

# Fear Not: You are Important

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This year we're not doing a nativity service because we decided to do something a little bit different instead. That's why I played that video, so we still get the full Christmas story, just in less than a minute.

But actually I thought today, okay, we're not doing a nativity story this year, so I thought let's write and tell our own story. Not about us, it's still about Jesus, but let's write our own story together this year.

You see from Matthew, if we can have the reading on the screen. This is from the message version. Matthew 13, starting at verses 31.

Another story. God's kingdom is like an acorn that a farmer plants. It is quite small as seeds go, but in the course of years it grows into a huge oak tree, and eagles build nests in it.

Another story. God's kingdom is like yeast that a woman works into the dough for dozens of loaves of barley bread and waits while the dough rises. All Jesus did that day was tell stories.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] A long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy. I will open my mouth and tell stories. I will bring out into the open things hidden since the world's first day.

So we know that Jesus loved telling stories. So that's what we're going to do today. But first, to get us a little bit warmed up, I'm going to need some help with telling these stories.

But to get us warmed up and to get us focused on God, because that is what these stories are about. Let's have a little bit of time of sung worship. So I'll invite you to stand if you are able, and we will sing together.

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Oprah that belonged to Josh the Abizrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied. But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?

[ 2 : 1 9 ] Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of the Midian.

The Lord turned to him and said, Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?

Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied. But how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.

The Lord answered, I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive. Gideon replied, If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.

Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you. And the Lord said, I will wait until you return. Now I am going to say a prayer for the first Advent candle, about hope.

[ 3 : 34 ] Loving God, we pray for hope. We pray for hope for the homeless. We ask that they can feel the warmth of your love this winter. We ask that you will keep them safe this Christmas, and that they won't suffer from the cold.

We know that some people are struggling with finances at this time. We pray that they can feel you are always there, even when they face difficult times.

We ask that they can turn to you with hope when things feel desperate. Nothing is impossible for you. You are there, Lord.

You are there with those who have lost loved ones. Be ever-present and remind them of the love you give. Show them the hope for the future and surround them with good things.

Emmanuel, God with us. When we put our faith in God, we can stay hopeful, because he will make a way. We pray that everyone can find hope, no matter their situation.

[ 4 : 38 ] Amen. This is the second prayer about peace. We pray for peace in countries that are facing war and conflict.

We pray specifically for people in the conflict in Gaza and Israel and the war in Ukraine. We ask that you look after and rescue the victims of the war and change the hearts of their leaders, so that there can be peace and love and justice in the land.

We pray that you can bring your peace to the situation in Syria and be there with the people who are struggling.

Amen. This is the third prayer. For the joy that the birth of your son, Jesus, brings.

We pray that we can share this joy together in this wonderful season. Jesus was born for us.

[ 5 : 56 ] He was like us and he died for us. Thank you for the greatest gift, your only son. We pray that we can bring joy to others and teach them about Jesus.

Amen. The reading is from Matthew 1, verse 18 to 25. This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about.

His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

[ 7 : 18 ] The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took Mary home as his wife.

But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son, and he gave him the name Jesus. Amen. Thank you.

So, I said that we're going to write and tell our own story together this morning. To do that, we need some characters. To play the characters, we need some helpers.

So, if you are able, I'd like everybody please to stand to your feet. If you would rather just put your arm in the air, or actually standing is difficult for you, you can just raise a hand.

That is fine. But please stand to your feet if you can. So, for working out who's going to be helping us, who's going to be playing our parts this morning, I've taken a little bit of inspiration from just a little bit later than one of the stories that we have read.

[ 8 : 30 ] But I think this is the most important story that we can tell. Therefore, we need important people to play these parts. So, let's try and narrow it down a little bit.

If you're a deacon or an elder, I want you to sit down for me. If you're involved with helping with or leading any of the other groups in the church, I want you to sit down for me.

If you are the boss of anybody at work, I want you to sit down. If you're between the ages of 40 and 70, I want you to sit down.

If you are an older sibling, I want you to sit down. So, if you have younger siblings, I want you to sit down. Let's see, we've got a few people left.

If you have ever been on the leadership team, either here at this church or any other church, I want you to sit down. If you are a parent or grandparent, I want you to sit down.

[ 9 : 34 ] I'm hoping this isn't going to rule out all of you, but if you really don't want to play the part, you can sit down. Okay, now between the three of you, I need two volunteers, so I'm going to let you decide who wants to do it.

Okay, I'm going to use one of you now. One of you can sit down for the moment, but could one of you come up? So, William, could you come up to the front for me? You do get a chair. So, you may have noticed that actually I started by ruling out all of the things that actually society and the world says are important.

That if you're in charge, if you're the top of the family, if you do this, if you're between this age bracket, I got rid of all of those people. William, you are our first important person for today.

Before I tell you which character you're playing, you've had a clue as to which character you're playing, but before I confirm that for you, we have a video. Because we have our most important person. Now, this is going to tell us what the most important character is, of sorts.

That's what I am for the nativity. I'm a classic one. Classic role, is it? Classic part. Yeah. Joseph? No. One of the three wise men?

[ 10 : 53 ] No. One of the innkeepers? No. Um... Um... Call rejected. But it's a classic part? Yeah.

Okay. Um, you tell me then, because... I'm door holder number three. I'll be holding doors. That's amazing! Holding doors for who? Um, probably, um, Joseph and Mary.

Oh my gosh, were you pleased when they said that? Yeah. And... What did you do? And I was like, I'm a door holder. Like, get in there, let's go, yes.

Whoa! And, and maybe, because there's no room, I'll probably be just, there'll be like, just coming in, and then I'll just slam the door in their face.

Is that your style role? I'll probably, maybe, I'll probably be dressed up as a door. Okay. So that's a slightly, uh, that, that wasn't staged.

[ 11 : 53 ] That was an actual thing that went on, uh, went viral on TikTok not that long ago. But for that boy, for Milo, holding the doors was a really, really important part.

Most people would probably say, you're a door holder. You're not one of our main characters. But actually, imagine if he wasn't there, and there was nobody to stand in front of the door, or no one to open the door of the barn to let Mary and Joseph in.

So, William, the part that you're going to be playing for us today, they're from the Old Testament. They're from the tribe of Manasseh. Now, Manasseh is quite a small tribe.

So, when Israel was broken up and divided amongst all of the tribes, they each, it wasn't divided particularly evenly. They all had different amounts of land. And actually, William, your land is one of the smallest.

Not only that, actually, your family, not particularly well known. And you're not even the eldest son in your family as well. So, most people are saying that, William, the part you're playing is not particularly important.

[ 12 : 55 ] But I think it is. We could look at the description of Gideon and say, well, actually, Gideon's kind of a side character in all of this.

He's a side character who gets an amazing thing to do. But he's a side character. He's not from a big tribe. He's not from an important family. He's not the one who's going to inherit the house or his father's job.

He's, by all accounts, most people would say a nobody or a side character. So, William, that is your part for us in this story. As a reminder of who our second person is.

So, actually, William, if you want to move your chair to the side slightly for me. We have another short video to remind us who the second person in this, who the second person we need for our story is.

So, who was our second volunteer? Can you come up to the front for me? You will also get a chair. So, you're going to play Joseph for us. But to give you a little bit of context, just to recap that.

[ 13 : 55 ] You are actually from an important family. You are descended from the line of King David. You live in Bethlehem, which is the same place David was born. But actually, Bethlehem isn't a big town. Not everybody knows where Bethlehem is.

All of the Israelites would have done. But people outside, probably not. But then, actually, you're engaged to get married. We can celebrate that.

Engaged to get married. There we go. But then, actually, you find out that, is Mary cheating on you? That's not a nice position to be in. If you find out you're getting married and your fiancé, has she been cheating on me?

I'm not sure I want to go through with this. I don't know anyone else who probably would. But not only that. Every year when we tell the Christmas story, we'll tell it briefly.

We won't miss out completely. But we don't usually tell much detail of the angel appearing to you or what you did in the story. The story is all about Mary. And, obviously, Mary is very important. Mary is the main character, at least until Jesus comes along.

[ 14 : 58 ] Then he becomes the main character. Joseph, you're a side character. So, both of you, Gideon, Joseph, you are side characters in the story that we are going to tell, that we are going to write.

We'll pick up on that again in a bit. But I think it will be good to have a little bit of break and sing another song together. So, we have our characters. We have our actors.

We have Gideon coming from the smallest of the tribes. A family who not everyone knows about, not even the oldest in the family. We have Joseph. Joseph comes from David's line, but comes from a small town.

And as far as he knew, he was cheated on by his fiancée. And even then, he's not given that much attention every time we tell the Nativity story.

The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him something different. An angel appeared to Gideon to tell him something different. We have a short quiz, if we can have the PowerPoint on the screen.

[ 16 : 07 ] So, I don't need you to stand again for this one. Okay. So, it's a quiz about sidekicks. We're going to put a picture of a sidekick up.

I just want you to call out who is their main character. Some of these will be easier than others. I think we're starting quite easy. We have Donkey. Donkey's main character is?

Excellent. The next one. Oh, I just realized I got a bad picture because it's in the corner of the screen. It's always good to start easy. Chewbacca.

Han Solo. Yep. The next one. This is Bingo. Who is? That's it. It is Bluey. Our next one.

This is Jacques. This is testing people's knowledge a little bit. They're starting to get a bit more difficult. It is Ella. Well done. Our next one.

[ 17 : 07 ] This is John Watson. It's Sherlock. The next one. Genie. We're going to go easy again. It's Aladdin.

I think we've got one more. Sangamji. It's Frodo. Excellent. I think you're starting to get the picture.

We have Gideon. A side character. Joseph. A side character. I've just done a quiz about side characters. We're starting to get the picture. That's what we're going to build our story around.

All the time we focus on the main characters. So I thought today, let's focus on the side characters. Because actually I've got a question for you. What happens if we take the side characters out of the story?

If we take Joseph out of the story. If he didn't marry Mary. If we take Gideon. Because he's not from a big tribe. He's not from an important family. If we take him out of the story.

[ 18 : 09 ] If we take Jack out of the story. Cinderella doesn't get to go to the ball. If we take Donkey out of the story. Shrek probably wouldn't find.

Or wouldn't be able to rescue Princess Fiona. What happens if we take Sam out of the Lord of the Rings story? I've got. This is one of my favorite moments from the film.

This is our final video clip. I believe. To show us what would happen if we took our side character out. That's one of my favorite scenes from the Lord of the Rings films.

Frodo was ready to give up. He couldn't keep going. He was crushed. He was lying down. He was ready to die. The enemy had won. But Sam, the side character was there.

And he gives one of my favorite lines. Come on, Mr. Frodo. I can't carry it for you. But I can carry you. If we take Sam out of the Lord of the Rings story.

[ 19 : 10 ] Frodo doesn't make it. Throughout the story. Sam gets himself in trouble. He says the wrong thing. He draws attention to them. And they're trying to move quietly. He's probably the one character.

For most of the story. You'd think things would go a lot better if he wasn't there. But take him out. Take out the side character. And the story doesn't have its ending.

Frodo doesn't reach his destination. We can't take side characters out of the story. Because side characters are important.

In the reading. The stories that we read at the very beginning. The stories that Jesus told. Jesus said that yeast.

The tiniest seed of yeast. Is kneaded into a dough. And causes it to rise. Jesus said that the unimportant people. Can do massive things.

[ 20 : 10 ] And that's our point for this morning. I'm going to read from Isaiah 61. Verses 1 to 3.

The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me. Because the Lord has anointed me. To proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted. To proclaim freedom for the captives.

And release from darkness for the prisoners. To proclaim the year of the Lord's. Favor and the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn. And provide for those who grieve in Zion.

To bestow on them a crown of beauty. Instead of ashes. The oil of joy. Instead of mourning. And a garment of praise. Instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness.

A planting of the Lord. For the display of his splendor. I have come for all people. The Israelite people. The Israelite people.

[ 21 : 17 ] The chosen nation. They were the main characters of the story. They were the nation that Joseph chose. Sorry. That God chose to lead through the world.

God chose to protect them. God chose to give them his blessing. The point is we could go all the way back to Genesis. And actually in the book of Genesis. When God gives his blessing to Abraham.

He says to Abraham. All nations. Will be blessed through you. God chose the main characters of his story. But that doesn't make anyone else less important.

The message is still for you. We are all side characters. In the Christmas story. But we're characters. We are part of the Christmas story.

A few minutes ago we sung the words. I am who you say I am. God says you are important. You might come from an unknown family.

[ 22 : 18 ] In the smallest part of London. Or the smallest part of the world. You might be the middle child. Or the youngest child in that family. You might think you're not important. But God says you are important.

You might be in a story. Where actually you feel like this isn't really about you. It's all about the other person. It's all about the person next to you. And all you've got to do is support them. You might not feel important.

But God says you are important. And that is the point today. We can't take side characters out of the story.

The main characters get all of the focus. They get all of the attention. But the side characters are no less important. And you are no less important to the Christmas story than anyone else.

Jesus is the main character at Christmas. It's all about Jesus. Let's not forget to put the focus on him. To put him at the center. But you are a character as well.

[ 23 : 25 ] You are an important part of the Christmas story. Amen.