



## An Advent Blessing between Joy and Love

Standing between joy and love, the stories all around are filled with violence and fear.  
Angels everywhere. With startling, disturbing, frightening news.

To a teenage girl, news of an unplanned pregnancy. Don't be afraid!  
To a young fiancé, instructions to keep someone else's baby. Sorry it's not yours, but don't  
publicly shame her. Or yourself. Oh and by the way, do not be afraid.  
Even the king hears bad news: you are about to be overthrown. By a baby.  
The innkeeper delivers more bad news: No room for you! Unless you want the barnyard  
special. Labor has begun. And if that doesn't frighten you, nothing will.  
Shepherds blinded in the middle of the night, sheep scattering to the four winds.  
Bright lights began to speak: Do not be afraid.

Each story resounds with the same chorus: *Do not be afraid*.

Looking around now there is also plenty to fear.  
Startling family news. Unplanned illness. Scary diagnosis. Intolerable side effects.  
Invasive treatments. Chronic conditions. Decline in functionality.  
Disturbing headline news. Another school shooting. Hungry children. Asylum seekers  
looking for sanctuary yet pushed out into the cold. Wars erupting. Old prejudices still  
working their violence. Powerful officials shirking responsibility for words and actions.  
Uncertain job news. Desolate dating scene. Struggling to make the ends meet. Racing  
thoughts. Car trouble. One trip or fall away from a cascade of unstoppable change.

How can we possibly *not be afraid*? Where is joy or love in the midst of all the scary news?

In every story of Advent stands a one-word answer: **with**

God is **with** us. We are **with** each other.

Whatever comes we are beloved. Emmanuel-God-With-Us. And we are not alone.

