

The Angels' Plea for Peace  
Luke 2:9-14

**Slide 1**

When one contemplates Christmas in our culture, there're some pretty weird things that we do.

One Christmas card text captured this sentiment: *"What other time of the year do you sit around staring at a dead tree in your living room and eat out of your socks?"*

But, as we look at the details surrounding Jesus' birth, there're some strange, surprising, and supernatural elements also happening.

Ray Pritchard states: *"Take the supernatural out of Christianity and all you have left is a religious story. A virgin teenager becomes pregnant. A fiancé remains faithful. An 80-mile trip to Bethlehem. A birth in a barn. Shepherds leaving their sheep. A supernatural star. Wise guys traveling across a desert to see a king. Messages through dreams. And angels appearing."*

Last week we were impacted by Isaiah's audacious hope as his prophecies of Jesus as a sure sign, a sent Son, a shoot from a stump of Jesse, and a suffering Savior were fulfilled with pinpoint accuracy.

Now, while the Christmas story is saturated with the supernatural, a lot of us miss the meaning because we view the season on a superficial level.

When we skim over Christmas, we fail to see the mysterious and miraculous elements surrounding Jesus' birth.

In his book called, *“Rumors of Another World,”* Philip Yancey writes, *“The Bible presents a view of reality that encompasses both the familiar visible world and an invisible world that coexists as a kind of parallel universe”*

This is so true when we think about the angels in the Christmas story.

## **Slide 2**

Angels appear in more than half of the books of the Bible and are referenced over 300 times.

If you ever do a study on angels, you’ll find they have three primary responsibilities with the number one spot being that of magnifying God.

Nehemiah 9:6b, *“You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you,”* and according to Job 38:7, at creation *“the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.”*

Another one of their responsibilities is to be God’s messengers. The word “angel,” as used in the Bible, literally means messenger.

And, as such, their job is to convey two types of messages that God sends them to do.

Sometimes it’s good news like announcing the birth of Christ. The Christmas carol *“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”* captures the fact that angels “herald” or proclaim.

But other times they bring bad news. When they serve in this capacity, they’re not cute and cuddly cherub dolls that we put on top of our Christmas trees.

2 Thessalonians 1:7, *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”*

The Book of Revelation is full of avenging angels, and they're anything but pretty.

Third, they 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 aren't seen, but minister invisibly behind the scenes. Yet, on occasion, they break into our world, appearing for a short time to accomplish a specific purpose.

The Bible mentions that when they do appear, they often look just like humans. Hebrews 13:2, "*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*"

The Christmas story begins and ends with them. The Incarnation was so incredible and so earth shaking that only angels could be entrusted by God to be the appropriate messengers.

No earthly channel of communication could be relied upon to get this amazing message out because no human person could possibly be persuasive enough.

As an aside, if you were to look at all the major events in the Bible, there's no other occurrence that has as many messages from so many angelic messengers as Jesus' birth.

Have you ever heard of a concept called, "*thin places?*" This is where the natural and supernatural worlds come together at their narrowest, with only a thin veil between them.

As we read the Christmas story, there are many of these "*thin places,*" particularly when messengers from the angelic world made an appearance into our world.

### Slide 3

At the time of Jesus' birth, God had been silent for four hundred years between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew.

The Israelites had been pleading with God to come down into their world with words similar to what Isaiah said in Isaiah 64:1, "*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...*"

Then suddenly angels appeared. They didn't appear to kings or politicians, but to ordinary people doing ordinary things.

They weren't announced. They came bearing an announcement which is how they usually come.

They break into our world unexpectedly with messages of galactic proportions. And, in doing so, they cause people to be afraid.

When an angel appears in Scripture, a sense of fear and wonder blasts through the blasé and predictable.

When Isaiah came face-to-face with seraphim proclaiming "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory,*" in Isaiah 6:3, he was scared to death.

The doorposts shaking, smoke filling the temple, these things caused Isaiah to cry out in fear, "*Woe is me!*" Knowing that they have this kind of effect on humans, their first words are usually: "*Do not be afraid.*"

Regardless how imposing and awe-inspiring they are, angels are never to be adored.

Because every reference to angels in the Bible is incidental to some other topic, we need to be careful to not give them too much attention.

Psalm 103:20 says that they are *“mighty ones who do His bidding.”* We’re never told to seek out encounters with them. In fact, they refuse to be worshipped.

In Revelation 22:8-9, when John is overcome by all that he has heard and seen, he wrote, *“I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel...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!’”*

In fact, good angels never draw attention to themselves. They can get our attention, but they always do it for God’s sake, not their own.

When Biblical angels discharge their duty and deliver their tidings, they withdraw from human contact. They don’t stay long because they don’t want us to focus on them; they want us to worship God.

Also, we’re not to pray to angels. Even though they may help deliver answers to prayer, the Bible never suggests that we should direct our requests to them.

Angels are an important part of God’s plan, as can be seen in reference to Jesus.

They were present with Jesus at His Temptation and while He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. They were there at His Resurrection and His Ascension. And they’ll accompany Him at His Second Advent.

#### **Slide 4**

The first appearance of an angel in the Gospels takes place in the opening verses of Luke.

Gabriel, one of only two named angels in the Bible (the other being Michael), appeared to Zechariah and told him that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son named John.

Luke 1:7 tells us that *“they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.”*

Zechariah was a priest and when it was his turn to serve in the Temple to burn incense, the angel of the Lord appeared and Luke 1:12 tells us that he was *“gripped with fear.”*

But the angel calms his fears and tells him wonderful news. Luke 1:13, *“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.”*

The angel then proceeded to describe what kind of person he would be as well as his purpose: *“...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

Though Zechariah had been praying for a child, he still denied what the angel said was true and even doubted it could be done.

Luke 1:18, *“How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”*

Because of his doubts, the angel caused him to be not able to speak until the baby was born.

Luke 1:64 tells us that when he was finally able to speak, eight days after John’s birth, the first thing he did was praise God and then broke into a song.

Luke 1:68, *“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and redeemed his people.”*

The song ends alluding to Isaiah 9:2. Verse 79, *“To shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

### **Slide 5**

Six months later, Gabriel appears to a virgin named Mary. But after giving a greeting from the angel, Mary was troubled and so we hear these words of comfort once again: *“Do not be afraid...”*

Gabriel then told Mary she would be pregnant and give birth to a son and she was to give Him the name Jesus.

Then in Luke 1:32, Gabriel told her that *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...”*

While Zechariah denied and doubted, Mary was just curious as to how all this would happen. Verse 34, *“How will this be...since I am a virgin?”*

After Gabriel gives her a few more details, Mary responds with the heart of a servant.

Luke 1:38, *“I am the Lord’s servant...May it be to me as you have said.”* Mary wasn’t sure how it was going to work out, but she surrendered.

### **Slide 6**

Joseph was a different story. He needed some divine intervention after he learned Mary was pregnant. He knew he wasn’t the father, and his reputation was on the line. What was he going to do?

To him, being a righteous man, there was no choice, Mary had to go. So, he determined to end the engagement as quietly as he could. Yet, in the middle of his misery, Joseph got a visit.

Matthew 1:20-21, *“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”*

This unnamed angel fills in some of the blanks for Joseph, but he was being asked to raise a child that wasn't his.

He felt uncomfortable doing this, therefore, to quell his fears, Joseph was given a glimpse of the glory of this child.

The angel told him that this boy would be the Savior, fulfilling the prophecy of a *“sure sign”* from Isaiah 7:14.

Joseph immediately accepted his assignment and acted on it as we read, *“he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”*

Joseph actually had two more encounters with angels several months later, and like the first time, he accepted these messages and acted on them.

In the first encounter an angel told him to get his family out of the country!

Matthew 2:13-14, *“When they [the wise men] 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 immediately “got up and went!” His response was identical at the second encounter when he was told to return to Israel because Herod had died.

We see his obedience again in Matthew 2:21, *“So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”*

Zechariah denied and doubted. Mary wasn’t sure but she surrendered. Joseph accepted and acted.

### **Slide 7**

The final exhibit of angelic intervention takes place when God rocks the routine of some guys who are just out doing their job.

Luke 2:8-9, *“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”*

In the midst of the mundane, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and the darkness of a silent night became the brightness of the glory of God.

I’m sure these shepherds were rubbing their eyes and shaking in their sandals. In fact, the word “terrified” means that they were alarmed and agitated.

Yet again, the angel quieted their fears, *“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid.’”*

They didn’t need to be afraid because the messenger brought *“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.”*

As the shepherds were trying to handle the message from this one messenger, they were taken aback when *“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God...”*

The word *“suddenly”* means that the heavenly host came unexpectedly and without warning.

The phrase *“great company”* means there were so many that it was impossible to count, a vast array of angels. The sky was filled with a multitude of mighty messengers.

The phrase *“heavenly host”* refers to the Lord’s army. Like in 2 Kings 6:17, *“Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*

The shepherds watched as heaven opened up and they literally saw an entire militia of messengers, hundreds and thousands of angelic warriors worshipping God.

Luke 2:13-14, *“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Notice in these verses that peace comes only after praising. We must put God and His glory first and then peace will come.

So, after witnessing this incredible display of unbridled adoration and praise, the shepherds knew that they had to move.

Luke 2:15, *“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’”*

They discussed what they should do and were unanimous in their decision to head to Bethlehem.

Verse 16 is great. It shows that their fear had been replaced with faith at which time their faith went to their feet: *“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.”*

There was no delay. The word *“hurried”* carries with it the idea of speed. It was no small matter for them to leave their sheep behind either since they could have lost their jobs by leaving them unattended.

The shepherds became messengers of the message they had just received.

Luke 2:17-18, *“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”*

With hearts filled with gratitude, these men broke out into praise.

Luke 2:20, *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”*

## **Slide 8**

### Conclusion

There are angels everywhere still doing God’s work today. It doesn’t matter whether we see them or not. What matters is that we receive God’s message. Not just receive, but respond to it.

Don’t be like Zechariah and allow your doubts to delay a decision. Did you know that angels are very curious about Christmas? In fact, they’ve studied salvation and are amazed by it.

1 Peter 1:12, *“Even angels long to look into these things.”*

Angels don't understand everything about redemption because they can't experience it, but my guess is that they're dumbfounded when people deny and doubt.

Are you uncertain but ready to surrender? Remember, Mary wasn't sure about everything, but she surrendered anyway.

Christmas must become personal. When you repent and receive all that Jesus has for you, Luke 15:10 tells us that *"there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents."*

The angels are ready to throw a party on your behalf, but you must first receive Jesus as your personal Savior.

Heaven's open now, but it won't stay that way forever. John 1:51, *"I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

At the heart of Christmas is a gift heralded by angels. But remember that like a present, it must be received, and like a gift it must be opened.

Joseph is a good model of someone who put feet his to faith. No matter how difficult it is, if God is telling you to do it, that's what you need to do.

Then, when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you must broadcast the good news. Have you ever noticed the middle letters in the word *"evangelism?"* They spell the word "angel."

We're called to believe and broadcast the good news, just like the shepherds communicated the Christmas story to all who would listen.

Today, we're the messengers of the manger story. Who can you point to the Savior this season?