

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20

“Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

"Angels in the Salvation Story"

Last week Pastor Liberati introduced our Advent season for 2022 with an important reminder about why we light four candles over four weeks leading up to the celebration of the Incarnation of the promised Savior Jesus. Pastor Liberati traced some aspects of that promised coming all the way from the Garden to John the Baptist!

- This morning I want to say a bit more about the church calendar and then turn to the important role the Angels played in announcing the good news of His coming!

Many American churches have long ago left the Church calendar behind and that was in part because of abuses in the past: If you look at a Roman Catholic or Orthodox church calendar, they have filled every Sunday with some special remembrance of events or Saints.

But throwing the baby out with the bath water was not helpful because calendars & special days do shape how we think and often how we live! *[mention OT]*

Thus many of the reformers argued that we should keep essential feast days like Advent, Good Friday, Easter & Pentecost.

Some did this more formally and others were more casual. Sadly as America drifted from the faith we saw what Linda and I knew as Children: Many people going to church only on Christmas and Easter.

Without faith and the meat of the Word & Sacraments throughout the year these soon became empty rituals.

Today, Christmas and Easter can still be found as relics of our Christian past but Jesus has been replaced by Santa Claus and the Easter bunny.

- These are forces of secularism that we must stand against if your children are to properly understand & celebrate the true meaning of these important seasons.

As we try to point out each year, the season of Advent is both the beginning and the end of the annual Church calendar with the focus on the comings of Jesus: Advent comes as we complete the season of normal time and we often reflect on the future 2nd coming of Jesus as the judge of the world.

Looking toward the Incarnation we remember and celebrate the first coming of Jesus as the Saints of old would have anticipated, but now with the full record of His coming to study!

Epiphany Sunday comes after Christmas and we enter a season of studying how Jesus was manifested to the world in His earthly ministry.

When we come to the Passion Week, we prepare for our annual Good Friday service to remember the suffering of Christ on the cross!

Here at Church of the King this is the one day, other than the Lord's Day, that we hold a formal worship service where we remember the words of Christ on the cross as He gave Himself for our sins. The one time we allow sad faces during communion!

- **Then we have the power of the resurrection celebrated on Easter!**

Seven weeks later we remember the importance of Jesus Ascending to the Father and His sending of the Spirit on Pentecost Sunday.

After Pentecost we begin normal or ordinary time again with a reflection on God's character with Trinity Sunday and then a season of growth & maturity which brings us back to the next celebration of Advent.

- **This is the calendar and patterns we are following here at Church of the King as a part of the vows we take to raise our baptized children in the Lord! We must make sure they grow up understanding and celebrating these important events.**

If the church calendar is not central in their lives, and ours, then I can assure you that the world has plenty of things to replace it with:

The world has no problem with them keeping a secularized version of Christmas and Easter; today known as winter holiday and spring break!

- **Any celebration of Reformation Day has been forgotten and has been replaced by Halloween's celebration of the dead!**

And now today, even the American Christian holiday of Thanksgiving is often subsumed by Black Friday!

- **Sadly, we often know more about and focus other special holidays the world offers like Valentine's Day or the 4th of July.**

And what is the BIG national celebration that takes place in January?

That's right the Super Bowl...

- **Which even many Church services now try to accommodate!**

As we come to this 2nd Sunday of Advent I hope and pray this year that our families will read the Christmas accounts together! I would encourage you to even use the Advent orders of worship for some hearty family singing and to review all the aspects of the various Christmas accounts in some of your family devotions & discussions!

- **As we do so, find angels everywhere in the Biblical accounts, so today I want to focus on the role they played which the children always enjoy!**

So let me begin with a question:

- **When do we first see the Angels in the story of our Salvation?**

Where did Pastor Liberati begin?

Our text relates the events of that first Christmas morning and once again we should return to the Book of Beginnings!

There we find Cherubim or angels that God placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden along with a flaming sword to protect Adam from the Tree of Life, a tree that could now cause them to live in a fallen state forever.

We have to keep that in mind as we consider what happened that first Christmas eve some two thousand years ago: A night that certainly changed all of history:

- **Mary has given birth to the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us!**
- **He was the promised Seed of the Woman and the One the Angels had waited thousands of years to see.**

And just as they protected man at the Garden, they now have the task of announcing the New Life in Christ. Now if Hollywood were writing this story the birth of the King of Kings would have come with a great deal of pageantry probably right there in Jerusalem! But, we all know that was NOT what happened! God chose to have Jesus born in the very city the Prophets said he would be born in with very humble surroundings:

- **As Francis & Edith Schaeffer rightly point out, a smelly stable is not a fitting place for the birth of a King, no less the Son of God, but it is a perfect place for a lamb to be born!**

And thus the announcement of this important birth was not sent to Caesar or the High Priest as the civil and religious leaders of the day, it was sent to humble Shepherds: Those who care for sheep!

“Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Now it is important to notice the flow in what the angel said:

He brings glad tidings and great joy!

The Angel brings this good news because a Savior has been born...

That Savior is Christ the Lord...

AND they will know this because he will give them a sign to look for...

We will consider that a bit more this morning when we come to the Table.

- **So was God trying to be a bit secretive about the coming of Jesus?**

He has him born in a small village with no announcement in the Jerusalem Post or the Roman Record.

- **The birth of Jesus was no secret!**

It came at the right time and at the right place and even though it was first announced to these rural shepherds, the witness of that Angel and their obedience is today proclaimed around the world with nativity scenes and Christmas carols!

Even in some VERY pagan settings!

And there was a grand celebration that night, but again only for those faithful shepherds...

**13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:
14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"**

- **As Pastor Liberati reminded us last week by going back to Genesis, God is telling His grand story of salvation and this is certainly one of the high points that brings Him glory.**
- **And it brings peace on the earth!**

Here it is important to understand the message and those who carried the message: Details can be important! The Bible does not give us a great deal of detail about the angels nor the heavenly hosts. The Hebrew and Greek words translated as Angel means messenger so it can sometimes mean one of the heavenly cherubim as in this case, it can mean Church leaders as it does in Revelation two & three and it can even mean the Lord Himself as when He came to council with Abraham about the destruction of Sodom. We saw how man was driven out of Eden to protect him for a time from the Tree of Life, so he would not live forever in his fallen state, because God had promised to send a Savior.

As I pointed out we first see Angels in the story of salvation, at the Gate of the Garden with a flaming sword to protect mankind.

- And we continue to see Angels as protectors or guardians throughout the story of salvation and we should be careful not to miss the details.

Moses was instructed to build a Tabernacle to be a dwelling place for Jehovah God just as He was present in Eden. Later the Temple would serve the same purpose.

BUT His presence was in the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could enter once a year after offering sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people: *The people could not enter!*

At the center of this room was the Ark with a mercy seat guarded by two cherubim as described in Exodus 25:18 “18 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. 20 And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, & they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.”

Another detail to note is how we see cherubim on the veil that hung in front of the Holy of Holies Exodus 26: 31 "You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim... Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil.”

Now obviously Moses is given enough detail to instruct the craftsman about how these golden cherubim were to be made and to properly picture them on the curtains and the veil.

- We have neither of those images today, nor the instructions so we have to do some speculating about what angels actually look like!

Almost all the angels we picture have wings so we get that part right! The part I don't think that we get right is their majesty and power. As we consider how the angels appear throughout the Christmas story we should notice a common theme:

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias he had to say, ‘fear not’!

The angel says the same to Mary. When the angel appeared to Joseph we again hear ‘fear not’ and here in our text the angel, even when the first Angel was by himself had to tell the shepherds, ‘be not afraid.’

- Now these people were not afraid because angels were scary like zombies or orcs!

They were afraid because their appearance was powerful and they would have known who they were, being familiar with their appearance from the curtains at the Temple!

- They knew they were in the presence of God's messengers.

Thus I have to give the word of warning that I try to give each year...

Beware of those cute little cherubs! No we don't have to throw them all away, just use them as teachable moments to make sure children know about the real messengers of God!

After this announcement from the Angel, he is joined by a heavenly host...

13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:
14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

- What a glorious sight that must have been and again given only to these few shepherds!

As we ponder the wonder of the good news of joy and peace on earth proclaimed that night it should take us back to the garden.

- Man has fallen into sin and the way to the tree of life has been barred: It is now protected by Cherubim & a flaming sword.

This picture is continued in the Tabernacle and Temple where man's access to God is still blocked by those Cherubim awaiting the sacrifice that could take away sin.

We see Angels announcing the birth of Jesus and we see them comforting Jesus in the wilderness and again in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We must remember that when Satan quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus he was trying to tempt Jesus to sin, but it does not mean that the Scripture was not true:

Psalm 91: 11 For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. 12 In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone."

The angels did comfort and protect Jesus throughout His earthly life...

- And as He rightly told Pilate, He could have at any time called upon vast legions of them to help Him.

But Jesus prayed to His Father,

Thy will be done not mine because He knew that being the sacrifice for sin was the very purpose for which He had come as the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent.

It must have brought great sorrow to the hosts of angels as they had to watch the Son of God be humiliated & tortured, scorned & beaten, crucified & buried!

And yet where do we see the angels again in the grand story of salvation?

- Yes, two of them standing on either end of the slab on which the Body of Jesus had been laid: Just like we saw in the Holy of Holies in the Temple!

And we must not forget one of the final events that took place on the day that Jesus, who had been that baby in the manger, was crucified in order to crush the head of the serpent...

The veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom: The veil that prevented the people of God from approaching God's Holy presence with cherubim woven into it to remind God's people of the guards at the Garden."

- But now the Tree of Life was available to man once again!

People could come to Jesus as their Savior, repenting and turning from their sin so they could now stand in the very presence of our Holy God in the full righteousness of Jesus, the Son in whom He was well pleased.

We see the heavenly host singing again in Revelation chapter five, but now they are singing, along with the Saints of all the ages a new song!

At verse 9 we read, "And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

- That brothers and sisters was the JOY that was proclaimed to those shepherds keeping watch by night!

It is the joy we sing of as we are commissioned each week of the Advent season singing the words of Isaac Watts taken first from Psalm 98

Joy to the world! The Lord is come Let earth receive her King Let every heart prepare Him room And heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the Earth! The Savior reigns Let men their songs employ While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains Repeat the sounding joy

Then a verse based on Genesis chapter three that is sadly left out of some modern hymnals...

No more let sins and sorrow grow Nor thorns infest the ground He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found

And finally from that glorious passage in Revelation chapter five:

He rules the world with truth and grace And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness And wonders of His love

Communion Meditation:

"and this shall be a sign to you!" Luke 2:12

How were they to know the Savior was born...

They would find him in a manger

How do we know the work of Jesus has brought joy and peace to the world?

Jesus commands us to eat some bread and drink some wine!