

## **“Christmas Character: Angel”**

Luke 1:26-28, 2:1-14

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I hope that you all enjoyed the Thanksgiving break. Now the Christmas season is ready to begin! Let me ask you a question: What characters or images come to your mind when you think of Christmas? Some of us may think of a giant beautiful Christmas tree in a shopping mall or you may already be thinking about a special Christmas gift for your loved one. Nowadays, we sense that the Christmas consumerism dominates the spirit of Christmas. We often forget a simple fact that Christmas is really not our birthday but it is all about God and His son, Jesus Christ.

According to the Church calendar, today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent lasts four Sundays, beginning today and ends on Christmas Eve. The word, Advent, originates from the Latin word, *adventus* and it means “arrival” or “coming”. Traditionally, this is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ, not only the coming of Christ-child, but also waiting for the final coming of Christ. As you noticed earlier in the service, we lit the first candle out of four candles which symbolize ‘hope’, ‘peace (faith)’, ‘joy’ and ‘love’ in the Advent Wreath. For this year’s Advent theme, I will be focusing on Christmas characters in the birth of Jesus: The angel, Joseph, Mary, Shepherds and the three wise men. This morning, I am going to explore the first character “Angel”. I hope that we can learn more spiritual insights from the angel Gabriel.

Let’s revisit the story of angels in the New Testament. Angel Gabriel appeared three times in the birth story of Jesus. Let me briefly explain this story to you. In Matthew’s account, the angel Gabriel, God’s messenger, appeared to Joseph in a dream and said that his fiancé Mary will conceive and bear a son. Joseph was told to name his son “Emmanuel” which means ‘God is with us.’ The Gospel of Luke describes a similar story that the angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary and said to her that she would conceive and bear a son. His name will be Jesus. In our second Scripture reading, God’s angel appeared to the shepherds and said to them. “Do not be afraid! I am bringing you all good news of great joy for all the people.” When the shepherds heard this news from the angel, they went with haste to see the baby Jesus. When the shepherds arrived, with their own eyes, they witnessed “Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.”

Both Hebrew and Greek words for “angel” mean “messenger.” You may imagine angels as cute babies with wings or winged creatures flitting about in the night sky singing, but this is not a biblical understanding of angels. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds and talked to them. Actually, biblical scholars argue that most often in the Bible, angels simply appear as people. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrew 13:2). Angels typically appeared as strangers, not as winged creatures.

I want to share my personal encounter with angels. Friday night, our family was ready to go out for a family fun time nearby in the shopping mall, but we realized that no one brought keys. We were locked out of our house! While I was carrying Joshua and his car seat to my car, I forgot to bring my keys. I thought Youngjae had brought her keys. For a moment, I lost my words standing in the garage. In a couple of minutes, baby Joshua started crying in the cold weather, and Jacob was running around the garage. Thankfully, I thought of two people in my mind: Jim and Dedra. I personally very hesitated to call them in the evening time, but I was desperate. When I called them, Jim Allen graciously came to the church right away and let me in the office. Dedra immediately returned my call and helped me find the spare parsonage key in her office. Truly, I would say that they were two angels sent to me by God. Not only did they show me their hospitable act of kindness, but also they taught me what I ought to do and share with those who are in desperate need of help like mine. They challenged me to discern God’s message in their good example act of kindness. Jim and Dedra were angels who delivered God’s special message to me.

Edward Hays puts out a meaningful quote of spiritual guidance in his book, “In Pursuit of the Great White Rabbit”. If we are to experience God, we must be open to God, to the mystical, to the divine, appearing in our lives. And we must have an openness that is free of preconditions about *how* that will happen. Looking for God in a godly form is the great historical mistake. God is not a watch-maker type of creator sitting on a throne in the universe. Our God constantly wants to be with us and be our guide. But if we don’t have openness to God, we can’t listen to God’s voice and we won’t be able to meet with God either in our lives. In these three accounts of angel Gabriel’s appearance, angels are God’s messengers. Simply speaking, two messages: “You have nothing to fear”, and “God has a surprise for you-Emmanuel God is with you”. As the

angel Gabriel spoke to Joseph, Mary and the Shepherds, God speaks to us saying, “Do not be afraid. Take courage and trust in me!”

We know that life is not easy. Sometimes, we experience things in life that don't go with our wishes and hopes. We feel frustrated and easily let down in despair. Have you ever found yourself so profoundly disappointed that all you could do was cry out in anger to God, or weep or both? It is hard for us to see ourselves and our life circumstances from God's perspective and God's purpose because we are not masters of our life. The angel Gabriel delivered God's message to US that hope gives us a reason to keep ongoing and helps us to move forward. Some of us may struggle with difficulties at different stages of life. No matter what hardship you are having in your life journey, if you have hope, you will go through and you can step forward towards a light in the end of tunnel. Our Messiah is coming down to us as a light to expel darkness as hope. Darkness is a state of absence of light. In the same way, despair is a state of absence of hope. God is our hope.

Shepherds in the fields on that night were not someone else, but they are US, you and me! Angels point to God's call on our lives to be God's messengers. In this special and spiritual season, I hope that we want to remember this simple and powerful message about angels in our hearts. The birth of Jesus is God's assurance that God is with us, so do not feel afraid. Be strong and be bold in the storms of life, because God is with you wherever you are in your life journey. Amen.