peek into the real hearts of God's people. Repeatedly throughout the Bible (some say 365 times, one for each day of the year) God's people hear the words: *Do not be afraid*. Even the great Apostle Paul heard those words from the Lord. There is only one reason to speak that command, because the listener was afraid! As we consider gifts that cannot be broken, we circle back to the first *Today's Treasure* in our Christmas devotional: Hebrews 13:5. Perhaps this is the most priceless gift of all, the gift from which all other gifts flow: *Fear not, the Lord is with you*.

The most priceless present of Christmas that cannot be broken is the treasure of God's favor and presence. We have to go back in time to eavesdrop on an ancient conversation, a verbal exchange where God gives this mother-of-all gift to Abraham and everyone in Abraham's family (which includes you if you are a child of God). To begin to understand the deep emotion of this moment, reach back into your own treasure chest of memories and recollect the delight and joy you experienced when you gave your loved one a priceless gift. That's how we imagine God felt when Abraham began unwrapping this precious gift placed in his hands by the very heart of God. Abraham was not seeking God and we think he was a moon worshipper. In this unique conversation (Genesis 12:1-3) God says (my translation), "Abraham, you're My child now. I choose you. From this moment on, I am binding you to Me, I will walk with you. As we walk through life together, I will teach you what it means to be My child. When you are faced with difficult choices and painful circumstances, remember this. I am with you always. I will bless you. You, in turn, will be a blessing to others. Through you I am

creating a community, a family with more people than you can count. You will be a blessing to others and this covenant community will be a blessing to many because of My presence."

In Genesis 15:1 God continues this conversation with the words:

Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.

In response to Abram's fear, God promises His presence which is the greatest protection and reward of all. God did not leave us without a grid through which to push life decisions. In Galatians 3:29 Paul declares:

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

That makes me Abraham's seed which means I am part of the fulfillment of God's promise to build a huge family from the seed of Abraham. Therefore, the same promises God made to Abraham are part of my eternal inheritance. Every promise God made to Abraham belongs to me and to you if you know Jesus as your Savior. What are those promises? Through repentance and the gift of salvation purchased by the sacrifice of Jesus, God promises me forgiveness of sin, eternal life, His presence, that He will bless me, that I am part of a covenant community (spiritual family). He promises that the grace He has placed in me will flow through me into the lives of others. It's in that family that I will experience blessings and learn how to be a blessing. Because of these promises, we look forward to being with our church family on Christmas Eve and family on Christmas Day. We know that being with them will nourish our souls and encourage us to believe that God is sovereign and we can trust Him. It's because of God's promise to make me a blessing to others that we choose to celebrate Christmas with loved ones rather than isolate ourselves in sorrow. These choices are sometimes difficult when our spirits are overcome by longing for Mark, but choosing to walk by faith in these moments often soothes our souls and supernaturally restores our hearts.

However you are spending Christmas set aside time to reflect on this great gift of Christmas Presence. Ponder that first Christmas, the joy God experienced when He unveiled the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, when He wrapped up His son in the package of human flesh and delivered Him through the body of a young girl. Think of Immanuel, whose name means, "God with Us!" and realize that He was thinking of how much you would need the reality of His presence as you walked by faith in the Land of Grief. Give yourself permission to laugh, to share memories. Lean into the pain of grief and as you weep, listen for the whisper of God: *My child, do not be afraid, I am with you.*

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for Your presence through Your son, Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us. I pray for each one reading this devotional who is longing for more of You, to experience Your presence as Savior and constant companion. Open hearts and minds to how to know Your Son as Redeemer.