

## ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD...?

**IT IS CHRISTMAS EVE AND FOR MANY THE THOUGHT FRONT AND CENTER IS GIFTS!** OF COURSE FOR MANY TONIGHT AND TOMORROW, FOOD IS QUITE IMPORTANT IN THE MINDS OF THE PREPARER AND THE PARTAKERS. AND SOME MAY BE THINKING ABOUT A SHORT TRIP TOMORROW MORNING TO FAMILY OR FRIENDS.

TONIGHT FOR THIS TIME TOGETHER I WOULD LIKE YOU **TO FOCUS ON ANGELS, AFTER ALL THEY PLAYED QUITE A PART IN THIS CHRISTMAS STORY.** IT IS THE REASON, THIS CHRISTMAS STORY, WHY WE ARE HERE. NOW THE REASON FOR COMING MAY NOT BE THE SAME, BUT WE ARE HERE AND WE ARE CELEBRATING IN SONG AND WORD.

**LOVE OF FAMILY IS A BIG PART OF WHY WE HAVE COME TOGETHER THIS NIGHT.** THERE IS SOMETHING HERE TONIGHT THAT WE CAN'T TOUCH OR EVEN MEASURE, BUT WE KNOW IT'S HERE AND **THAT "THING" IS LOVE.** WE CAN'T MEASURE IT BECAUSE IT IS EVER CHANGING AND SHOWS ITSELF IN THE MOST DIFFICULT TIMES AND A TIME LIKE TONIGHT, BOTH VERY DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF THE SAME THING – **LOVE.** THIS IS WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT, NO, **THAT IS CHRISTMAS!!!!**

**GOD SO LOVED US HE SENT HIS SON THIS NIGHT IN THE FORM OF A BABY.** THAT BABY GREW AND HAD A MINISTRY OF LOVE AND COMPASSION. THEN THAT BABY WHO HAD BECOME A MAN TOOK ON EVERYTHING WE HAVE DONE WRONG, ARE DOING WRONG, AND WILL DO WRONG AND DIED ON THE CROSS. GOD SENT HIM BECAUSE OF LOVE, AND IN LOVE JESUS FOLLOWED THE FATHER'S WILL AND JESUS MADE RIGHT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER. THIS IS WHAT I MEAN ABOUT CHRISTMAS BEING LOVE. THAT IS THE STORY TONIGHT AND WILL BE TOMORROW AND THE NEXT DAY AND THE NEXT!

I SAID EARLIER THAT THE ANGELS WERE A BIG PART OF THIS LOVE STORY CALLED CHRISTMAS. **THEY HAVE BEEN GOD'S MESSENGERS, WHICH IS THE MEANING OF THE WORD ANGEL.** SINCE THE TIME IN GENESIS WHEN ONE APPEARED TO GUARD THE WAY TO THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN. **THE BIBLE MENTIONS ANGELS NEARLY 300 TIMES** BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS. THEIR FINAL MENTION IS IN REVELATIONS WHERE AGAIN ANGELS PLAY A BIG PART IN THAT STORY.

WE USUALLY DO NOT THINK THE CHRISTMAS STORY COMING FROM ALL THE WAY BACK EARLY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. BUT **AN ANGEL PROMISED ABRAHAM THAT IN HIS SEED WOULD BE A BLESSING TO ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH.** MEANING THE MESSIAH WOULD COME FROM HIS FAMILY LINEAGE.

IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE WHERE THE MOST COMPLETE ACCOUNT OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS TO BE FOUND IS WHERE THE FIRST ANGEL OF THE STORY APPEARS. **GABRIEL APPEARS TO ZACHARIAS IN THE TEMPLE TO BRING THE NEWS OF THE BIRTH TO HIS WIFE AND HIM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.**

**NOW GABRIEL IS A BUSY ANGEL BECAUSE SIX MONTHS LATER HE APPEARS TO MARY. IT IS HIS JOB TO EXPLAIN TO MARY THAT SHE WILL BE WITH CHILD AND HIS NAME SHALL BE JESUS, THE SON OF GOD. NOW MARY'S ONLY ANSWER TO ALL THIS IS "HOW CAN THIS BE I AM A VIRGIN?" GABRIEL GOES ON TO EXPLAIN THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THAT HER COUSIN ELIZABETH IS WITH CHILD. MARY, NOW THAT IT HAS BEEN EXPLAINED TO HER REPLIES "behold the bond servant of the lord be it done according to your word". IMAGINE MARY HAS JUST BEEN VISITED BY AN ANGEL AND SHE WILL CONCEIVE IN AN UNUSUAL WAY AND BE THE MOTHER OF THE SON OF GOD! IN READING THE ACCOUNTS OF ANGELS WITH THE PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE THE ANGELS MUST HAVE A VERY POWERFUL WAY WITH WORDS.**

**THE NEXT ANGEL TO VISIT IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS UNNAMED AND COMES TO JOSEPH, WHO IS ENGAGED TO MARY. THE ANGEL EXPLAINS TO JOSEPH EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT AND HE WILL HAVE A SON THAT WILL FULFILL THE PROPHECY OF A MESSIAH. JOSEPH RISES AND DID AS THE ANGEL HAD TOLD HIM. AGAIN, AN ANGEL MUST HAVE HAD A POWERFUL WAY WITH WORDS.**

THE MOST WELL KNOWN VISIT OF AN ANGEL IS ON THE NIGHT OF JESUS' BIRTH. **AN ANGEL APPEARED TO THE SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELDS TENDING THEIR FLOCKS. AN ANGEL TELLS THE GOOD NEWS OF A SAVIOR BORN IN BETHLEHEM.** SHORTLY AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT, A MULTITUDE OF THE **HEAVENLY HOST** APPEAR PRAISING GOD AND SAYING "*glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased*"

WE STOP NOWADAYS TO LOOK AT SUNSETS, RAINBOWS AND NORTHERN LIGHTS, BUT CAN YOU BEGIN TO IMAGINE SUCH A SIGHT TO THESE SHEPHERDS, THE OUTCASTS OF SOCIETY? **AFTER THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN TO JESUS AN ANGEL APPEARS TO THEM IN A DREAM AND WARNS THEM TO TAKE ANOTHER ROUTE** BACK TO THEIR COUNTRY AND NOT GO BACK TO HEROD. ONCE AGAIN THE PEOPLE VISITED BY THE ANGEL FOLLOW HIS WORDS.

THE LAST ANGEL TO VISIT COMES SOON AFTER THE WISE MEN HAD LEFT. **THE ANGEL CAME TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM AND TOLD HIM "arise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt".** THEN AFTER HEROD'S DEATH AN **ANGEL COMES AGAIN TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM TELLING HIM TO RETURN TO ISRAEL FOR NOW IT IS SAFE.**

IN THE CASE OF MARY AND JOSEPH, **OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD DELIVERED THROUGH AN ANGEL WAS KEY TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY.** BOTH HEARD THE ANGEL AND BECAME AN ACTIVE PART OF GOD'S PLAN. **THIS NIGHT OF ALL NIGHTS WE CAN ASK "HAVE I HEARD AN ANGEL?" MANY WILL SAY "WHY AND WHERE WOULD AN ANGEL COME TODAY, THERE IS NO BIRTH OF A SAVIOR TO ANNOUNCE?"** SINCE THE BIRTH OF JESUS, EVERY DAY IS A REBIRTH OF HIM. JESUS IS BORN ANEW IN OUR HEARTS EVERY SINGLE DAY OF OUR LIVES!!!

**WHY WOULDN'T ANGELS COME TO US TODAY?** THINK OF JESUS' TIME, ISRAEL WAS OCCUPIED BY THE ROMANS, POLITICS WERE A "MIXED BAG", AND PEOPLE WERE DOWN BY THE CONDITIONS

AROUND THEM AND IN THEIR OWN LIVES. **REALLY, THE WORLD IS NOT MUCH DIFFERENT THAN IT WAS IN JESUS' DAY.** THE PEOPLE OF HIS DAY DIDN'T HAVE MUCH, AND WERE SPIRITUALLY LACKING, RELIGION HAD BECOME A ROUTINE. TODAY, MAYBE WE HAVE "MORE", BUT MANY ARE LACKING MEANING YET THEY RUN AFTER THIS AND RUN AFTER THAT, AND REMAINED UNSATISFIED, EVEN THOSE WHO MAY COME THROUGH THE DOORS OF A CHURCH. IT IS OUR TASK TO BE THE MESSENGER TO THOSE AROUND US.

**ANGELS, GOD'S MESSENGERS, ARE NEEDED TODAY AS MUCH OR EVEN MORE.** WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF THEIR PRESENCE AND THEIR MESSAGE TO US. EACH ONE OF US WAS CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE AND WE ARE A PART OF GOD'S PLANS AS MUCH AS MARY, JOSEPH OR THE SHEPHERDS. YOU ARE THE MESSAGE IN THE WAY YOU LIVE AND LOVE YOUR LIFE. YOUR WORDS CAN LIFT THE HEAVIEST BURDEN IN ANOTHER'S LIFE.

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD....ONLY IF WE ARE READY TO LISTEN. HERE IS A HUMOROUS STORY, BUT THERE IS MUCH TRUTH IN IT. There's conversation in the Peanuts comic strip between Peppermint Patty and her friend Marcie. They are walking to school and Peppermint Patty says, "I'm going to ask the teacher if I can be Mary in the Christmas play this year." Marcie answers, "She already asked me, sir." Patty continues, "I think I'll be great in the part." Marcie says again, "She asked me yesterday." Ignoring her, Patty declares, "I really like the part where the angel Gabriel talks to me." Exasperated, Marcie says, "Why would Gabriel talk to you? You never listen!"

THE MESSAGES OF THE ANGELS COME FROM THE HEART OF GOD FOR AS THE BIBLE SAYS "GOD IS LOVE". TO HEAR THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS, LOVE, FROM THE ANGELS IS TO BE A PART OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY. **THIS IS THE MESSAGE THE ANGELS CONTINUE TO BRING TO US, WHERE WILL WE HEAR THE MESSAGE NEXT?**

AMEN.