

Series: The Characters of Christmas
Title: Angels: Messengers of Good News
Text: Luke 1: 26-37
Key Word: Characteristics
Proposition: Everyone can recognize God's messengers by observing the following characteristics.

It is hard to imagine that we are twenty- four days away from celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus. If we would ask a child what he loves about Christmas, he would probably say that he loves the presents. One day, my daughter, Kelsey told Melinda that she loves two things about Christmas, first: it is Jesus' birthday; second, the outside Christmas lights. Others may love the music or the lighting of candles or the food. I love the characters around Christmas, like the characters who gather at our family Christmas events. There are parents and In-laws, Aunts and Uncles, Sisters and Brother-in laws, nieces and nephews, gathering around a Christmas tree, exchanging gifts after a delicious meal. Like all families, we have many different personalities with different interests and perspectives. During the year, we may have had a few hang-up or hic-ups, a few hurts and challenges or received some bad news during the year, but each year we gather to remember and reclaim God's love in Jesus. Many times we hear stories of Good News.

In preparation for Christmas, we are going to revisit the Characters of the first Christmas. We hope to see that most are not any different from the characters at our family Christmas events. We hope to observe how they received and pass forward God's precious gift.

Luke reveals that angels were the one of the first characters introduced at the Christmas event. The Bible describes angels as spiritual representatives between God and humans. They are described as created beings, superior to humans in power and knowledge. Some angels serve God continually as attendants around his throne, offering continual praise. Others are messengers. In fact, in biblical languages, the word “angel” means either divine or human messenger. They communicate God’s will to people. Genesis reveals that an angel found Hagar in the wilderness. (Gen. 16:7) An angel announces to Gideon that he is to save his people. (Judges 6:11-22) The angel Gabriel instructs Daniel. (Dan., 8:16) The Psalmist depicts angels as protectors, and guides saying, “*He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.*” (Ps. 91) An angel reassured Jacob. (Gen. 28:12) An angel fed Elijah in the wilderness. (I Kings 19:5-11) In Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, an angel revealed secrets about the future through dreams and visions.

The distinction of good and bad angels appears in the Bible. Their conflict is waged on earth between the superior Kingdom of God and the inferior Kingdom of the Evil One.

In the New Testament, angels have the privilege to announce to Zachariah and Mary the coming of the Savior. Angels informed the shepherds of its fulfillment with a song of praise. Angels attended to King Jesus while he was in the wilderness tempted by Satan. Angels attended Jesus at the Empty Tomb. Revelation describes angles playing a dominant role in world history and the events at the end of days.

There are those who don't believe in angels. That's all right; there's nothing that says a person has to believe in angels in order to be a Christian. I myself believe in angels, and I foresee the day will come when you too will believe. The Bible mentions angels more than 300 times, and that's good enough for me. Now, I want to make clear that I don't believe in angels the way most people picture them. They're not chubby little cherubs going around with no clothes on. Scripture does portray them as great majestic creatures with vast wings. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures say that there are eight different kinds of angels. Remember that angels are spiritual beings, not material, physical beings such as we are. It was their nature as spiritual beings that gave them the privilege to announce Mary's and Elizabeth's role in the first Christmas. They also joyously sang in shepherd's fields.

They came into being before all physical things were created. They knew God's Son from the very beginning. Before this planet was created, they knew the only begotten Son of God. They saw him in all of his power and in all of his glory, and they knew the promise that one day he would come here. At long last, there came that moment when the Infinite became definite, when Christ left heaven and came to earth. Imagine their joy, wonderment, and amazement when they saw the Holy Spirit swoop down upon that little town called Bethlehem, and there with a stable the glorious Son became flesh. No wonder they sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven."

The question then is how can we recognize such holy messengers today? Zechariah and Mary's encounters give us some clues to some characteristics of messengers of Good News. **First, messengers of Good News calm our fears.** Zechariah was gripped by fear and Mary was troubled greatly. Immediately, the angel responded, "*Do not be afraid.*" As each was standing in a holy presence fear gripped them like a cold winter wind. Maybe they were afraid of what was going to be asked of them.

The shepherds were terrified when the angel of the Lord appeared with the glory of the Lord shining all around them. Again, the angel said, "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.*" (Luke 2:10) God's messengers calm our fears, offering peace in the midst of confusion.

Psychologists have identified all kinds of fear. For example there is the fear of crowds and darkness. Some folks fear being looked at by other people. Others fear failure. Others are afraid of being alone or of marriage. Some are afraid of poverty or responsibility. Others fear difficult conversations. Some are even afraid of God. What fear grips you? What troubles you? Where do you need to hear, "*Do not be afraid?*"

Second, messengers of Good News affirm our purpose. Zechariah was a married, but childless priest serving in the temple. He and his wife were afraid that they would be expelled from the church because they were a childless clergy family. Childlessness was also grounds for divorce. Zechariah and Elizabeth were on the

verse of losing the central purposes of their lives: their place in the family of faith and their marriage.

The Angel told Zechariah that God had heard his prayer, giving him the reason for living: to be the father of the man who would call people back to the Lord.

Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, a Jewish carpenter. She and Joseph had yet to discover their purpose in life. The angel affirmed Mary's favor with the Lord and revealed God's purpose for her life: to be the mother of the Son of the Most High God.

Just like Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, you were made for a reason. Your life has profound meaning! When we listen and yield to God's messenger of Good News, we discover His purposes for our lives. Paul wrote in Romans 12, "*The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us.*"

My friends, you are who you are for a reason. You are part of God's ultimate plan! You have found favor in the sight of God! Not because of what you have done, but because of who you are. You are a precious design, called God's special man, God's special woman. God brings you Good News! Claim His purpose!

Third, Messengers of Good News strengthen our faith. We understand Zechariah doubt in God's answer to his prayer. He had faithfully served God for many years. His prayers were left unanswered. Elizabeth and he were too old to have children. I suspect that they had stopped asking for a child. He simply doubted

his ability to father a child. His “Good News” was too good to be true.

Unfortunately, he paid a price for his doubt...silence for 9 months. “What is the “Good News” that is too good to be true in your life? Remember physical limitations do not limit God’s power.

Even though she had found favor from the Lord, Mary had doubt as well, “*How can this be since I am a virgin?*” Perhaps she doubted that God could use her. Perhaps she had reservations in God’s ability or willingness to see her through impending difficulty. Perhaps she questioned God’s miraculous power to make a virgin conceive. Both Zechariah and Mary heard the Lord say through his messenger, “*Nothing is Impossible with God!*” One’s lack of experience, ability or education does not make one an unlikely witness of the Good News. Where are you hearing God’s messenger say to you, “Nothing is impossible with God!”

Messengers of Good News calm our fears, affirm our purpose, and strengthen our faith. A.W. Tozer, wrote, “Anything God has ever done, he can do now. Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do here. Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for you.”