

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2024
SERMON "JOY & TERROR"
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:1-12
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2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while [a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Sermon: Joy and Terror

In Luke 2:1-12, we find one of the most familiar and beloved stories in Scripture. Shepherds are out in the fields, tending their flocks, when suddenly, the mundane night sky bursts into light. An angel of the Lord appears to them, and they are "terrified." That terror is quickly followed by a proclamation of joy: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

But let's pause here for a moment. We know this story ends in joy, but what about that initial reaction? The shepherds were terrified. And who could blame them? Imagine you're at your day job, sitting in an office reviewing spreadsheets like any other day, and suddenly an angel appears with an announcement that is nothing short of earth-shattering: the Messiah has come. Would your first reaction be joy? Or would it be terror, confusion, maybe even dread?

For the shepherds, this announcement was a lot to take in. The coming of the Messiah wasn't just a personal event; it was cosmic. It signified that things were about to change in ways they couldn't fully understand. More to the point – the coming of the Messiah meant the end of the world. And in their context, the world did indeed end shortly after Jesus' arrival and departure from Earth with the violent fall of Jerusalem, upheaval in their nation, and the dismantling of the world as they knew it. The shepherds would have known that the arrival of this Angel signified that terrifying events were soon to take place. Joy and terror were interwoven in that moment, and that's a truth we often overlook in the Christmas story.

We may not have had an Angel show up at our offices this month announcing the arrival of the Messiah, but this blend of joy and terror isn't unique to the shepherds. It's something we experience in our own lives, especially in the pivotal moments that matter most. Think about welcoming a new baby into the world. There is indescribable joy in holding a newborn for the first time, in marveling at the miracle of life. But there's also terror: Will I be a good parent? Will I be able to provide for this child? What kind of world are they being born into?

Starting a new job can feel the same way. There's excitement and joy in stepping into a new opportunity, but also fear of the unknown. Will I succeed? What if I fail? Even embarking on a new relationship or moving to a new city can be a mix of exhilaration and anxiety. The most meaningful moments in life are often marked by this duality—joy and terror existing side by side.

Why is that? It's because these moments stretch us. They push us out of our comfort zones and into something bigger than ourselves. They force us to confront the unknown, to embrace change, and to trust in something greater. And that's exactly what the shepherds experienced that night in the fields.

When the angel told the shepherds not to be afraid, it wasn't because their fear was irrational. The angel wasn't dismissing their terror; instead, the angel was reframing it. Yes, the coming of the Messiah was going to change everything. Yes, it was a moment of cosmic significance. But it was also a moment of unparalleled joy. The angel's message wasn't just, "Don't be scared." It was, "Your fear is real, but so is the joy. Focus on the joy."

This is where faith comes in. The shepherds didn't ignore their fear; they carried it with them as they went to Bethlehem. But they also acted on the joy. They didn't stay in the fields, paralyzed by terror. They took a leap of faith, trusted in the angel's message, and went to see the child who would change the world. And in doing so, they became part of a story that has been told for over two thousand years.

The Bible is full of stories where joy and terror coexist. Think of Moses at the burning bush. He was terrified by the sight of the bush and by God's call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. But he also experienced the joy of seeing God's power at work and the liberation of his people.

Or think of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel appeared to her, she was greatly troubled. The news that she would bear the Son of God was both an incredible honor and a heavy burden. Her response, "Let it be to me according to your word," was an act of faith that embraced both the joy and the terror of her calling.

In our own lives, we can see this dynamic at play. Consider the moments when you've faced a major life change—starting a new chapter, making a big decision, or stepping into a role you weren't sure you were ready for. Those moments are often a mix of fear and excitement. But they're also the moments when we grow the most, when we see God's hand guiding us, and when we experience the deepest joy.

So why is joy worth the terror? Because the things that scare us the most are often the things that matter the most. The shepherds could have stayed in the fields, paralyzed by fear. But they chose to

step into the story God was writing, and in doing so, they encountered the Savior of the world. Their terror was transformed into awe, their fear into worship, and their night of uncertainty into a testimony that has echoed through the ages.

In the same way, when we face the big, scary, meaningful moments in our own lives, we have a choice. We can let fear hold us back, or we can trust that God is with us, just as He was with the shepherds. And when we choose faith, when we choose to step into the unknown, we find that the joy on the other side is worth it.

Think about Jesus Himself. The cross was a moment of unimaginable terror. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed with such intensity that His sweat was like drops of blood. But He endured the cross because of the joy set before Him—the joy of redeeming humanity and restoring our relationship with God. Joy and terror were intertwined in the most profound way in that moment, and it's a reminder to us that the greatest joys often come through the greatest sacrifices.

As a church, we are in a season where joy and terror coexist. We are seeing signs of growth and renewal that we have long prayed for. Families are joining, children are laughing, and the sanctuary is alive with new energy. This is the joy we have been waiting for. And yet, there is also the terror of financial uncertainty, the fear of whether we can sustain this momentum and meet the needs of our growing community.

The angel's message to the shepherds speaks directly to us today: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." This is not a time to let fear paralyze us. It is a time to act on the joy, to step forward in faith, and to trust that God is with us in this journey.

Let's prioritize the joy over the terror. Let's come together as a church family to seek creative solutions, to support one another, and to trust in God's provision. Let's remember that the same God who guided the shepherds to Bethlehem is guiding us now. And let's hold onto the promise that the joy on the other side of this season will be worth it.

This Christmas, let's embrace the joy and the terror. Let's step into the story God is writing, trusting that His plans are good and His purposes are worth it. And let's share that joy with the world, so that others may come to know the Savior who brings peace in the midst of fear and light in the midst of darkness.

Amen.