

ANGELS ANNOUNCED*

Several angel messengers delivered news related to Jesus' birth. God ensured that the right people knew.

SCRIPTURE†	MUSIC‡
<p>Luke 1:5-22 (to Zacharias) Luke 1:26-38 (to Mary) Matthew 1:18-25 (to Joseph) Luke 2:8-14 (to Shepherds) (See Scripture collage below for worship service reading.)</p>	<p>A Cradle Carol (Forrest) Angels from the Realms of Glory Angels We Have Heard on High Go Tell It On the Mountain Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (Forrest) SATB Infant Holy, Infant Lowly O Come, All Ye Faithful The First Noel</p>

SCRIPTURE COLLAGE

Today's reading is taken from several passages in Matthew and Luke. § And the angel came in unto [Mary], and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying... And the angel said unto her, "*Fear not*, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS." [So while] as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, *fear not* to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." And [Mary] brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger... And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "*Fear not*; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Emphasis added in italics.)

[Theme image]

* Theme is **second** in the **Advent** Christmas worship series.

† Daily preparatory readings shown in **bold**.

‡ Published choral and vocal music shown in **bold**.

§ Luke 1:28-31; Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 2:7-10

PRESENTING & PROMOTING THIS THEME

MESSENGERS

In the events surrounding Jesus' birth, it seems that God uses angelic messengers to highlight the importance of what He is doing on earth – sending His own Son to live among us. Angels brought messages to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph (on two occasions), and the shepherds. We can see irony in the announcement to the shepherds; the host – literally “army” – of heaven brings a message of peace on earth. We can try to imagine what the angels thought about the announcements they were sent to make. Perhaps a sense of excitement about God's plan underscored their announcements. Jesus' birth was certainly worthy of the angels' praise because of Who Jesus is. It is our privilege to join the angels in worshiping Him.

- *The theme intro will focus on the text of Luke 2, perhaps adding in short asides to help the congregation think about the perspective of the angelic messengers. It should be presented in a dramatic reading style.*
- *Ideally, the theme intro should flow right into the choir piece, “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.” The choir should be standing and poised. If a timpani is used, the last few phrases of the theme introduction could possibly be presented as the timpani begins the musical introduction to the choir piece.*

TERROR, THEN COMFORT

Matthew 1:18-25 | *If an angel appeared in front of us today, how would you react? You probably would not rejoice, but respond in terror. Unlike the depictions of medieval art, angels are not naked babies floating around in the sky. The sight of one would be more nightmarish than happy. Imagine if an angel appeared, and then told you your life's trajectory will dramatically change, and it will never be the same. To Mary and Joseph, the angel was a messenger of fear and comfort. The angel itself and the message were scary, but comfort came in knowing the message was directly from God. Joseph obeyed God and showed an ability to trust since he had the message. Everyone has experienced (not necessarily to the same extent) some sort of life transforming event. We can take comfort in the same thing Mary and Joseph did: that God has His purposes, and knowing God's will brings comfort.*

It was one of the most difficult days I had ever experienced. Just a few days before, my wife, whom I had betrothed, had been found to be pregnant. So, I had begun to prepare to divorce here. I was going to do it secretly. I still loved her. And I did not want any harm to befall her. But right is right. And wrong is wrong.

As I laid my head to sleep, all I could think about was why such a God-fearing girl would do such a thing. My eyelids began to close. My heart continued to ache. But I was so tired emotionally that I could help falling rapidly into deep sleep.

Without warning, I was startled awake. My heart went from resting to nearly jumping out of chest. Blood rushed to my head and adrenaline filled my veins. The room became flooded with light. It was brighter than day. And I felt heat, on the back of my neck, like the heat of a fire. When I rolled over, I knew I was in the presence of an angel.

Immediately, all the lessons on angels from synagogue began to fill my head. And fear followed shortly thereafter. Memories of stories of brave and strong men who seemed fearless, and then crumbled in the presence of angels came to mind. There was

1. Abraham – Took on the forces of multiple nations with a little more than 300 men.- nervously hosted 3 angels.
2. Jacob – a powerful and wealthy man and father of a nation – panicked and wrestled God’s messenger.
3. Gideon – who took on an entire army of Midianites with 300 men – shook with fear.
4. Assyrian Army – undefeated at the time – encounters one angel who slays 185k of the rank and file in one day.
5. Nebuchadnezzar – the most powerful king in the world – quickly turned off the furnace upon seeing God’s messenger among three heroes of the faith
6. Daniel – who napped with lions – kissed the ground in the presence of an angel.

So, it seemed I had two options, fight or flight. I’m not as scrappy as Jacob, so maybe I should run? But before I could do anything, this heavenly creature spoke: “ Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for what has been conceived of her is from the Holy Spirit. And she will give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Suddenly, my heart was filled with thankfulness. Thankful that God would send one of his highest-ranking messengers to speak to me. Thankful that my life would now be part of the greater narrative of God’s will. And my heart was filled with thankfulness to Him who would bear my pain, who would plumb the depths of my disgrace and who would give me life again. Who would crush my cure of sinfulness and who would cloth me in His light.

That was not the last time Mary and I would be visited by angels. And these visits were in no way an indication that our lives would somehow become easier. In fact, the visits were more of an indication of the difficulty that would befall us. We would have to marry under the perception that either one of both of us had committed adultery. We would have a less than optimal first child delivery. And Mary would deliver while on the road and away from our own home. We would need to flee to a foreign country under chase from a jealous king with a reputation for executing all who he suspected of threatening his rein. It was true that it was better to be Herod’s pig than his son. We

would come back home after our flight to Egypt. But in an effort to avoid being conspicuous, our family moved to a back water-town where we would forego the conveniences of living in a city.

However, in no way did all of this diminish our gratitude. We were grateful because Messiah had come! And He would free us from death and sin. So, when God's hand of providence visits you, whether it brings ease or difficulty, never forget that this world is not your home and that your worth is in Christ alone! (George Binoka)

Promotional Post: Angels announced the birth of Jesus to several individuals and groups in anticipation of His birth. These angelic appearances naturally caused fear; but God sent them with messages of comfort. Join us for worship this Sunday.

Read Scripture's record of these appearances in preparation for worship this Sunday: [...]



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