

Title: ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD, LUKE 2:8 – 20
(Chatham, NJ; 12/24/17, AM) [Pc – Narrative Discussion; Double-Sided Coin Outline]

Theme: The story of the incarnation continues to inspire us because the hand of God is apparent throughout: dreams, angels, and unusual circumstances set about everyone talking.

Purpose: To inspire us that we might incorporate the Gospel story into our way of living.

Introduction:

1. The Christmas story cannot be improved or changed in any way to make it better.
2. That God became human (the Word became flesh) fascinates anyone willing to hear the retelling every year.
3. It is a story with a long shelf-life, and as the beginning of Christ's redemptive work, it carries personal meaning and hope for those who believe it.
4. Today, transport yourself to the world of angels and use your imaginations to enter their world and see their part in this grand story.
5. Think of them coming through a portal from another dimension: why shouldn't we believe that another spirit world exists?
6. They demonstrate the presence of God: they are his messengers (elsewhere his warriors).
7. To see the hand of God in the births of John and Jesus is to be on the road to faith.
8. So we also want to see this from the human perspective of those who experienced it.
9. Perhaps we have heard the story so many times that it has become ordinary though it should be anything but ordinary.

Directives from Heaven: Two Conceptions

- A. Gabriel came to Zechariah, Luke 1:11 – 19
 1. The angel identifies himself in verse 19
 2. What might it be like to be a messenger "who stands in the presence of God?"
 3. Remember the beginning of "It's a Wonderful Life"?
 4. This must be more like Revelation 4 where those around the throne prostrate themselves before God: not just a relic of a by-gone era, rather a reality of heaven
 5. What makes the story different from myths about the pagan gods?
 6. We have his name; he speaks to a specific person; he has come to a specific place (God's temple in Jerusalem) at a specific time.
 7. Zechariah struck with fear, 12
 8. John's birth is foretold: he brings an ancient prophecy to bear, Malachi 4:4-5.
 9. Despite Zechariah's doubts, he and Elizabeth become parents
- B. Gabriel also appears to Mary, Luke 1:26-28
 - He also brings news of a conception: one of a different sort, 35
 - He has Isaiah 14:7 in mind: the virgin will be with child
 - Once again the hand of God is at work
 - Like any of us encountering a being from another world, Mary is troubled and afraid, 29-30
 - Her child will be holy, the Son of God, 35
 - Hebrews 1:1-4 elaborates on who Jesus is
 - Let that stir your imagination

Human Reactions to the Births

- A. John's birth, 1:57-66
 - Her neighbors gathered for the occasion of his birth, 58
 - Her choice of a name caused some consternation, 59-63
 - This was unusual

- So was the miracle by which Zechariah was now cured of his inability to speak
 - Consider how each of these things sparked conversation, stirred the imagination, and created anticipation, 65-66
 - Wouldn't you have kept an eye on the boy if you lived in his town?
- B. Jesus' birth: note the time and place here as well, 2:1-4
- Another message from beyond by a nameless angel
 - His message: no fear, good news, a savior is born, and you can go see him now
 - Also a group of angels, 2:8-14
 - The curtain between heaven and earth was thrown open
 - Think about the greatest concert you have ever experienced: multiply by at least 100
 - This was a heavenly song, and thus not really much of a comparison: they never heard such voices or saw such a heavenly throng
 - More conversation ensues, 16-20; imagine their excitement
 - How would this have stirred everyone's imagination?
 - Add Simeon and Anna to the conversation when Jesus was circumcised, 38

Conclusions:

- a. Experience the angelic presence again. Does that stir your imagination?
- b. Participate in the conversation about Jesus that still takes place 2,000 years later.
- c. Their message was divinely appointed.
- d. John pointed to Jesus, and Jesus in John 11 pointed to "the resurrection and the life."
- e. A story of new beginnings: the birth of children, and the new birth that brings about new beginnings and redemption, John 3.
- f. Consider the story, accept it as your story, and live it anticipating your redemption and your resurrection.