



The Angels of Christmas

Hearing God's Voice in Advent
Week 3





Opening Prayer

Lord, we have all experienced feelings of betrayal, disappointment with others, and anger. We have all experienced times of doubt and confusion, when we don't know what you want us to do. Remind us this week, and every week, that you are always with us and that you continually place your messengers in our midst. Help us to be awake to the presence and attentive to their message. And help us to be like Joseph, who believed what seemed unbelievable and acted decisively in response to your angels. Amen.



What Matters Most

God reaches out to us through messengers, whether they're heaven or purely human, complete strangers or people we know well. "God is trying to tell you something!"

The angels of Christmas came to deliver important messages to people who were hoping for God to intervene in a mighty way, both in the fears and darkness of their personal lives and in their world.

Review of Last Week

- ★ Mary & Gabriel - let it be
- ★ Mary & Elizabeth - sanctuary
- ★ Where do you believe God may have been at work to send a message to which you have not yet responded?
- ★ How will you be more willing, in response to message from God, to step out with the faith of Mary and say, "Let it be"?

★

★



Acting on the Unbelievable



An Angel of the Lord & Joseph



Gospel of Matthew

- ★ What was the purpose of Matthew?
- ★ How does Matthew start?
- ★ What do we know about Joseph from the Bible?





Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to **public disgrace**, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 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.'



Matthew 1:18-25

All this took place to fulfil what had 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.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus."



Three Words

★ **Betrayal**

- ★ Remember a time when you have been betrayed.
- ★ What would you have done in Joseph's place? Why?

★ **Disgrace**

- ★ How do you define "public disgrace?" What does it mean to make a public example of someone?
- ★ How does the modern idea of "cancel culture" contribute to your understanding of Joseph's situation?

★ **Mercy**

- ★ Jesus tells the Pharisees to go and study what "God desires mercy and not sacrifice" means (Hosea 6:6). What does it mean to you?



Mercy and Sacrifice

- ★ Matthew's Gospel quotes Hosea 6:6 twice: *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.*
- ★ How does Joseph's action add insight to these words?
- ★ How does Joseph's merciful attitude toward Mary's pregnancy reflect attitudes Jesus will later show toward others?
- ★ What do the responses of Jesus' earthly parents suggest to you about the kind of household in which Jesus was raised?





But the Angels Aren't Done Yet...

Matthew 2:13-14

Now after they had left, **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph** in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt...



But the Angels Aren't Done Yet...

Matthew 2:19-22

When Herod died, **an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt** and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And **after being warned in a dream**, he went away to the district of Galilee.



But the Angels Aren't Done Yet...

- ★ What do you notice about Joseph's response to all the angelic visits?
- ★ How do we attune ourselves for what God is asking us to do?
- ★ How do we protect what the Christ Child represents for the world?
- ★ Are we doing all that we can to protect that which has been (metaphorically) born to us?



Genesis 32:9-12, 22-24, 26-30

And Jacob said, 'O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, "Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good", I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. Yet you have said, "I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number." '



Genesis 32:9-12, 22-24, 26-30

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans,* and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'



Hosea 12:4

He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor; he met him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him.

Acting in Response to Angels

- ★ Jacob's second encounter with God/heavenly being is life-changing. How have you wrestled with God?
- ★ How does Jacob's experience help you better understand the faith and response of Joseph to the message of the angels? How does it help you consider your own response to messages from God?
- ★ When have you experienced God's presence in an unusual way? Did this encounter leave you questioning whether the experience was real?
- ★ Where in this coming week will you be more attentive to the possibility that God is trying to communicate with us?

Angels Gather Among Us





Closing Questions

- ★ In the coming week, how will you prepare yourself to receive the Christ Child?
- ★ In the past week, where have you had a possible “angel sighting”? How have you been a possible “angel sighting”?



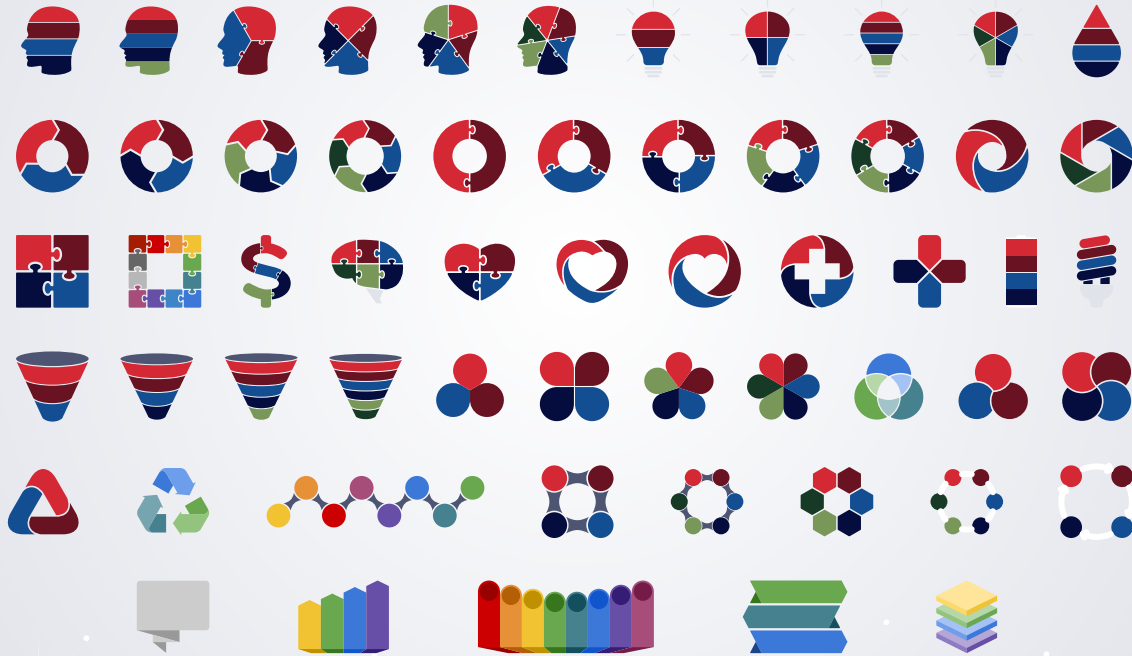
Closing Prayer

O God, we long for you to come to us, to be with us, and to speak to us. But we don't always recognize the occasions when you are sending your messengers to us, and we may find it easy to do nothing rather than act in faith on the word you give to us. Help us to be inspired by the example of your servant, Joseph, who had the faith to believe and to act without hesitation, even when the message from your angels seemed unbelievable. Amen.



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01

Ho ho ho

Let's start with the first set of slides