

# RICK WARREN

## What to Do When You're Afraid

Everybody faces fears. It doesn't matter if you're a pastor, a teacher, a parent, or a child—we're all afraid of something. Some people fear that their life doesn't really matter, that they'll die alone, or that they'll never truly be loved. Others admit, "If everyone knew the real me, they wouldn't like me."

When you think about that first Christmas, "fear" probably isn't the first word that comes to mind. But fear was actually a big part of the Christmas story. And if you give it another look, you'll find strategies to defeat your own fears!



# Fears at the First Christmas

When you read the Christmas story, you'll find several variations of the phrase, "Do not be afraid." Angels said it to Mary, to Joseph, to the shepherds, and to a priest named Zechariah. Today, we know that the birth of Jesus was good news, but it didn't necessarily sound like good news to the people who first heard it. In fact, it scared them!

Here are four fears experienced that first Christmas—fears that people still face today.



1



## Mary faced the fear of inadequacy.

You probably know the story. One day an angel appeared to Mary—a young, poor, uneducated peasant girl—and told her she was going to be the mother of the Messiah. She had so many reasons to feel inadequate. First, she was an unmarried, virgin teenager. She knew the chances were slim that her fiancé, family, or community would believe the story of how her pregnancy came about. And on top of that, she would be raising the Son of God! That would bring fear of inadequacy to anyone! Yet what did the angel tell her? *“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God”* (Luke 1:30 NIV).

2



## Joseph faced the fear of disapproval.

Imagine this: You’re Joseph, and your fiancé tells you she’s pregnant. You know you’ve never been intimate with her, and she claims that the baby is the Son of God. How will you explain that to your small town where gossip spreads quickly? Joseph’s first reaction to Mary’s story was disbelief, followed by the realization that if he took her home as his wife, he’d face the disapproval of his entire community. Still, the angel said, *“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 1:20 NIV).

3



## The shepherds faced the fear of sudden change.

The night Jesus was born, the shepherds were out in the fields watching their flocks. It was a quiet evening. You can picture the sheep settled for the night and the shepherds gathered around the campfire. And suddenly—in a time before electricity—the night sky lit up like it never had before, filled with a choir or angels. This was not the quiet evening the shepherds expected, and that unexpected change made them afraid. The Bible tells the story: *“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.’”* (Luke 2:8-10 NLT).

4



## Zechariah faced the fear of disappointment.

For many years, a priest named Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth (who was Mary’s cousin), had wanted a baby. Year after year, it never happened, and they eventually gave up hope. They were past child-bearing years and had already been disappointed so many times. But one day an angel appeared to Zechariah: *“Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John’”* (Luke 1:12-13 NLT).

What about you? Which fear might be holding you back this Christmas? Let these four lessons from that first Christmas guide you to a life of courage and peace.

# Four Ways to Live Free of Fear



1

## Surrender your life completely to God every day.

That's how Mary overcame her feelings of inadequacy. Because she believed that her Creator knew what was best for her life, she was willing to do whatever he wanted her to do. When the angel told her God's plan for bringing the Messiah into the world through her, she said, in the Living Bible paraphrase, *"I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to do whatever he wants"* (Luke 1:38).

When God asks you to do something, he'll give you everything you need to do it—the time, money, relationships, and abilities. When your confidence is in him, not in yourself, there's no reason to be afraid.

2

## Stop listening to the voices of fear.

To overcome fear, you have to stop letting fearful things enter your mind from sources like social media, books, movies, TV shows, and the news. Fear can also come from your own anxious thoughts and from negative, fearful voices around you—people who create fear by suggesting that God didn't make you good enough or smart enough or talented enough or wealthy enough. When you listen to the voices of fear, you can't hear the voices of faith.

Instead, spend your time with godly people and enjoy things that feed your faith, not your fear. Imagine all the fearful voices that must have been around Joseph and Mary—people constantly questioning God's plan for them. But they chose not to listen to those voices and, instead, chose to live by faith.

3

## Fill your mind with music that praises God.

Praise is the antidote to panic. And worship is the antidote to worry. When you're scared, you focus on yourself—on your feelings, your appearance, and your abilities. To get rid of fear, you need to focus on how big and capable God is—and one of the best ways to do this is by listening to worship music.

When Mary was frightened about the assignment God had given her, she sang praises to the Lord: *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. . . . He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors"* (Luke 1:46-49, 54-55 NIV).

4

## Base your hope on the promises of God.

Nearly everyone that first Christmas had to base their hope on God's promises. Joseph chose to trust God's plan for Mary and their unborn child. The shepherds believed the angels' good news of great joy for all people. Even Zechariah trusted that God had heard his prayers and would give him a son.

Mary also chose to base her hope on the promises of God. Her cousin Elizabeth told her, *"You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said"* (Luke 1:45 NLT). Mary was just a young peasant girl, yet she faced an incredibly scary situation with remarkable confidence because she trusted God would keep his word.

What do you put your hope in? Is it in yourself, the economy, a politician, or someone's opinion of you? Each one will fail you eventually. Instead, you need to get to know the promises found in God's Word—and then put your hope in them. God *a/ways* keeps his promises.





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