

Gabriel's Announcements: Fear Not

Date: November 23, 2025

Main Passages: Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

Introduction

In 1939, Dietrich Bonhoeffer fled Nazi Germany to safety in America but felt God calling him to return and help Christians stand firm against Hitler. He went back, was arrested, and executed just weeks before Germany's surrender.

Sometimes, following God's call is truly difficult. When he says "fear not" it is not because there are not things to fear, but because God promises to be there with us, even when it is hard.

This sermon is about two ordinary people from Nazareth who heard God's call and chose to obey even when it was scary. When the angel came to Mary and Joseph, the angel's first words were "Fear not."

The Promise Was Never Guesswork

(Luke 1:26-33)

Gabriel appeared to Mary, a young woman engaged to Joseph, announcing that she would bear a son through the Holy Spirit. When Gabriel said "Do not be afraid," he grounded her call in God's track record. Every phrase echoed promises made centuries earlier: "A virgin will conceive" came from Isaiah 7:14. "The throne of his father David" referred to 2 Samuel 7. "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever" echoed Isaiah 9. Gabriel was announcing that God's ancient plan was unfolding exactly as promised.

When God asks us to do something impossible, we need more than good feelings—we need truth. Mary would face scandal and accusations. Gabriel gave her God's character to stand on: promises kept, prophecies fulfilled, a God who always keeps His word.

Rehearsing God's promises isn't just nice spiritual practice—it's survival. When fear is loudest and obedience looks most costly, we anchor ourselves in what God has already done.

Ordinary Obedience from Mary and Joseph

(Luke 1:34-38; Matthew 1:18-25)

Faith isn't just believing something in your mind—it's trust that shows up in action.

Mary asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" She wasn't doubting God could do it—she was asking how. Then came her response: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." She didn't authorize God's plan—she submitted to it.

When Mary was found pregnant, Joseph didn't know it was from the Holy Spirit. He had every right to protect his reputation by exposing her. But Matthew calls him "a righteous man." He planned to divorce her quietly, sparing her public humiliation.

Then God stepped in through a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." That phrase "son of David" reminded him he was part of God's story.

What did Joseph do? "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife." Immediately. He knew this would make him part of the scandal too. He did it anyway.

Faith isn't just words—it's words that turn into steps. Mary's "let it be" became a nine-month pregnancy. Joseph's dream became a public choice to stand with Mary, cost what it may.

Where is God interrupting your plan right now? Notice that Mary went to Elizabeth. She didn't handle this alone. Who's your Elizabeth—the trusted believer who will hold you accountable when fear tries to talk you out of obedience?

"Fear Not" Is a Command Backed by Presence

(Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:30, 35)

Both Mary and Joseph heard the same two words: "Fear not."

God's "fear not" is never cheap optimism. It's not "Don't worry, everything will be fine." Everything was not going to be fine. Mary faced scandal. Joseph shared her shame. They would raise a child who would be rejected and crucified.

So what does "fear not" mean? It's not the absence of danger—it's the presence of God.

Scripture shows a consistent pattern. Genesis 15: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield." Joshua 1: "Do not be frightened, for the LORD your God is with you." When God says "fear not," the command is grounded in His presence, not in circumstances.

Matthew 1:23 says: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"—which means "God with us."

God comes to us as one of us. Jesus doesn't stand at a distance pointing out failures. He enters our vulnerability, takes on our flesh, shares our weakness, faces our fears. Then He bears our judgment so "God with us" no longer means condemnation—it means grace and rescue.

Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." That word "overshadow" is the same term used when God's glory filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40. God doesn't just command obedience—He empowers it.

Here's what that looks like practically:

First, stop rehearsing worst-case scenarios. Instead, rehearse promises. Memorize Isaiah 41:10. Write Matthew 1:23 where you'll see it.

Second, cultivate practices that make you aware of God's presence. Gathered worship reminds us we're not alone. Daily Scripture reading gives us God's voice consistently louder than culture's intimidation.

Third, pray for the Spirit's power before you take the next step of obedience. Don't walk into the hard thing trying to survive on your own strength. Ask God to overshadow you, to empower what He's commanded.

Conclusion

The promise was never guesswork. Ordinary obedience from Mary and Joseph. "Fear not" is a command backed by presence—not the absence of danger, but the nearness of God. Immanuel. God with us.

Here's the gospel: Jesus didn't just enter our world to model obedience. He came to bear the shame and death our disobedience deserved. Mary and Joseph faced scandal so Jesus could face the cross. Jesus faced the cross so we could stand forgiven, empowered, and unafraid.

Mary and Joseph didn't know how their story would end. But they knew who walked with them. That changed everything.

This week:

1. **Write down one promise God has already kept.** Keep it where you'll see it.
2. **Share your "yes" with a trusted believer.** Find your Elizabeth—someone who will bless your obedience and hold you accountable.
3. **Pray daily: "Holy Spirit, empower obedience where I fear."**

The long-awaited King has come. When they were afraid, He steadied them. "Fear not. I am with you."

He's still saying that to you right now. Whatever He's asking you to do, however costly it feels—He's not sending you alone.

Immanuel. God with us.

Discussion Guide Questions

1. **When has God's call or leading in your life felt disruptive to your plans?** How did you respond initially—with resistance, questions, or surrender? What does your natural response reveal about what you trust most in uncertain moments?
2. **Gabriel grounded Mary's calling in God's track record of fulfilled promises.** What is one specific way God has proven faithful in your past that could anchor you when facing a current fear or challenge? How might regularly rehearsing this past faithfulness change the way you approach what God is asking of you now?
3. **The sermon distinguished between Mary's humble question ("How will this be?") and Zechariah's skeptical demand ("How shall I know this?").** Reflect on a time when you brought questions to God. Were you genuinely seeking understanding, or were you requiring proof before you would trust? What's the difference between honest wrestling and faithless resistance?
4. **Both Mary and Joseph faced real costs for their obedience—scandal, shame, misunderstanding, economic uncertainty.** What does it reveal about our faith when we expect obedience to God to make our lives easier or more comfortable? Where might God be calling you to a costly "yes" that you've been avoiding because it doesn't promise safety or approval?
5. **Mary didn't navigate this call alone—she went to Elizabeth for confirmation and support.** Who in your life can serve as your "Elizabeth"—someone who will bless your obedience rather than talk you out of it when

God's call seems foolish by worldly standards? If you don't have someone like this, what's preventing you from seeking out that kind of spiritual community?

6. **The command "fear not" is grounded not in the absence of danger, but in the presence of God.** Think about an area where fear is currently shaping your decisions. Are you waiting for circumstances to become less threatening before you obey, or are you learning to depend on God's presence regardless of the circumstances? What would it look like to move forward with "Immanuel—God with us" as your anchor rather than safety as your requirement?
7. **The sermon challenged us to "stop rehearsing worst-case scenarios" and instead rehearse God's promises.** What specific fear-driven narrative do you find yourself replaying most often? Which promise from Scripture could you memorize and speak aloud to turn up the volume on truth when anxiety gets loud?
8. **Joseph "woke from sleep" and immediately obeyed, stepping into Mary's scandal without delay.** What step of obedience have you been postponing while waiting for more clarity, better timing, or reduced risk? How might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to move from contemplation to action this week?