

Angela Pound

Advent

I always said, if all babies were like Mackenzie when he was born, I could have had 10. But now as he's growing and eating us out of house and home I can understand why not. As an infant, he was often full of smiles and sleeping through the night at 6 weeks of age. Don't hate me out there, we definitely made up for this with our sleepless girl, but she has an incredible willfull spirit, that I couldn't imagine life without her. Anyway, it wasn't until one night, our last night on our vacation in Maine that things turned different when Mackenzie was 10 months old. Packing up most of the vehicle the night before leaving so that we could get up early in the morning and drive the 7 1/2 hours to home we left out the bare necessities. Clothes for the morning and baby monitors. We put him to sleep in the playpen in the room only for him to start crying shortly after. We tried to comfort him to no avail for hours and we didn't know why. It wasn't until I went to the car to get his stuffed duck to see if that might comfort him, that he finally fell asleep. Without realizing it, Mackenzie had associated the comfort of sleeping with this duck. He was

afraid until he had that duck, at which point he curled up in a ball and fell fast asleep.

I'm sure many of us as a kid had a security blanket of some sort, whether an actual blanket or some other object. For me, it was baby brenda, which mom had someone sew a new body for, when it became too ragged for me to keep using as is.

There's a point in life where we let go of these securities from our childhood only to often replace them with something else: money, food, relationships, the list goes on.

If you know of the the animation: A Charlie Brown Christmas, there is a character Linnaeus. Do you know what he is always carrying? (If you're not sure here are some pictures that might help from the animation). (PUT UP PICTURES)

Yep, that's right, a security blanket.

(GO TO NEXT SCREEN)

Linnaeus is going to read Luke 2:8-14. There's something I want to see if you notice when he is reading it. Okay, let's watch

Wanda, just leave it on this screen for a minute

Did anyone notice something Linnaeus did?

It was when he said, Fear Not.

No?! He dropped his security blanket. The only time Linnaeus in the whole animation drops his security blanket is when he reads the passage, Fear Not.

Can you imagine what this would have been like for the shepherds?

As it says, An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The glory of the Lord shone around them. Yeah, I'm sure it was terrifying, not knowing what was happening.

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.

Jesus brings us good news. We no longer need to fear.

Continuing on to verse 20:

Luke 2:15-20 NRSV

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary

treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

For the last 4 Sundays we have been waiting. Taken from the Latin word *adventus* – which literally means “coming” – advent is a time where we await Jesus’ coming. A focused time of waiting and expectation, that creates space for us to anticipate and receive again the announcement of Jesus’ birth – ‘God with us’. This idea of creating space is counter-cultural. When our lives are so busy, when the public narratives are so divisive, and when the fear of others is so strong, creating space challenges our instinct to retreat into safe echo chambers to the exclusion of our neighbours. But God says all throughout the Christmas story, as we have been focusing on this year, fear not. The time has provided us with space to reflect and acknowledge our fears. Like the fear of taking the kind of action required to become peacemakers in the world. And perhaps even our fear of embracing the freedom Jesus has given us to *fear not*. Don’t retreat into your own safe space, proclaim the good news. Remember, the shepherds returned and glorified praising God for all they had heard and seen.

God’s love is radical and gracious. It is a love that banishes fear of judgement. Though we live in a world in which fear

is at the heart of division and exclusion, as we reflect on Jesus' call to move beyond fear, we are reminded not only of the love we encounter personally, but also of love as a driving force for good in the world.

And so, the wait is over. Jesus is born. Fear not. Let go of whatever securities you are hanging onto in this world and give it all to Jesus. Jesus' wants to be your comfort and loves you, every single one of us. The shepherds had made known to Mary and Joseph all that had been told them about Jesus and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. Treasure the words you hear and read through Scripture, ponder them in your heart.

No one can comfort us like God can. Yes, God puts people in our lives to comfort us, but God is the ultimate comforter. As it says in 2 Corinthians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation," and he wants to comfort us Isaiah 40:1 "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God."

So, let go of your worldly comforts, your security blanket. Find comfort in the one secure thing of this world, Jesus, the son of God, a babe born in a manger who came to save the world. So, what are you waiting for?

Let us pray:

God of hope, joyful Spirit, Prince of Peace and Lord of Love, we wait for you to come live among us. On this Christmas Eve, may we set aside our busyness and simply enjoy the gifts God, you have given us. You are Immanuel, God with us. We wait, believing what all your prophets told us is true: that your grace is sufficient and that your love will transform the world. The world is a weary world, and we can get tired of waiting. We long to hear spoken again those words of assurance, your messenger's commandment, "do not be afraid." Give us courage for these times, Lord: for the long nights of winter, for the darkness of human chaos and suffering, and for the brokenness of our own imperfect selves. Empower us, by your grace, and in your spirit, to live as those who long for your saving love - and those who keep your light, even while we wait. For all the joy of these days, we lift our lights against present darkness. Against all the darkness of the world, we dare to believe that all you've promised is true. That you stepped into human form and came to dwell among us; that your story told tonight will breathe hope, peace, joy, and love into all the hurting places. Give us ears to hear again the good news of your Word made flesh, and come to life in our midst. Help us to not fear the things that lie ahead. May we rest in your goodness as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen