

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 22, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 102, 92:4, 136, 83, 94.

Lessons: Psalm 91, Hebrews 1:1-14, Luke 1:26-38.

Sermon Text: Luke 2:8-15

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Advent means coming, and refers to the coming of Jesus Christ. He came to earth as an infant, true man as well as true God, to redeem mankind from all their sins. Believe in him as your Savior, and you will be saved!

Jesus Christ will come again, to judge the living and the dead. That's an idea we just mentioned in passing this advent season, but both of his comings are abundantly announced in the Holy Scriptures.

The fourth candle that will be lit on the Advent Wreath is called "the angel candle".

Among those who announced God's messages were the angels who appeared to the shepherds at Bethlehem. Angels are God's messengers.

As we mentioned last Sunday when we talked about the shepherds to whom the glorious birth of the Savior was announced, they were terrified when they saw the brilliant light announcing the glory of the Lord. Then they heard the voice of the angel telling them "*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*"

We've talked about prophets, of which the first Advent candle reminds us. We've talked about Bethlehem, of which the second Advent candle reminds us. We've talked about Shepherds, of which the third Advent candle reminds us. And now we look to the fourth Advent candle, the angel candle. Today we want to emphasize that for believers,

ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS

- 1. Angels are God's messengers.**
- 2. These messengers of God brought Good News to Bethlehem.**

God chose angels as well as prophets to announce Christ's coming. Both are God's messengers. Remember what a messenger is and does. He or she tells the message. He doesn't necessarily originate the message, or create the message which is to be announced.

Today we look at angels, who shared news about the Savior's birth with the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem. In the scriptures, angels give good messages to believers, and they have brought destruction to unbelievers.

Before we go much farther, let's review what angels are. Now today we are talking only about good angels, not evil angels and spirits, of whom Satan, the devil, is chief. We confess that God created all things, "visible and invisible". Angels are the foremost of God's invisible creatures, and in a few times throughout history, God made them visible, as in our text today.

Before the beginning nothing existed but God (John 1: 1-3). After the sixth day no new creatures were made (Genesis 2: 1-2). Thus the angels must have been created sometime within the six days of creation. Angels do not reproduce, for they neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30). We do not know how many there are. They are very many, as Revelation 5:11 teaches, in addition to our text, when "*suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the*

highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Even though at times they assumed human forms (Genesis 18:2), they do not have material bodies. (Luke 24: 39) The angel spirits have no bodies in which they live, but are complete in their spiritual nature.

They are personal beings, as we learn from Gabriel, who along with Michael, are the only angels named in Scripture. Angels are rational beings, who experience joy over a sinner's repentance (Luke 15:10), and desire to look into the things that pertain to the kingdom of Christ (1 Peter 1:12). They possess knowledge and wisdom (2 Samuel 14:20) and excel in strength (Psalm 103:20). However, they are neither almighty nor omniscient (Mark 13:32).

The good angels delight in serving God. Their happiness does not consist in idleness, but in willing and joyful service. They praise and worship God (Luke 2:13-14). They **"do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word"** (Psalm 103: 20).

And in serving God, they also serve believers, the church, God's saints. Listen to 1 Peter 1:10-12, which tells us about prophets and angels. **"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."** And we read in Hebrews 1:14: **"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"**

Angels were busy in the days surrounding Christ's birth. In the first event at that time involving angels, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce the imminent birth of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:26) Six months later the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce the imminent birth of Jesus, the Savior. A few months later an angel who is not named in Scripture appeared to Joseph telling him to take Mary to be his wife. We read in Matthew 1:20-21: **"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 she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."**

And now these angels over the hills of Bethlehem had some especially great news to tell mankind. **"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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."**

The first words out of their mouths in these four appearances were "Fear not!" "Do not be afraid!" People were certainly frightened when they saw angels, and these shepherds were no exception. They were terrified, seeing and hearing angels in the dark of night.

The angels brought good news that started with comfort. There was no reason to fear because they were bringing good news. There was no reason to fear because the Prince of Peace was on his way or had arrived, in all four of these appearances of angels!

There were also two other appearances of angels in connection with the birth of Jesus. The wise men, the Magi, had come and worshiped the young child, giving gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then we read **"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream."Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."** (Matthew 2:13-15)

Then, of course, occurred that horrible massacre of all the children two years and younger in the region of Bethlehem by Herod. We have been shocked in recent years by mass murders, even of school children in the United States. But have people – even Christians – forgotten another massacre of an unknown number of little children? And that by a pagan king masquerading as the king of the Jews?

Then comes another appearance of an angel: **"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for**

those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."" (Matthew 2:19-23)

As the shepherds we heard about last Sunday were in the fields *"keeping watch over their flock by night,"* we read that an angel of the Lord appeared to them.

Now you and I haven't seen angels in the same way that the shepherds outside Bethlehem did, in fact no one has. But we read in the letter to the Hebrews *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."* (13:2) So we, too, might not recognize God's angels when they come to visit us. But these shepherds did acknowledge that these were the angels, the messengers of the Lord, as evidenced by their faith in promptly obeying the angels.

We know that he gives his angels to guard and keep believers safe, as we read in the Psalms. *"If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge -- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."* (Psalm 91:9-12)

What a marvelous picture of these angels at Bethlehem, singing and praising God! And what a marvelous message they brought to mankind, simply, humbly. All this was for you, that you might learn of Jesus Christ unto your eternal salvation.

We could say a great deal more about angels from Scripture. But we must remind you of another great appearance of angels: We read in Matthew 28:5-6: *"The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."* Angels announced the fact of his resurrection to the women who came to anoint his dead body.

And at Jesus' ascension into heaven we read: *"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them."Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:10-11)

And on judgment day we will see this: *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."* (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

But on this day near Bethlehem, *"the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* At Jesus' birth about 2000 years ago there were just a few people who were aware of his coming into the world. Shepherds, a mother and father and somewhat later, Magi and then elderly people in the temple. His birth was not a big news event then to the world, but went largely unrecognized, even though angels announced it!

Today, of course, the day called Christmas is celebrated over most of the inhabited world, though not always to celebrate the birth of a Savior from sin. However, that is why we celebrate Christmas, to rejoice in God's greatest gift to mankind.

When he was born, the message was delivered by angels: Fear not. Don't be afraid!

That message is certainly appropriated for us today. In these days of great uncertainty, there is no reason for fear. Christ offers us peace in our hearts today. And one day in the future he will bring about eternal, permanent, all-encompassing peace in heaven for all who believe in him as their Savior.

Good news of the angels brings joy – great joy. May that joy be yours today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.