

Matthew 1:18-21
Angels and Dreams
Joseph Series Week 3
Sunday December 17th, 2017

Angels and dreams are very much a part of the Nativity Story. The angel Gabriel spoke to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and told him that he and his wife were to have John. The same angel Gabriel spoke to Mary and told her “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”

Angels spoke to the Shepherds in the field and said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

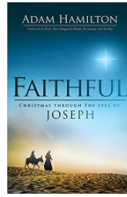
This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

And most importantly for us today an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and told him, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

The name Jesus means “God Saves”, so when the angel told Joseph to name Jesus, “Jesus,” he was telling him to adopt Jesus so he would be in the lineage of David. The name given to Jesus would also foretell his purpose and destiny.

Today is the 3rd in a 5 part series on “Joseph the forgotten man in the Nativity story.” It is inspired by the book by Rev. Adam Hamilton called “Faithful Christmas through the Eyes of Joseph.”



Rev. Hamilton is a UM minister of the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, which is the largest UMC in the United States.

Angels are messengers of God. In fact that is what the word “Angel” means. We see this again and again in the stories of Jesus’ birth angels bringing to Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and others messages from God.

Now a bit about angels, they are often portrayed as beings with wings. Some feel this comes from the description of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2, **“Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces,**

with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.



Or the “Four Living Creatures” that are described in the same manner in Revelation 4:8.

Angels are portrayed in most drawings, paintings, stories and movies as having wings, but angels in the Bible they are mostly described as looking like human beings. It is the other heavenly spiritual beings that have wings, seraphim, cherubim etc.



In the Old Testament we have the story of the three visitors (angels) to Abram who told him his wife would bear a child. We have Jacob wrestling with an angel of God, which is how the Hebrews received the name “Israel”, which means “He who wrestles with God.”



Now when we die we don't become angels. We are still human beings with human spirits awaiting the Resurrection of the Dead when we will receive our new bodies. Jesus said we would be “like angels”, not that we would be angels. Angels are a type of spiritual being that God uses as a messenger.

Angels are still present and at work in the world. I want to tell you a story from one of our members. She told about an experience while on vacation in Wyoming. She and her husband were towing a trailer with a truck and had stopped in front of her cousin's house. She wrote, *“A white pickup passed the camper and parked in front of the truck. A Handsome cowboy got out and came down the sidewalk toward me. When he got to me we said, “Hi” to each other and talked a minute.*

I said I was visiting my cousin and getting the camper ready. He said he was also visiting his cousin down the street. Then he said, “Before you go up the mountain, you need to have that wheel looked at.” He said it again during our conversation, emphasizing it. He then turned around and went back to his truck and drove away.

How did he see the problem when he was on the street side of the camper and the problem was on the sidewalk side? Dale was inside the house and saw the cowboy talking to me. We did have the wheel checked and there was a serious problem.”

She ends by saying, “My cousin checked with her neighbors and no one had company!”

Angels appear with a message from God, an important message, and then most often just disappear.

This is why it is so important to greet strangers in our midst. As Hebrews 13:2 says, **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”** A random cowboy walking down the street (handsome helps), but often the angels have nothing that would make them stand out from the crowd.

Several years ago at my previous church we had a retired preacher visiting our church for a couple of weeks. One day she asked to come in to speak to me and had a very daring conversation with me. She critiqued my preaching style. She was cautious in the conversation for some preachers would not receive such criticism well. The thing that hurt the most about it was she was exactly right. Her criticisms were spot on.

I don't remember her name. She never visited again, but that conversation had a positive impact on what you are hearing preached today. She was an angel and God had a message for me, **“Preach up! Be animated! Don't put your audience to sleep!”** She helped! Never saw her again.

In the Bible angels are mention 329 times, in the Old Testament 105 times and in the New Testament 178 times. Angels were very much in the background of the thoughts and faith of the people at that time and even down to this day but we don't much talk about them.

Psalms 34:7 says, **“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.”** Each of us has an angel and we often test those angels to the limit, and even beyond the limit of their ability to protect us. For we have all seen this little quote.



Every church has an angel. That is why John in the book of Revelation wrote to the **“The angels of seven churches.”** Some people even to this day have the ability to see them. God communicates with

people in the way they best can hear him, and for some, a very few, he lets them see angels. I have never seen angels, but I know those who have. There are those, even those in this congregation, who have seen angels here on this chancel as the word was preached.

I have a friend Andrea Owen who writes for a Guidepost devotional magazine called "Angels on Earth". She saw two angels standing with her when she preached for me for the first time at my previous church. The magazine she writes for is full of stories of angels here on earth. Takes a while to absorb this and believe this, but for some it is part of their spiritual reality.

Now dreams. In the Nativity story Angels and Dreams come together for God to delivery his messages. Mary, Zechariah and the Shepherds were awake when the angels spoke to them.



But Joseph had to be asleep to hear the message of the angel. For some of us God has to speak to us when we are quiet enough to listen.

Remember the story of Elijah when God spoke to him? There was the wind, the earthquake and the fire and finally there was **"the sheer silence."** 1 Kings 19:11-12, says it was only in the sheer silence that Elijah heard the **"Still small voice of God."**

Psalms 46:10 says, **"Be still and know that I am God."** God speaks to us when we are quiet enough to listen. Often when I am upset and anxious about something and seeking God's direction and will, I am like a crying baby that is too wound up to hear the words and actions of comforting. I am too agitated and full of words speaking at God rather than being quiet and still enough to listen to God. That is why many of us need the stillness of sleep to hear from God.

In my dreams I have heard from God at critical points in my life; the first and most memorable time being when I was torn between choosing what seminary to go to for pursuing my calling as a pastor. I couldn't

choose between Perkins, which seemed way too expensive, more than twice what Claremont cost, but then in a dream I found myself at the DFW airport.

I had never been to the DFW airport. I was directed by God to Perkins by that dream and it made all the difference in the direction of my life and ministry. After making that choice, I found out, because of Perkins endowment it turned out to be 4 times cheaper than Claremont.

In the Nativity story God spoke to Joseph 4 times through dreams. First, an angel in a dream directed him to adopt and name Jesus. Second, in a dream he was warned to escape to Egypt with Jesus and Mary. Third in a dream he was directed to come back from Egypt and then finally, the fourth dream, to settle in Nazareth. God speaks in dreams.

God speaks to us in the way we are most able to hear. For a very few he sends visible angels. For some God speaks in dreams. Of course God speaks to us all through the Bible and worship. But God realized the best way for us to hear and know God was for God to become one of us. **John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."**

And John 1:14 proclaims, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Looking to hear from and know God? Know the Word, know his Son. Read the word, worship with his people, dare to dream for God promised, as Joel 2:28 says, **"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy,**

your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. We live this out in the life of our church.

A final thought. Some have said to me about God speaking to them in dreams, "I don't dream, or if I do, I don't remember my dreams." In seminary they put us all in group therapy groups. My group was run

by a Jungian Psychiatrist. Jungians put a lot of emphasis on dreams and dream interpretation. I learned a lot about dreams from him. One thing he taught me was how to dream and remember my dreams.

At the time I thought, “Yeah sure that’s going to work.” But it did. Here is what he told us to do. Before you go to bed, tell yourself 3 times that you are going to dream, and remember your dreams. Then put a pad of paper and a pen next to your bed to record the dream as soon as you wake up. I didn’t believe that would work until I tried it. Putting the pad of paper there and writing things down I found was as important as telling myself to dream. It works.

So, pay attention to your dreams. Welcome and listen to the stranger in your midst for he or she might just be an angel.

Indeed, what is God saying to you and how? And what are you going to do?

Amen.