

“Angelic Encounters”

December 8, 2024

Luke 1:5-22

I. Introduction

Last week, as we began preparing for the birth of our Savior, we considered the prophets; today we consider the angels—in particular, “Angelic Encounters.” Angels appear in about half of the books of the Bible and in over 300 different references. They have 3 primary responsibilities: 1) *Angels are messengers of God.* In Hebrew and Greek, the word “angel” means “messenger” or “message bearer.” Their job is to do what God sends them to do. Sometimes they bring good news like announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds or the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah. Sometimes they bring bad news. In [Genesis 19](#), it was angels that appeared to Lot and his family in Sodom and Gomorrah and told them to leave before those towns were destroyed. The Book of Revelation is full of avenging angels and what they say and do is definitely “bad news.” 2) *Angels praise God.* [Job 38:7](#) says that at creation “the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy.” After the angel announced the birth of the Christ—the Messiah—to the shepherds, [Luke 2:13-14](#) says, “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’” Turn to another record of angels praising God—this time sometime in the future; [turn to Revelation 5:11-12](#). 3) *Angels minister to people.* [Hebrews 1:14](#) puts it best: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” Most of the time angels are not seen—they work behind the scenes. But sometimes, they appear for a short time to accomplish a particular purpose. Sometimes they look just like human beings. [Hebrews 13:2](#) says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

It is impossible to read the Christmas story without talking about angels—it begins and ends with them. The birth of Christ was so incredible and so earth shaking that only the angels could be entrusted by God to be the appropriate messengers. No human being could possibly be persuasive enough to get this

amazing message out. There is no other event in the Bible that has as many messages from so many angelic messengers.

Human responses to angels and their messages may vary, but there is a pattern in the actions of the angels. 1) *Angels appear suddenly to ordinary people often doing ordinary things.* Zechariah was serving in the Temple. Joseph was sleeping. Mary was going about her daily activities. The shepherds were “**keeping watch over their flocks at night**” (Luke 2:8b). When angels come bearing an announcement, they break into our world unexpectedly with messages of great importance. 2) *Angels cause people to be afraid.* When an angel appears in Scripture, a sense of fear and wonder is immediate; e.g., Zechariah “**was startled and was gripped with fear.**” Knowing that they have this kind of effect on humans, often their first words are: “**Do not be afraid.**” 3) *Angels are never to be adored or worshipped.* They aren’t to be the center of attraction. In Rev. 22:8-9 the Apostle John was so overcome by all that he had seen and heard that he wrote, “**I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’**” 4) *Angels don’t stay long.* They deliver their message or do their appointed task and then they are gone. The focus isn’t to be on them—that belongs to God. They want us to worship only God.

II. Four Angelic Encounters

A. Zechariah: Refused to believe and doubted the angel’s message. This morning, we are going to look at four angelic encounters related to the birth of Jesus and the human response to them. In the Scripture we just read we find the 1st encounter: the announcement by the angel Gabriel (*the mighty one of God*) to Zechariah telling him that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son, and they were to name him John.

Luke wrote that “**they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.**” At that time, Zechariah was a priest, and it was his turn to serve in the Temple and to burn incense in front of the curtain leading to the Holy of Holies. It was there that the angel of the Lord appeared to him;

verse 12 says that Zechariah “was startled and was gripped with fear.” As expected, the angel reassured him and then went on to say, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.” The angel then proceeded to describe what kind of person John would be. Repeating what Malachi had prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6, Zechariah was told that John’s calling was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Even though Zechariah had been praying for a child and even though he was obviously a religious man, he refused to believe and instead doubted the angel’s message. In verse 18 he said, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.” Because of his doubts and lack of belief, Gabriel said that Zechariah would “be silent and not able to speak.” He wouldn’t be able to speak again until after the baby was born. Eight days after John’s birth, Luke 1:63-64 says, “He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, ‘His name is John.’ Immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.” After this miracle, the first thing Zechariah did was to praise God. But in the beginning, Zechariah’s response to his angelic encounter was that he refused to believe and doubted the angel’s message.

B. Mary: Unsure but surrendered. The next angelic encounter is also found in Luke; turn to Luke 1:26-38. After Gabriel greeted her, “Mary was greatly troubled” and so Gabriel spoke those familiar words of comfort, “Do not be afraid.” Mary was then told that she would become pregnant and would give birth to a son, and she was to give him the name Jesus which means “Savior.” Then Gabriel told her a little about the baby she would give birth to: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.”

Zechariah refused to believe and doubted when he heard the angel, but Mary was simply unsure about how all this would happen—she asked, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” Gabriel gave her some more details, but it was still difficult to comprehend. In spite of her lack of understanding, Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” Mary actually called herself “the bondservant of

the Lord.” Mary was unsure about how it was all going to work out, but she surrendered herself completely to her Lord anyway. Zechariah’s response was to refuse to believe and doubted; Mary’s response was unsure but surrendered.

C. Joseph: Accepted and acted on the angel’s message. The third angelic encounter is found in Matthew. **Turn Matthew 1:18-25.** Joseph had been in a dilemma after he found out that Mary was pregnant, and he knew he wasn’t the father. His reputation was on the line. Mary’s life was on the line, too. What was he going to do? Because he was a righteous man and a caring man, he **“did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”**

In the midst of his quandary, Joseph got a visit. God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream. In **verses 20-21** this unnamed angel addressed Joseph’s concerns. Through His messenger—His angel, God told Joseph to raise a child that was not his. And, then Joseph was given a glimpse of the glory of this child as the angel told him that this boy would be the Savior who would fulfill the prophecy from **Isaiah 7:14:** **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”** Joseph immediately accepted his assignment and acted on it; **“He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”** Joseph’s response: he accepted and acted on the angel’s message.

In the following months, Joseph had two more encounters with angels, and just like the first time, he accepted those messages and acted on them, too. Following the visit of the Wisemen **Matthew 2:13-14** says, **“When they, i.e., the Wisemen, 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.”** Joseph’s response was again to accept and act on the angel's message. Sometime later he had a third angelic encounter; **turn to Matthew 2:19-23.** Once again Joseph accepted what the angel said and acted on it

as they returned to Nazareth. Zechariah refused to believe and doubted. Mary was unsure but surrendered. Joseph accepted and acted.

D. The Shepherds: Believed and went and then told others about the angel's message. The final angelic encounter is that of the angels and shepherds that Meredith and Cliff read about earlier from Luke 2. The shepherds were quietly going through the evening's chores and then **Luke 2:9** says, **"An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."** Into the darkness of a quiet night in the country came the brightness of the glory of the Lord. I'm sure the shepherds were rubbing their eyes and shaking in their sandals. In fact, the word **"terrified"** means more than just little scared. We'll look more at the shepherds themselves in a couple of weeks.

The angel had to reassure them, too, so he said, **"Do not be afraid."** They needed to hear the message the angel was bringing: **"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

While the shepherds were trying to comprehend what this heavenly messenger was telling them, they were shocked again when **"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God."** Unexpectedly and without warning God's army appeared. After all they had seen and heard, the shepherds knew that they had to respond, **"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was **lying in the manger."** There was no delay. They believed the angels and went immediately to Bethlehem. They believed and went. But there was more.

After they saw the Baby, **"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."** The shepherds' response was three-fold: they believed and went and then they told others about the angel's message.

III. Conclusion

There are a variety of responses to the message that “**Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**” Some are like Zechariah; they doubt and refuse to believe. Sadly, some don’t or won’t go any further. Others have doubted, but after studying the Bible with an open mind they no longer doubt but believe. Some have written books about their studies, men like C. S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, and Josh McDowell. If you doubt and refuse to believe, I would challenge you to take time to read this Book, study God’s Word yourself—don’t rely on hearsay from others—some who have never read the Bible themselves.

Some are like Mary, a bit uncertain but ready to surrender. Mary wasn’t sure about everything, but she surrendered anyway. In **Luke 2:11** the angel said that “**a Savior is born to you.**” Christmas--Christianity must become personal. **Romans 10:9** says, “**That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**” You don’t have to understand everything but as you study and walk in Christ you will grow. Have you opened your heart to Jesus? Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? In **Revelation 3:20** Jesus said, “**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.**” If you haven’t done so, invite Jesus into your heart.

Some are like Joseph, ready to accept and then act. Joseph is a good example of believers who put feet to their faith. They walk the talk. What is God asking you to do right now? No matter how difficult it is, if God is calling you to do something, that’s what you need to do. You need to accept and act on His Word. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**”

Finally, there are the shepherds, an example of those who believe and then tell others the good news. The response of the shepherds should be the response of everyone who has believed. **Turn to Matt. 28:18-20.** The shepherds told others the Christmas story; they were God’s messengers. Now we are God’s messengers of the manger story. Who can you point to the Savior this season?