

ANGELS IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY

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Lessons: Matthew 1:18-25; 2:12-15; 19-23; Heaven and Hell 406 (portion)

There are so many wonderful events that happened just prior to, during and after the Lord's birth, that it is sometimes hard to remember them all. You now that the Lord was born to Mary in the little town of Bethlehem. You know that the same evening the shepherds (who were watching their flocks at night) were told of the joyful event by angels in heaven. You also know the story of how the wisemen came, following the star from the east to where the young child was, bringing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Rather than try to recall the whole Christmas story every year at this time it is helpful to pick out just one event, or one person, and to talk about that. For example, have you noticed how often angels are mentioned in the Christmas story? In the opening chapter of the Gospel of Luke, do you remember the story of Zacharias, who was later to be the father of John the Baptist? In that story we read: "And there appeared unto him an *angel* of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the *angel* said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:11-13).

Later on, in that same chapter from Luke, we are told the following:

"And in the sixth month the *angel Gabriel* was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the *angel* came in unto her, 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 cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the *angel* said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God" (Luke 1:26-30).

And in the next chapter of Luke, chapter 2, we read the following words: "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, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:9-11). This was the occasion when the shepherds in the field were told of the Lord's birth in Bethlehem.

Still another time, in the Christmas story, we are told of how an *angel of the Lord* appeared to someone, and explained certain things he would not have known without this message from the Lord, After the wisemen had given their gifts to the Lord, we read: “And when they were departed, behold, the *angel of the Lord* appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (Matt. 2:13).

And later on in the same story, we are told: “But when Herod was dead, behold, an *angel of the Lord* appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: For they are dead which sought the young child’s life” (Matthew 2:19-21).

There was even a third time when Joseph was visited and received news from a *messenger of the Lord, an angel*. We read in the opening chapter of Matthew: “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 Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20,21).

In all of these occasions, *angels* were sent *by the Lord* to speak to someone on this earth. Their words were always messages of instruction. They wanted to help the people from falling into harm, or to announce the glad tidings of the Lord’s birth. These *angels* could not be seen by anyone but the person they were speaking to, because the Lord allowed these individuals to have their spiritual eyes opened to peek into heaven for a short time. It was a special way in which the Lord could take care of and instruct those He loved on earth.

Now the Lord is guiding us, too, all the time, though not necessarily through *angels* that we can see with our natural eyes. Nevertheless, the Lord with His *angels* seeks to guide each one of us every moment, even to eternity. The fact is that *angels* are around us all the time, even though we cannot see them. But there are times when we can feel their presence with us—those moments when we feel happy over some event. Then, we can be sure the *angels* are near us and we are feeling their presence. They are with us to protect us and keep us from harm, just as they warned Joseph in the dream.

Especially when we are reading the Lord’s Word, we are told, the *angels* are very near to us. They rejoice when we turn to the Lord’s Word to learn how we can prepare ourselves to be angels ourselves someday.

We are told, also, that *angels* are very near to us when we are in temptations. Those moments, when we feel tempted to do something wrong because evil spirits are urging us to, we know that the *angels* are there, too, ready to aid us

the minute we ask for their help. Evil spirits flee away from us as soon as we turn for the Lord's help through His *angels*. As we invite them into our hearts and into our minds, all the evil forces run away as quickly as they can, because they fear the very presence of an *angel of the Lord*. This happens every time we read from the Lord's Word or hear it read to us. *Angels* come near and the evil spirits flee.

Also, when we leave this earthly body and move on to the other world at the time of death, there are special *angels* there to greet us and instruct us in the ways of heaven. What a wonderful thought to think that when we wake up in the spiritual world, the first thing we will see will be these wonderful *angels* ready and able to help us.

The real essence of an *angel* is a special love. That special love is the desire and joy they have in helping others. They would not be happy unless they could turn whatever they have from the Lord toward those around them. And of course, there are so many in heaven that to all eternity they have the joy of helping those in their heavenly society.

Now we know from the Lord's Word, that all our life on this earth, from the time we are first born until we are old people, the Lord is constantly leading us and instructing us through His *angels* to become an *angel* ourselves. Now how do we go about doing this? Why, by the very simple way of learning to help others. Even a young child can find ways to help his brothers and sisters. There are a dozen ways in the day when children can find ways to be of assistance to their parents and even to their teachers. There are many times that we can protect those about us from harm, watching over little brothers and sisters when they are babies, helping neighbors and their children to play safely without harm. We can teach others the right way to live, by telling them about the Lord's Word and by our very example of what we do every day—these are just a few of the ways that we can practice to be *angels* ourselves someday.

Like the *angels* who appeared to the shepherds the night the Lord was born in Bethlehem, we, too, can bring the glad tidings of good news to others. The Lord wants us to tell everyone about His coming to earth and how He has told us, through His Word, the way to heaven. It is part of our duty, then, as a potential *angel of heaven*, to tell others about the Lord's wonderful birth and His message of salvation.

Just imagine how the *angel Gabriel* felt telling Mary, the mother of the Lord, that she was to conceive and bear a child who would be the Savior of the world. Think how the *angel* must have felt spreading the glad tidings of a wonderful announcement to the shepherds.

Observe very carefully, children, the joy and the delight you will see in your parents as they tell to you again the story of the Lord's birth this Christmas season. They, too, want to become *angels*, and they enjoy some of that angelic delight when they recount to you this wonderful story. Watch them carefully as they try to protect you from harm and lead you to learn new knowledges. Notice the happiness they have when they see you learning this wonderful secret, too, when you assist them and the rest of the family. It is their responsibility, from the Lord Himself, to prepare you to be an angel in heaven.

So, children, as you hear the story of the Lord's birth this coining Christmas season, and you are feeling the happiness that comes at this time of the year, think what a wonderful feeling it would be to have that joy forever. It is the message the Lord has brought us by His birth on this earth and by His teachings throughout His Word. That message is: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." That means all can enjoy the peace of heaven as they spread good will to other people, like the *angels* do in heaven.
Amen.