

**Church of All Nations  
Luke Zechariah and the Angel in the Temple  
November 30, 2025**

**Advent 2**Our material for this year's Advent season is from a crowd in the USA called A Sanctified Art who produce liturgical material for churches that leans heavily upon the creative arts. This year's theme is **What are your fears?** It could sound bleak to introduce the topic of fears into what is usually a joyful anticipatory church season. The **Beginning point is the observation of how often the command/proclamation Fear Not appears in the Advent/Christmas season. And in scripture generally. We know the best way of dealing with fear is not to deny it or avoid it but to name it, turn and face the snakes that bite us by hoisting them on a pole and gazing upon them to use a biblical story as illustration. In naming and facing our fears we draw the potency and the power over us that paralysis us. And that is powerfully symbolised by the announcement of a pregnancy. Faith in the One who comes gives us both the courage and the tools for this journey of fear facing. We emerge strengthened, more mature and so in this way our fears actually are a stepping stone, or an instrument in our growth. Of course it is far more complex than that, and does happen in a single week or even a 4 week season of Advent - but that is where we are coming from in dealing each week with a story that raises fears in the characters. And how looking to Jesus enables us to be transformed through fear.**

**After a brief intro explaining his purpose in writing his gospel Luke begins the story of Jesus with this opening line: "In the time of Herod, King of Judea..." This detail may seem minor to us modern readers, however, it reveals layers of information about the fearful world Jesus entered, one filled with rampant oppression, economic disparity, uncertainty, and instability. A world not so unlike our own. Herod was both a skilled administrator and builder but also a megalomaniac, a cruel and paranoid ruler who killed his own children so they would not be a threat. And yet, throughout the stories of Christ's birth, the whispers of angels deliver a surprising message: "Do not fear." The most repeated instructions/summons/proclamation in the Bible.**

**As an elderly priest, Zechariah had witnessed the fall of Judean independence and the beginning of Roman occupation. He longed for the coming Messiah, and he longed for offspring to continue his line. Elizabeth and Zechariah had no child. In their time, barrenness was**

often interpreted as divine judgment. Elizabeth's childlessness brought not just personal grief but public shame.

Yet, Luke insists: they were righteous.

Their faith endured, even in waiting.

It's tempting to rush ahead to the angel's announcement and the joy of John's birth. But Luke slows us down, inviting us to notice the interruption.

While offering incense in the temple,

Zechariah encounters a divine messenger. His response is not relief or joy—but fear.

When the angel visits Zechariah, he is “terrified/perplexed” and overwhelmed with fear. In the Greek, the same root word, *tarassó*, is used to describe Mary when the angel Gabriel visits her as well (Luke 1:29). Young and soon to be pregnant Mary hears the precise same words as the elderly priest Zechariah: Do not be afraid. Sometimes God breaks into our lives in unexpected and fearful moments.

Fear in scripture is a multi-layered and. - The old classic Proverbs 9:10 Fear of Lord is the beginning of wisdom - Fear understood as something like holy awe. Yet as we have seen people are also being consistently instructed to Fear not or some variation. Presumably this is some different sense of fear for we are told to be done with it.

Sometimes fear is good and healthy. The person who does not fear will be reckless and not able to take precautions against injury or loss. But even appropriate and timely fear left rampant, can turn into paralysis, leading us to being curtailed, frozen in panic and timid to venture out. We move from people able to experience fear to simply being fearful people.

It is those fears we are to face and deal with so we can be freed to live the joyful and bold lives of disciples.

In our own time, we might ask: is it even possible to be fearless in a fearful world? When Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the magi are each called into God's redemptive story, they do not deny their fears—they move through them. They ask questions, hold fast to courage, trust in good news, and say, “Here I am, Lord.” When we find ourselves in fearful times, can we acknowledge our fears while also insisting on hope?



## **Zechariah and the Angel**

**by Hannah Garrity**

**Inspired by Luke 1:5-13**

**32"x20" Paper lace & graphite drawing, backed with cyanotype print**

**In this piece, I imagine the angel in a female form arriving close to Zechariah in the darkened Temple, surprising him by her presence. His reaction is a fearful one in this image. He leans away, squints his eyes, and covers his head. He protects himself from her, from her presence, from her power, from her words, from her gaze. He hides. The incense swirls around them. In contrast to his fear, her message is one of hope: long-yearned-for-joy and family security. Here the angel's message is represented by the doves and the stars. Her message flows into his space with the same power that invoked his fear. I imagine Zechariah lets his guard down then, and listens to her in shock. I imagine he takes in her words, lets his arm down, meets her gaze, and holds onto joy, despite his ongoing apprehension.**