

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA December 19, 2010

Luke 2:8-14

Christmas Decorations: Angels

They remind us about:

1. *Proclamations of salvation*
2. *Promises of preservation*

Hymns: “Come To Us, Emmanuel” –
707 – Distribution: “Gathered Round Your
Table,” 24 – 38 (vv. 1-4)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Luke 2:8-14 –

⁸ *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

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

In recent years, people have had a fascination with angels. Many have felt that these creatures that God truly created had a hand in some part of their life – and perhaps rightly so.

Many, however, have had misconceptions about the angels:

- Many people think that angels always appeared with wings. Angels appeared to people in Scripture as simple young men at times.
- Many people think that angels that had wings had two of them. A main rank of

angels that appear in Isaiah (seraphim) have six wings, not two.

- Some people think that angels go through a process to “get their wings,” probably made famous by a Christmas movie. We don’t hear about such an “education process” for the angels.
- Some people think that angels are baby-like creatures with wings. Angels are actually called God’s “mighty” ones in Scripture.
- Some people think that believers become angels after they die. Although we will be like the angels in some ways, we won’t “become an angel.”

Today we’re continuing a short sermon series on Christian Christmas decorations. Since we see many angels around us this time of year and since there are many misconceptions about angels, it’s good for us to briefly discuss the Christmas angels today. **Let’s take a look at the Christmas angels we see around us at this time of year. Why are they used as a decoration? And what should they remind us of? We will learn two things about them.**

1 – We read in Luke 2: “*There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”* An angel appeared to the shepherds outside of quiet Bethlehem that first Christmas and had quite a proclamation to make.

It shouldn’t surprise us that God chose to proclaim news through the voice of an angel. He chose to do this many times in Scripture. Do you remember some?

- The Lord appeared to Abraham with two angels, proclaiming to him the important news that a year from that time his wife Sarah would bear a son to carry on the line of the Savior. (*Genesis 18*)
- An angel appeared to Daniel in the Old Testament, proclaiming things that would happen until the end of time. (*Daniel 8*)
- An angel appeared to old Zechariah, proclaiming that he and his barren wife

Elizabeth would have a son, John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of Christ. (*Luke 1*)

- The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and also to Joseph, proclaiming that Mary would become pregnant with the Son of God by a miracle of the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 1 and Luke 1*)

Angels proclaimed some pretty important things in many places of Scripture!

Often the appearance of an angel caused people to be extremely afraid. Great fear and panic were felt! Oftentimes, the cute angel figures we see around Christmastime can lead us to forget that fact. If an angel would appear to you as the angel who burst out of the night sky before the shepherds, you and I, dear friends, would be shaking severely from righteous fear!

Why? Why were people afraid at seeing an angel? Matthew 18:10 says, “*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.*” Angels are in the presence of God, who is bright, glorious, and holy. And they are holy themselves. We are mortal sinners who sin daily and don’t even understand how corrupt and sinful we are. We don’t deserve to have God or even his messenger stand before us!

Fear in general is a result of sin. Just consider all of life’s situations which cause our weak, sinful hearts to give way to fear. How often – as if we could do anything to change things – don’t we fear falling victim to accidents, car wrecks, floods, or sickness? How often – as if our presence could prevent anything – don’t we fear for the lives of those whom we love and demand that they take all sorts of eccentric precautions for safety? Don’t misunderstand. A certain amount of caution keeps us from doing dumb things. But all too often we are gripped with fear and allow ourselves to become worry warts. Fear is a result of sin.

For those who defy God’s plan, they should be afraid of him and of his angels! An often overlooked fact is that God even uses angels to exact his judgment on sinners. When God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after the Fall into sin, we hear that he placed two cherubim (angels) at the entrance along with a flaming sword to guard the way back to the Tree of Life. We hear about Judgment Day in Matthew 13: “*This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” This is what we deserve by nature!

Yet what is the first thing this angel tells the shepherds? “*Do not be afraid. I bring you 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 is the first thing that Christmas angels remind us of:**

Proclamations of salvation are being announced!

A Savior has been born! He is Christ the Lord. Even though we were dead in our sins and worthy of nothing in God’s sight except punishment and hell, he chose to love you enough to send the Savior born that first Christmas. This proclamation made by the Christmas angel is made looking ahead to a cross where this God-man would suffer and die for our sins. In fact, we can’t understand the full impact of the angel’s proclamation unless we remember Calvary’s cross.

Looking even farther ahead in God’s plan, we see another proclamation made by an angel. Luke 24 tells us, “*Suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words.”* Angels also made the wonderful proclamation that the Savior of the world had risen victoriously after paying for the sin of the world with his suffering and death. **Angels remind us that proclamations of salvation are being made. When we see an angel in Christmas decorations we can rejoice that this message is for us also!**

An interesting feature with many Christmas angels is that often they have a trumpet in their mouths. The angel picture in your sermon notes has one of these. This reminds us even more about the nature of what they do – Trumpet news! Proclaim the news of salvation in Christ!

This also reminds us that angels are not the only ones who proclaim good news. You are also supposed to be an “angel” in the sense of a messenger. You might think, “Me, an angel? I’d never have imagined I should be like an angel.” But we do have a message to trumpet to the world also. We have the privilege of witnessing as to the real meaning of what Christmas is about. Hopefully, people can see it in our lives, in our words, in our cards, and in our decorations. To whom will you be an “angel” to this Christmas?

2 – Angels have something else they remind us of also. What else can you think of when you see them in Christmas decorations? **They remind us of future promises of God that are yet to come.** Let’s

recount a few other things that the Bible teaches us about angels:

- *“Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, ‘I will set up my camp’... When the servant of (Elisha) got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh, my lord, what shall we do?’ the servant asked. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, ‘O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.’ 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.” (2 Kings 6)*

God, although he does not need angels, graciously uses them to protect us and keep us safe from dangers. Someone once said that if toddlers didn’t have angels watching over them, no one would make it to age 3! The presence of angel decorations can serve to remind us of this great promise of God, as he richly and daily cares for us.

- *“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’ ” (Acts 1)*

What did God have his holy angels proclaim to the disciples when Jesus ascended into heaven? They promised that Jesus would surely return to this earth. He would not abandon his Church, but he will come back for us! Angel decorations can help us remember this promise.

- Jesus said in Matthew 24, *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”*

Jesus promises that his powerful angels will announce his second coming and will gather his people on Judgment Day. If the buzzer goes off today and God brings this world to an end, how will you know where to go? Look for an angel! Angel decorations can help us remember to be ready for Jesus' second coming.

- *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... They cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’ ” (Revelation 7)*

We also have the promise of God that we will rejoice in heaven forever with the angels. He has prepared the perfect place of bliss for us to enjoy with them!

Christmas angels can remind us of the promises of God’s preservation until we are home with him in heaven.

These promises would have been very comforting to early Christians who endured persecution and death for their faith. In trying times, they could remember how God promised to protect them, be with them, and return for them one day. They could remember their place in heaven with the angels.

We also can find much comfort in these promises today. Perhaps we need to hear these wonderful promises of God this Christmas. Perhaps this Christmas in your life doesn’t seem like it will be quite as “merry” as in years past. Perhaps:

- There are loved ones who won’t celebrate this Christmas with you in this life this year
- Sickness and physical problems are weighing you down, or weighing someone down that you love
- Your marriage situation or your boyfriend situation is in a shambles at this time

- Your financial situation isn't as rosy as it has been in Christmases past

In the midst of situations like this, we have promises of God which angels can remind us of, promises that he still will keep. Look forward to the ones that we listed and be assured God will keep them!

There is much more that we could say today. The topic of angels is a large one. In fact, the Bible study on angels that I've done in the past is a 4-week Bible series, in one-hour lessons. But what can we say today in a brief sermon on the Christmas angels? **What can you be reminded of?**

- 1. Proclamations – Proclamations of salvation that have been made**
- 2. Promises – Promises of God's preservation and protection until you are in your heavenly home**

As you see angels this Christmas, thank the Lord for them. And more importantly, thank the Lord for the messages he brings through them! Amen.