

Luke 2:9-11, 13, 14

⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified! ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: ¹¹ Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. ... ¹³ Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.”

Sermon #3 Advent wreath series, The Angel Candle, St. Paul's Green Garden

Text: Luke 2:9-11, 13, 14

Theme: “The Angels Bring God’s Message to People”

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

It is surprising how many different ideas are conjured up when you mention the term angel. In our language the word can mean a variety of things depending on how you use the word. It might also depend on the person’s religious background or lack of it. If you call someone an angel it may mean they have a very pleasant and agreeable personality. Or it might mean the person is very beautiful. And, to many, the term does mean a heavenly being.

But what does the term ‘angel’ really mean? In both the Scriptures, in both Hebrew and Greek the term means ‘messenger’. If you will recall some of the times angels are mentioned in the Bible you can see how this understanding of the term fits. In quite a number of cases they deliver a message such as when an angel came to Joseph in a dream to assure him that Mary’s pregnancy was a miracle of God. And if you notice in each case the angel does not deliver a message of its own but God’s message. That’s exactly what we see them doing today in connection with our Savior’s birth.

Today we light the third of our Advent wreath candles, the angel candle. We often take for granted the angels and their messenger role at Christmas. But their activity for God on our behalf is evidence of God’s mercy and love for us. Using God’s word, we will consider these messengers who bring God’s message of Christmas to people.

The angels who brought God’s Christmas message to the shepherds did not come as ordinary human beings. They came as the heavenly beings they are. The most noticeable thing about their appearance is that they reflect the glory of the Lord. **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone**

page 2

around them, and they were terrified! It is no wonder the shepherds were terribly frightened. They were getting a glimpse of God's glory in the middle of the night. The glory of God reflects his majesty and power. The shepherds were no different from any other sinners. They knew by nature that they could not stand before the Almighty, eternal God. They knew that he could not and would not tolerate sin of any kind. Perhaps, for a moment these shepherds thought that the world was coming to an end and they were about to meet their maker.

The terror of these shepherds at the sight of God's glory must have reminded them of their sin. Could it be that now God was going to punish them for the harsh and thoughtless words they perhaps had shouted at children who at some time had riled up their sheep? Maybe God was going to require them to answer for all the times they had complained about their way of life and their low income.

When we view our sinful lives against the backdrop of God's perfect holiness it is, and should be, terrifying. The demands of the perfect law of God make us painfully aware of the many sins we have committed. Think of a man like David. For many months he did not confess or repent of his sins of adultery and murder. Peter lied and even called curses down on himself, claiming that he did not know Jesus Christ who was on trial before the Jewish religious court. But when both men viewed their actions against God's holy and perfect law they knew they could not stand. Each man knew his sin before God. Each knew that he stood condemned before God; That is perhaps how these shepherds felt at first as they saw God's glory reflected by the angel messenger of God.

Yes, the majesty and glory of God ought to terrify us. It ought to remind us that we have angered God. The sins we commit day in and day out, deserve His righteous wrath. He absolutely will not tolerate sin—from anyone.

Do you think that God winks at sin, or overlooks some sins. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord destroyed those cities because their constant, hideous sins against him were a stench to him. Recall also how the same God put Annanias and Sapphira to death for lying to him about the price of their land, believing they could get away with it. God's glory ought to make us painfully aware of our sins.

And what is even worse is that our sins are the chain of death for us. During the Middle Ages there lived a blacksmith who boasted that he could break any chain except those forged by himself. Later he committed some act which displeased the noble whom he served, and he was punished by being condemned to the dungeon. On the way to the dungeon he boasted that he could soon be out again as he was sure he could break any chain put on him. When he was chained, he immediately

page 3

started to look for the flaw in the links which would set him free, but he found his own mark on the links, and knew he was hopelessly bound by his own handiwork. He could not escape because his chains were the very ones he had made. We cannot get away from our sins. We are trapped.

Perhaps that was how the shepherds felt when they saw this heavenly messenger who reflected God's glory. Their terror was evidence of what must have been going through their minds. But what they didn't understand is that the God of glory and power did

not send his angel to pronounce doom, but to proclaim God's love.

One of the most notable things about the appearance of angels in the Bible is that God most often sends them when his plan of salvation is about to take a significant step forward. All we have to do is look at some of the more well-known appearances of angels in the Bible.

Already back in the Old Testament God had promised childless Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son and that the Savior would certainly come from their descendants. Genesis 18 reports that about a year before the birth of their son Isaac three men, the Lord and two angels, came to announce the birth of Isaac within a year. Isaac's birth was significant step in the plan of salvation.

Centuries later an angel came to a priest named Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Savior. God sent an angel again to announce of the impending conception of the Christ-child to Mary. When Jesus was a man he was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. After he had defeated the tempter in open combat, the angels came and attended Jesus. Once again, at Christ's resurrection angels were there to announce to the women and disciples the wonderful news. When the Lord Jesus left the earth at his ascension angels were there to explain the important significance of this event. In various places the Bible tells us that angels will be present with Christ when he comes to judge the living and the death on the last day. At each one of these significant steps in the plan of salvation, God sent angels to interpret the event for the human race.

It only makes sense then, that He would once again send angels to announce and interpret the most important event in human history. Here was God's son born as a human child. This was a birth so important for every human being that it simply could not go unannounced.

What mercy God showed to us in sending his messenger to tell the world the meaning of this otherwise insignificant birth. On the surface this birth looked like the birth of any other peasant child born under difficult circumstances. In his love for us God wanted us to know what the birth of his child meant. He wanted no reason for misinterpreting this event so he sent His angels report his love.

Page 4

The words of the angels announcement are also significant in proclaiming God's love for us. They announced the Savior's birth as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. **"Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord."** The angel specifically said this Savior is for all people. Perhaps the shepherds too recalled God's prophecy to Abraham in Genesis 12. When speaking to him of the promise of the Savior, God told Abraham, **"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** The angel's announcement was meant to show God's love in keeping his promise to Abraham and all people. This child is the Savior through whom all people will be blessed, that is, saved from their sins.

Those blessings of God's love were evident also in the angel's words, **"In the town of David."** The prophet Micah had said that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem in Judea. One by one the Lord fulfilled his promises. The angel announced God's love in keeping his promise of a Savior.

Know and believe in your heart that God sent Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin. God wants you to know that your sins are not too great for his Son to pay for. God's love is for you. The angels announced it and God proves it. He kept every one of his promises in connection with the Savior. Why should we doubt God's love?

Yet, isn't that what we do sometimes? When we are depressed, lonely because of the situation in our communities and our world; when sadness and troubles seem to overwhelm us we question God's love. "How can God say he loves me when he allows me to lose my job; when my children get sick, or when illness and other trouble afflicts me?" Our human nature asks those questions. We forget that God doesn't always show us His love in the way we would like. He does show us his love in the way he knows is best. And don't forget, the greatest display of God's love for us came when he sent his own Son to the cross to punish HIM instead of you and me!

That was all part of God's divine plan. He didn't reveal his plans all at once. Down through the ages He gave clues in His prophecies. But his plans weren't completely revealed until the Christ was born and lived on the earth. The angels had the opportunity to announce a most important part of God's divine plan. But before they left earth they praised God's divine plan for the sinful human race.

Their hymn of highest praise to God is still among the hymns we Christians sing to our Lord at Christmas time. The refrain from "Angels We Have Heard on High" is Gloria in Excelsis Deo." It is simply Latin for "Glory to God in the Highest." What is the mean of these words? Remember that the angels want God's

page 5

will to be done. It can safely be said that they want what God wants. They want his plan to save us to succeed. In the birth of his Son God had taken a major step in completing his plan to save all people.

Since the angels know that God wants all people to be saved they gave him their highest praise for sending his son to take all the guilt of our sins and give us life with God. Remember what Jesus once said. The angels of heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. If they rejoice over one sinner who comes to faith you can imagine why they would praise God for sending the Savior who would die for all people.

This Savior's punishment and death would satisfy God's justice. God is no longer angry with us and our sins. He punished Jesus instead of us. We are in a relationship of peace with God. As St. Paul says, "**God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.**" Everyone of us is in a father-child relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

How could any other blessing be greater? Earthly blessings can't even compare with what God has done for us in Christ. With the angels who announced his birth you and I fall down in worship and praise of the Lord Jesus who is the fulfillment of God's divine plan to formally adopt us as His beloved children.

It is most evident in the birth of the Lord Jesus that God has our welfare in mind in all He does. When he wanted to announce the birth of his son into the world as a human child he called on the angels to deliver the message. This message was so universal that he wanted all people to know that his plan for them had been completed. This message sent through the angels is for you. Hold it close, cradle it in your arms and cherish it as the most blessed message you will ever hear. Amen.