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For The Interim: Watchman Column for December, 2004

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OVERCOMING FEAR OF MAN

December comes, and now we approach that mysterious, yet glorious time of year, when we celebrate Incarnation. For, yes, Word became flesh and dwelt in our midst.

The biblical record tells us that an angel appeared to both Mary and to Joseph. To Mary, Gabriel announced that she had been chosen as God's special servant to bear the coming Savior. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God." To Joseph the angelic message in part was the same. For Joseph had been thinking to put Mary aside because of her pregnancy, but the angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

In this remarkable event of incarnation both Mary and Joseph were naturally afraid, albeit for different reasons. But the angel forbids their fears by telling them of God's purpose in this notable event. And both Joseph and Mary believed the angel and feared and revered God more than they would naturally have feared the reproach of men.

I see in this event a significant aid and godly weapon in the midst of our culture war in Canada. For postmodern, secular, Canada is increasingly tilting to the left in all things moral. Not that long ago there was a residue of Christian ethics in the society at large, although the basis for such had long since been eroded. But now relativism has taken such a hold that the common person does not believe any values can be absolute. Furthermore, he often believes that all values, no matter how contrary or unworthy, are of equal worth. With one exception, this belief system scorns the notion of absolute truth. In this new secular value system the one value that is seen as "absolute truth" is the idea of "tolerance". Intolerance is the one remaining sin, tolerance is the new virtue par excellence, and is the ever-present mantra of relativists everywhere. So, when followers of Jesus dare to affirm there is a "right and wrong", and that God is a Being of judgment as well as love, they are slandered as discriminatory bigots and made out to be as evil as the Klansmen of the deep South.

Long ago it was said, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It wasn't true then, nor is it now. To be slandered and reviled by unjust names has never been easy. Those who oppose abortion are routinely reviled as, 'anti-choice, bigots, anti-women etc. Those who oppose same-sex "marriage" are slandered as, "racists, bigots, Klansmen, and homophobes. Those who like to intimidate have always derided their opponents with names, because slander does hurt, wounds one's self-esteem, and degrades one's reputation.

Fact is, the vast majority of good, upright, citizens have a deep-seated fear that if they speak up for God and for good, they will be called names. They are not wrong. In today's rampant secular ideology reigning in Canada those who insist on defending marriage, those who insist that the baby in the womb is a person deserving of protection will indeed be slandered.

So, how does one overcome the fear of slander? How does one overcome the explicit intimidation that is launched at those who will defend life and the family? The apostle Paul says in Galatians 1:10, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ?" Paul's was seeking the favor of God. He was not seeking to gain the favor of men. He chose, and kept on choosing to pursue the reverence of the Father. He chose the fear of God rather than the fear of man. And that made all the difference.

Someone once said, "You can't beat something with nothing". And in this culture war of truth versus nihilism, those who favor death and perversion sling slanderous words like barbs and arrows. Those who favor life, those who favor order over sexual anarchy are called, intolerant, bigots, homophobes, discriminators, and racists. How then shall we stand in the face of this onslaught?

We return to the event of Incarnation. Joseph chose not to fear the reproach, the slander, and the gossip of men. He chose to fear and reverence God. Mary chose not to fear the painful barbs and slings that would be hurled at her. She chose to fear and reverence God and committed herself to his plan.

If we are to be effective in the present culture war, we must continue to stand on guard for Canada. We must keep speaking truth in the midst of a coarsened age.

We will stand, but only if we choose to fear and reverence God before all else. This good fear will trump the fear of man. It worked for Mary and Joseph; it will work for us.