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Christmas Eve, 2:00 pm
#DoNotBeAfraid

Prelude

Away in a Manger

Welcome—Greetings! Whether you are a regular attender, this is your first time or your first time back in a while, you are welcome here! For the truth this day is that God has invited us all to new birth and that makes us all the same—humans on a life path who yearn for the messages of God, bringing more hope, more peace, more joy, and more love to our lives. Let this be a moment of knowing these can be yours for you are loved by God! Today, we gather to hear the story of Jesus’ birth told in scripture and poem and song. Let us worship.

Gathering—Over the last four weeks, we have heard of the stories of angel appearances heralding incredible news of the birth of a savior. They didn’t appear to kings and rulers or courts or the privileged of society. They came to an old and barren couple, a young girl barely a woman, a simple and humble man betrothed to her, and finally, to lowly shepherds on a hillside. They came to people like you and me. God worked through ordinary people and did extraordinary things. And so it is that God works through us every time we offer messages of hope, peace, joy, and love to an anxious world. We are called to fly in the face of fear—to be angels among us.

Gathering Carol

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, #185

We Light Our Advent Wreath

There are angels among us that may not meet the eye. There are messages of light coming from a choir on high, but don’t just look up; for the way God works is to plant more light right here on earth just like it was with Jesus’ birth.

Today, as we light the Christ candle, we commit our lives this Christmas Eve to bringing more light to this hurting world. With this light we proclaim the message of the angels, “Do Not Be Afraid.”

Advent Wreath Prayer— Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of love this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more light in the midst of fear. Amen.

***Candlelight Carol* by John Rutter**

How do you capture the wind on the water?
How do you count all the stars in the sky?
How can you measure the love of a mother?
Or how can you write down a baby's first cry?

Candlelight, angel light, firelight and star-glow
Shine on his cradle 'til breaking of dawn
Gloria, gloria in excelsis Deo!
Angels are singing "The Christ child is born"

Shepherds and wise men will kneel and adore him
Seraphim 'round him, their vigil will keep
Nations proclaim him their Lord and their savior
But Mary will hold him and sing him to sleep...

Find him in Bethlehem laid in a manger
Christ our redeemer, asleep in the hay
Godhead incarnate and hope of salvation
A child with his mother that first Christmas Day

Candlelight, angel light, firelight and star-glow
Shine on his cradle 'til breaking of dawn
Gloria, gloria in excelsis Deo!
Angels are singing "The Christ child is born"¹

¹ John Rutter, “Candlelight Carol” (London: Oxford University Press, 1985). Used by permission of Hinshaw Music, Inc., in *Imaging the Word*, Vol 2.

A Christmas Prayer—Incarnate Christ, be born in us this Christmas! May our wills be as Mary’s, saying “yes” to your ways; our minds as Joseph’s, open to your unfolding revelation. May our voices be as the angels’, joyfully proclaiming Good News; our knees as the animals’, quietly bent in adoration. May our feet be as the shepherds’, running eagerly to find you; our hands as the wise men’s, offering up all that we have. May our hearts be as the manger, poor yet containing heaven’s greatest treasure; our lives as the stable, hallowed and expanded by your presence. Incarnate Christ, be born in us again this Christmas!²

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

We Hear God’s Word

Narrator: This Advent we’ve focused the angelic encounters of the Christmas story. We’ve heard the Good News of “do not be afraid” proclaimed as the angels came to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds. On this holiest of nights, we hear those messages proclaimed again.

ZECHARIAH

This is the story according to the messengers of God, present then and present now. We remember the angel appearance to Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth and cousin to Mary, foretelling the birth of their son, John:

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

And so it was! Elizabeth, even in her old age, was finally pregnant with John who would prepare a way for Jesus’ teachings many years later.

² Adapted from “Nativity,” Pat Bennett in *Hay & Stardust*, Ed. Ruth Burgess, ©2007 Wild Goose Publications, p. 41.

Carol

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, #153

MARY

Six months later in Nazareth, a city in the rural province of Galilee, the heavenly messenger Gabriel made another appearance. This time the messenger was sent by God to meet with a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David himself. The messenger entered her home and said:

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end... “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

At first perplexed by this, Mary resolved to offer herself as the vessel through which more love was born into the world.

Carol

To a Maid Whose Name was Mary, #171

JOSEPH

Mary’s response to God’s call for her life was, “So be it; I am ready according to your word,” but Joseph, her fiancé, needed some encouragement too, for becoming pregnant before their marriage was a serious offense in the eyes of the community. A message was needed:

In a dream, an angel of the Lord said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this takes place to fulfill what has been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

And so Joseph stood by her and she grew with the presence of God within her.

Carol

O Little Town of Bethlehem, #180

SHEPHERDS

The story continues: “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angels said to them:

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!

“To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord!

“This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host. And the angels of God praised God... Today, YOU, the congregation gathered here, are the multitude of messengers who have gathered this day to proclaim this Good News! Messengers of our congregation, you are invited to join us in proclaiming the Good News. Repeat after me:

Congregation: “Glory to God in the highest heaven,/ and on earth, peace and goodwill/ among all people!” (Thank you congregation.)

Yes, we can all be messengers of God and we give thanks this night that God has given us the wings of love to help us carry this message. ...

When the angels had left them the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Carol

Angels From the Realms of Glory, #189

First Coming by Madeleine L'Engle

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.³

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—In Jesus Christ, we received the greatest gift of God's love born into this world, into our lives, into our hearts. In response to that holiest, most sacred gift, we bring our gifts that God might use them to plant more love right here on earth.

Doxology

We Give Thanks—God of boundless love, we offer these gifts so that they may be transformed into your good news for the sake of the world. Amen.

Carol

Angels We Have Heard on High, #188

We Share the Light of Christ

As you receive the candlelight, hear these words from Isaiah 9: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy...For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests

³ Madeleine L'Engle, "A First Coming," in *A Cry Like a Bell* (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1987), 57. Revised by Jann Cather Weaver. Use by permission in *Imaging the Word*, Vol 1.

upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Hymn

Silent Night, #186

Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright
‘Round yon virgin mother and child; holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

“Nativity Prayer” by Bernard of Clairvaux

You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries. Amen.⁴

Benediction— Take a look around you. Indeed, there are angels among us. Precious agents of God’s love bringing the message of life and hope and peace and joy to all inhabitants of this earth. Why is Christmas Eve so special? Because candlelight lets us see our true nature. God’s light shines upon us—each one of us—alighting anew the possibility that we can carry this message through the witness of our lives each and every day. I invite you to face the Christ candle and receive this blessing:

May the wisdom of the wonderful counselor guide you, the angels of the Lord of hosts guard you, the strength of the mighty God uphold you, the love of the everlasting Creator enfold you, the joy of the Prince of Peace be yours, this Christmastide and forever. Amen.>`

Postlude

Gesù, Bambino

Worship Notes: ©worshipdesignstudio.com/angels.

⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, in *The HarperCollins Book of Prayers: A Treasury of Prayers through the Ages*, compiled by Robert Vann de Weyer (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), 64, in *Imaging the Word*, Vol. 2.