

Sermon Title: **The Angel and Zechariah**

Written: **December 1, 2017**

Preached: **December 3, 2017**

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Scripture Reference: **Luke 1:5-20**

Thesis: **The first angel that appears in the Christmas story is the angel that appears to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist who will announce the coming Messiah;**

Purpose: **This angel story reminds us that we need to be ready for the arrival of Jesus at any time.**

Key Word: "Anticipation"

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **Luke 1:5-20** (*Black 56 / Red 68*)

A) The Setting:

1) **Do you believe in Angels?**

- (a) What are angels and why are they a part of every major event in the birth, life and death of Jesus?
- (b) What would you do if you met an angel?
- (c) Or would you even know?

2) **This being the first Sunday of Advent I think it is appropriate that we look at the Christmas story and some years it is good to see it from the perspective of the Angels.**

3) **I am not elevating the Angels above the Christ story.**

- (a) Advent centers on God sending His Son to be with us in order to save His people from their sins.
- (b) **Having said that . . . God did not act silently; just the opposite,**
- (c) **After more than 400 years of silence God used His Angels to play a role that prepared the way for the greatest event in history!**
- (d) An event so important that even today we base our calendar on the coming of Christ.

4) **Luke, having carefully researched all the background information;**

- (a) Set out to record this orderly detailed account of the rest of the story.
- (b) And in this account, we have details that none of the other Gospel writers wrote about.
- (c) **Luke has done the investigative journalism;**
  - (i) Luke talked to the people involved who were close to the situation.
  - (ii) To Mary and to other relatives and friends who experienced these events first hand.

5) **Luke begins in his account with the birth of John, the baptizer.**

- (a) God was about to do something big and He wanted to make sure that people knew about it.
- (b) John would have the job of announcing the coming of the Messiah.

6) **That is where we are going to pick up the story; so, let us turn in our Bibles to Luke 1:5-20, to see the exclusive.**

B) Sermon Prayer

C) (The Hook)

- 1) **Ellen G. White in "The Youth's Instructor", July 15, 1897 wrote "Could the veil be lifted, we would see that angels of God are around us to preserve us from unseen dangers. Thousands of times has their care been especially manifested for us in our warfare with the agencies of Satan."**
- 2) **The word angel means, "messenger,"<sup>1</sup>**
  - (a) **While Angels were used to deliver God's message,**
    - (i) The activity of these celestial beings on God's behalf most often goes unseen to the human eye.
    - (ii) Angels are mentioned in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible.
    - (iii) And angels mostly operate in the spiritual realm.
  - (b) **Yet, on occasion God allows His angels to appear in visible form.**
    - (i) Their appearances are rare and therefore somewhat mysterious.

- (ii) And yet, at significant moments; there they are . . .
- 3) **Should we fear angels?**
    - (a) While Angels come from another realm.
    - (b) Their characteristics aren't familiar to us even though the Bible most often describes them as being very human-like in their appearance.
    - (c) Another thing, they don't make public appearances that often.
  - 4) **Zechariah was almost scared to death when he saw the angel.**
    - (a) Often when making an appearance the first thing God and His angels will tell us is "**Don't be afraid.**"
    - (b) When we are in a right relationship with God we need not fear God's messengers.
  - 5) **We probably shouldn't be so quick to judge Zechariah for being afraid.**
    - (a) Zechariah was one of the priests whose turn had come to be assigned to serve in the Temple.
    - (b) As a member of one of the 24 divisions of established priests Zechariah had been chosen by lot to offer the incense.
    - (c) Because of the large number of priests this would be the only time in Zechariah's life when he would be allowed to perform this task.
    - (d) A very special moment in His life to be sure.
  - 6) **As Zechariah approached the Altar of Incense, a crowd gathered outside to pray.**
    - (a) The incense for which Zechariah was responsible symbolized the prayers of the entire nation.
    - (b) At this particular moment Zechariah was thus the focal point of the Jewish nation.
  - 7) **Now to understand the setting of the temple building we have a series of courts.**
    - (a) There was the court of the people outside the temple area. (*inside the gate; but outside the actual temple.*)
    - (b) Once you entered the temple you first have the women's court.
    - (c) Going up 12 steps and through a double hung set of doors you entered the Court of Israel where the men could stand for worship.
    - (d) **Then you come to two giant doors of the massive temple itself in the next section;**
      - (i) Once you enter here you are in the court of the priest which contains the altar where sacrifices were carried out.
      - (ii) This is known as the Holy Place.
    - (e) **Inside the Holy Place you have lampstands and tables along the walls to give light.**
      - (i) And at the far end of the room, you find the Altar of Incense where the prayers of the people rise up before the throne of God.
      - (ii) Behind this altar, rising from the floor to ceiling is a giant heavy curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.
    - (f) **Inside the MOST Holy Place you would find the Ark of the Covenant which served as the Mercy Seat for God to rest when he visited His people.**
      - (i) No one was allowed in this area except for the High Priest once a year.
      - (ii) And only after following special ceremonial guidelines offering sacrifices for himself and for the sins of the people.
  - 8) **It was on this occasion where Zechariah entered alone into the Holy Place and proceeded to the far end of the room approaching the "Altar of Incense."**
    - (a) Also described as the Golden Altar made of wood and overlaid with gold.
    - (b) This is the only altar that appears in the heavenly temple where the sweet-smelling prayers of the people rise before God.<sup>2</sup> (**Revelation 8:3**)
  - 9) **It is at this moment with Zechariah alone at the Altar of Incense offering prayers for the people of Israel that without warning an angel appears.**
    - (a) This both startled and terrified Zechariah for he had never seen an angel.
    - (b) And he had never seen God; so, he probably thought he was about to die.

- (c) For no one had ever seen God and lived to tell about it.

**TS: This brings us to our first point . . .**

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **Angels Bring God's Message.**

- 1) **This is one of only two Angels who are named in the Bible.**
  - (a) This is Gabriel who we know appeared to Daniel; and now here to Zechariah.
  - (b) Tradition says that it will be Gabriel who will blow the trumpet at Christ's return.
  - (c) The only other angel mentioned by name is the archangel Michael.
- 2) **Gabriel was dispatched to make the very important announcement that the long-awaited Messiah was coming.**
  - (a) But God does not send His angels to speak to everyone as God wants us to do the talking.
  - (b) Gabriel's announcement... **the one who would make the announcement was coming.**
- 3) **Angels have brought God's message many times in the Bible:**
  - (a) They were involved in revealing God's law to Moses.
  - (b) We know this from **Acts 7:53a** where Stephen talking to his fellow Jews said "**you who have received the law that was ordained by angels ...**"
  - (c) Angels had a similar ministry to Daniel in writing his prophecies.
  - (d) And to the Apostle John while writing the book of Revelation.
- 4) **Angels have given instructions:**
  - (a) To the women at the empty tomb of Jesus (**Mt. 28, Mk. 16, Lk. 24**),
  - (b) To Philip, one of the deacons in the early church (**Acts 8:26**), and
  - (c) To Cornelius, a Gentile seeking salvation (**Acts 10**).

**TS: The second thing we should know about angels is this:**

B) Key Point #2: **Angels help provide physical needs and protection.<sup>3</sup>**

- 1) **The angels ministered to Jesus and Elijah when exhausted and hungry**
  - (a) After 40 days of fasting and after being tempted by Satan in the wilderness Angels came to Jesus' aid; **Matthew 4:11** "**Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**"
  - (b) When Elijah the prophet was running from Queen Jezebel who was trying to kill him, he became exhausted in the wilderness; **1 Kings 19:5**, "**Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.**"
  - (c) **And there are many other such instances in Scripture.**
- 2) **But the question is,**
  - (a) Does God still do this today?
  - (b) Does He still send angels when we face life's wilderness experiences?
  - (c) Do they deliver God's assistance when we are at the end of our rope?"
- 3) **Hebrews 1:14** (GNT- Good News Translation) "**What are the angels, then? They are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation.**"
- 4) **Psalms 91:11** "**For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;**" the (NLT) states it this way, "**For he orders his angels to protect you wherever you go.**"
- 5) **What this means is that if you are a follower of Christ, you have a spiritual bodyguard!**
  - (a) Their purpose is to serve God by helping and protecting you.
  - (b) It was an angel that shut the mouths of the lions when Daniel was thrown into their den. (**Daniel 6:22**)

- (c) Angels delivered several apostles from jail in **Acts 5:19**,
- (d) And an angel delivered Peter from prison in **Acts 12:7-10**.
- 6) **Consider this account from "Angels, God's Secret Agents" by Billy Graham.<sup>4</sup>**
- (a) **"The Reverend John G. Paton, pioneer missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, told a thrilling story involving the protective care of angels.**
- (i) Hostile natives surrounded his mission headquarters one night, intent on burning the Patons out and killing them.
- (ii) John Paton and his wife prayed all during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them.
- (iii) When daylight came they were amazed to see that, unaccountably, the attackers had left and they thanked God for delivering them.
- (b) **"A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Jesus Christ, and Mr. Paton, remembering what had happened, asked the chief what had kept him and his men from burning down the house and killing them.**
- (i) The chief replied in surprise, **"Who were all those men you had with you there?"**
- (ii) The missionary answered, **"There were no men there; just my wife and I."**
- (iii) **The chief argued that they had seen many men standing guard**
- Hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands.
  - They seemed to circle the mission station so that the natives were afraid to attack.
- (iv) Only then did Mr. Paton realize that God had sent His angels to protect them.
- (v) The chief agreed that there was no other explanation."
- (c) Graham continues, **"Christians must never fail to sense the operation of angelic glory. It forever eclipses the world of demonic powers..."**
- 7) **As a disciple of Jesus, you can expect powerful angels to accompany you in your life experiences.**
- (a) And let those events dramatically illustrate the friendly presence of 'the holy ones,' as Daniel calls them."
- (b) Bill Clemmer, our Go Global missionary in Southern Sudan, and the Congo has attested to God's Angels protecting them while on the mission field.

### TS: The third key point considering angels . . .

- C) Key Point #3: **Angels Strengthen and Encourage.**
- 1) **As we already read, they ministered to Jesus in the wilderness, and to the prophets and apostles.<sup>5</sup>**
- (a) One specific Scriptural incident perhaps best illustrates this encouraging ministry of angels.
- (b) The Apostle Paul was on a ship bound for Rome.
- (c) He was a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Jesus.
- (d) Sometimes people get angry at us for communicating the Good News but we need not fear.
- (e) A storm arose and everyone was fearful of their life.
- (f) That's when Paul spoke up.
- 2) **Acts 27:23** (NLT) **"For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, 24and he said, "Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you." 25So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said."**
- 3) **The ship broke apart in the stormy sea, but Paul and the other 275 men upon it all survived.**
- (a) It's a good idea to hang out with people God is protecting?
- (b) The writer of Hebrews told us, **"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."** (**Hebrews 13:2**)

- (c) Yes, I believe that angels sometimes appear to strengthen and encourage, protect and provide at times when we need it most.
- 4) **The Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to give Him a message from God; but also, to encourage and strengthen him.**
  - (a) First, he told Zechariah that God heard his prayers. (isn't that great to know?)
  - (b) Zechariah's name means "God Remembers" and His wife's name was Elizabeth whose name means "His oath."<sup>6</sup>
  - (c) God made an oath to Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3** and again to David in **Psalm 89** to not forget His promise to bring forth a seed who would be a blessing and sit on the throne of God forever!
- 5) **God was telling Zechariah that He was about to fulfill His promise.**
  - (a) The problem was that Zechariah did not have the faith to believe what he was hearing for he and his wife were too old to have children.
  - (b) Yet, they prayed to God for a son & now God was going to answer his prayer.
- 6) **Isn't that just like us?**
  - (a) We pray without believing in God's ability to answer our prayers.
  - (b) Without God that which is impossible cannot be; **but with God . . . All things are possible!**

**TS: Let me wrap it all up with a Scriptural account that tells us how important it is that we believe in and acknowledge the ministry of angels in our lives.**

### III) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **Today I want you to see that God still sends angels.**
  - 1) My own Grandmother when she was on her deathbed spoke of seeing the angels attending to her.
  - 2) She passed in peace without fear and a smile on her face ushered into heaven by God's angels.
  - 3) **Angels help God deliver His messages, provide for our needs and protection.**
    - (a) They strengthen and encourage us.
    - (b) **2 Corinthians 4:18**, "*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*"
- B) **Do you believe that just because you cannot "see" God at work right at this moment, He isn't working?**
  - 1) In your life, your school, your job, your relationships, your finances, & your church?
  - 2) God is at work and sometimes He sends His Angels to minister to you.
- C) **Zechariah received a message from God's angel that God hears our prayers.**
  - 1) Isn't it exciting and good to know that God hears our prayers.
  - 2) God's message for Zechariah was a message of exciting news that he would have a son who would announce the coming of the Messiah.
  - 3) **It was a message of HOPE for the Israelites and the whole world.**
  - 4) The light of the World is come for unto us the Son of God would be given!

IV) Invitation: Let's pray.

### V) Bibliography

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- <sup>1</sup> **Does God Still Send Angels?** by Brian Atwood, Baptist, Date Added to sermoncentral.com: December 2005
  - <sup>2</sup> The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Merrill F. Unger, Moody Press, 1957,1985, p.48
  - <sup>3</sup> **Does God Still Send Angels?** by Brian Atwood, Baptist, Date Added to sermoncentral.com: December 2005
  - <sup>4</sup> **Angels – God's Secret Agents**, Billy Graham, Published by Pocket Books, New York, NY, April 1975, p.15
  - <sup>5</sup> **Does God Still Send Angels?** by Brian Atwood, Baptist, Date Added to sermoncentral.com: December 2005
  - <sup>6</sup> Thru the Bible, J. Vernon Gee, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983, Volume IV, Pg. 244