

An Angelic Quandary

**A dramatic monologue
preached by
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Text:
Luke 2:1-20

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Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



This is not an easy job, you know. Nobody listens, people run away, dogs howl at us, people are always giving us the deer-caught-in-the-headlights look. Once, an old lady even threw a cooking pot at me – almost knocked me over – good thing I got some moves!

Well, here’s how it usually happens.

I drop in unexpectedly and unannounced – usually, although there have been times when it’s by request – I drop in unexpectedly, and then make a pretty clear announcement about why I’m there.

Next, people get all shook up – jump up from whatever they’re doing, sometimes they scream and then cry, and like I said, sometimes they even run away. Sometimes they just kind of run in place like a cartoon character – I like it when that happens – cracks me up.

So I have to calm everyone down if I want to make any progress with them – “Shhh, it’s okay; Now, now, now; Wait ... come back!” – this is usually the hardest part. And then once they settle down I can reassure them that it’s really okay and that, yes, they can believe what I’m about to say – or not – it’s a choice, it’s really all up to you.

Then I just lay it out there – whatever message it is that I’ve been given to share with them. “So ... blah, blah ... blah, blah ... blah, blah ... blah, blah.”

Now the reactions to this part are really interesting – from “Whoopie!” to “I ain’t listening.” “What!? You’re kidding right?” – “Um, okay ... um, what now?” – “No way! Me? Well, I’ll be.” – “Unh uh, not me, no way, take it back.”

Someone even once said to me “Your mama!” That one caught me off-guard. I’ve even had people cuss at me. Can you believe it?

Then they want proof. I don’t know what it is about you people, but you always want proof. What’s that saying I heard once? “I’m from Missouri. You’ll have to show me.” Well, now, you’d think everyone I’ve spoken to is from that place – but I know they’re not. I guess its just human nature.

So they want a sign. Nobody wants my business card. Nope. Gotta be a sign. Show me this and I’ll believe. Show me that and I’ll do what you ask. Can’t be a handshake, can it? Nope.

It’s always stuff like – “Make that cow over there give chocolate milk – that’ll be your good faith clincher on the deal.” Do you know how hard something like that is? Lightning and thunder I can do; smoke and mirrors I can do; wrapping a baby in swaddling cloths I can do; maybe even a star I can arrange. But chocolate milk from a cow? Lemme tell you something, there are certain things in nature you just don’t wanna mess with.

But I feel like I’m getting ahead of myself. Here’s how it usually goes down. I drop in, people are afraid, I calm them down, I give them the message, and then I give them a sign. Easy, peasy, right?

Sometimes I have to get out the uniform. The robe, the wings, the glow ... and the *pièce de résistance* – ta da! – the halo. Don’t you just love it? It usually gets their attention. This one was made by Verily Wing – she’s an up-and-coming holy halo designer, you know. You can wear these things lots of ways – pushed back, leaning toward the front, cocked to the side. It’s okay, having one – no big deal though. Sometimes it falls off which is bothersome. But you gotta wear it for some people – it makes it “official” I suppose. So I carry it with me wherever I go.

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There was a guy named Zechariah who I visited. Wow, was he sure afraid. I didn’t think I’d ever get him calmed down. And you would think he would have been used to this sort of thing being a priest at the high altar – lots of stuff happens there, I think. But he was shaking in his sandals that day. I didn’t mean to startle him, but it always happens.

“Psst. Uh, ‘scuse me. Z?”

“WHAH!,” he almost passed out right there in the holy of holies. That would have been embarrassing since there were people outside waiting for him.

I managed to settle him down. Not quite sure how, but I did. Maybe it was the news. It was good news for a change. I told him Elizabeth, his wife, was going to have a baby boy and he was gonna be g-r-e-a-t! I told him this little boy would go through some pretty wild days, do some pretty funky stuff over the years, but that in the end it would all be cool. That he might even get some people in Israel back on the straight and narrow path. Not bad news, huh?

He didn’t believe me at first – which kind of ticked me off. Usually it only bothers me a little so I dunno why this time it got the best of me. It was one of those moments when I had to show off a little so I puffed myself up and used my bestest, deepest voice:

“I – am – Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.”

I shoulda whipped out the trumpet right then, huh? That would have showed old Zech a thing or two. ***“I stand in the presence of God”*** – I love that line – I think I had my hands on my hips, even – ***“I stand in the presence of God.”***

Ahh ... good times!

Anyway – I show-up, they get afraid, I reassure, give the message, and then a sign – that’s the pattern. (Sigh) So ... a sign. What sign can I give a guy who uses his voice to make a living saying the prayers, reading aloud for the people, giving them counsel when they need it? I took his voice away for a little while. That seemed appropriate. You speak doubt about God’s message? Maybe you need some cooling off time without your pipes.

It came back. Don’t get too freaked out about it. His voice came back once the baby was born and he remembered what I had told him about naming the baby. They all wanted to name him “Z, Jr.”. But Daddy Z knew better. Rap, rap, rap – he pounded the table, waved his hands, made some fuss about it all. He got Elizabeth and the others to understand – “John. We’ll name him John.” And back came his voice ...



Next I had to go see a little girl named Mary. Now, I try to never frighten anyone but I also know adults are one thing and can handle a little shake-up now and again. But to startle a teen girl by showing up unannounced and knocking on her closed bedroom door – I knew that could be a disaster. I half-expected a sign on the door in Hebrew that said “Do not disturb! Go away!”

So here was my angelic quandary. I had to deliver the message – now was the time – she had to know what was going on before things started to change for her. But how do I step into her life without causing her to collapse – and just as important, how do I do it without having her throw a lava lamp at my head as I stand in the doorway?

You laugh, but it’s happened before in response to much easier news – I once had to tell a girl that she would be getting an invitation from her dream date to the prom and she misheard me – threw a pink lava lamp – knocked my halo right off my head! She apologized later ... we’re cool now.

Anyway ... Mary, Mary, Mary ... how do I do it? I tried the cheery approach. “Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you!” Huh ... good approach, right? A little buttering up with a compliment followed a mention of God. I thought it might work. But, same pattern – angel, fear, calm down, message, sign. I should have known better – it’s my job – and it always goes that way.

So Mary jumped out of her skin – not literally, mind you – it’s just a figure of speech. She jumped – “Yikes! What the heck are you doing here? Stalker!” I had to calm her down, of course, reassure her that all would be well.

“Wait, wait,” I said, “You’re gonna have a baby!,” I said. Now, what ever made me think that would calm her down I don’t know. And as soon as it came out of my mouth I almost regretted it. “A baby. You’re gonna be pregnant.” Just blurted it out like that. I waited for the explosion.

But you know what, that little girl was okay with the news. It was good news, I explained to her. “It’s gonna be a wonderful baby boy, a holy boy, and God’s gonna take care of you and the baby and your husband Joseph. It’ll be okay.”

“I know,” said Mary. “It’ll be okay. I’m still a little confused about all this. But it’ll be okay.”

I must say I never had that kind of reaction before. It was kinda nice, in fact. No screaming, no kicking, no slamming the door in my face. No denial. “Let it be,” she said. Let it be. Can you imagine?

Well, I had to give her a sign. I’m not sure this one needed the sign – I think she believed what I had to say. But signs come with the territory – give the message, tell about the sign. So I told her to go see Elizabeth and she would find out that her old cousin was pregnant even though they never expected it to happen. Go see

Elizabeth and you'll see for a fact that God can do whatever God wants.

I heard that she and Elizabeth stayed together for awhile – good thing to do to keep the rumor mill under control. And while she was there she started talking about what God was all about – they must have been talking about women from past generations like Sarah who gave birth to Isaac even though she was too old and Hannah who God gave Samuel to even after she had given up. I say that because Mary started using words like Hannah sang – about God scattering the proud, God bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, about how God fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty handed. That's God, for sure! That's who sent me with the good news, the one who reminds us of our equally blessed lives no matter who we are.

Hey ... permit a little tangent here, okay? I heard the other day that in the middle of the turmoil you all have dealt with this past year that the CEO of Goldman Sachs, said "I'm doing God's work." Well, friends, he's not doing God's work – I'm doing God's work, Mary is doing God's work, that baby of hers is all about God's work, you're doing God's work. I can promise you this, the rich who are getting richer while the poor get poorer – that Madoff guy, or your neighbor Joseph Forte – they're not doing God's work.



And talk about the poor who never seem to get a break, the next part of my mission was to talk to some shepherds near Bethlehem. Stinky little boys with runny noses hanging out there with the animals. Nobody much cares about shepherds – oh, sure, people love to have a nice warm lamb stew when it's supper time and a nice woven scarf when the desert winds blow – but who cares about the little ones that watch the sheep when no one else will do it. Those people are poor, let me tell you. Living out there with not much shelter, wolves wandering around them constantly – "Oh,

here," says the sheep herd CEO, "use this stick to chase away the wolves."

"A stick?? How about you build us a nice warm barn or something – where the doors lock and the wolves can't circle? Or how about a nice million denari bonus at the end of the year so I can give up this gig? A stick. Sheesh."

These are the guys I found out in the field that night. I say guys, but they were really little boys and some might have been girls, I don't know. My guess is some were even younger than Mary – adolescents, really. They're helping the family make ends meet so the bank doesn't foreclose. That's my audience.

My appearance went well, I thought. I figured I'd give them the whole nine yards – robe, wings, halo – all of it. This time I even created a little glow around me – "the glory of the Lord" I like to call it. Nice touch, really. It helps get across the God-ness of the message. I threw it all in this time. "Whaaaa" It sounded like music, almost! I was pretty darned impressed if I must say so myself – and I must. Glorious. Know what I mean?

And I think they got the point of it. 'Cause they were terrified, "with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for Presence ... oh, we got Presence ..." Enough of that nonsense.

These guys were scared and they started to scatter like sheep. "Whoa, now, little shepherds. It's okay. Just stop and listen for a minute, will ya? I got some good news for you. A savior ...," now that got their attention, "A savior will be born. A messiah." That got them and they stopped and looked up. They knew about the messiah – they're parents and grandparents had been teaching them, and every year at the Temple festivals they heard about God saving God's people, and the learned rabbis that came to their villages talked about a messiah. They stopped to listen. And that was my message – "a savior will be born." Now ain't that Good News?!?!

We brought in the choir on this one because this is the BIG news. And boy, oh, boy did they sound great that night. Wow. I can still hear it. **“Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace.”** Unlike any sound you have ever heard before. **“Glory to God in the highest.”** My, oh, my. What a night that was.

And the shepherds loved it. To them – the lowest of the low – to these grungy little shepherd boys – God’s messengers sang. Amazing love, that’s what that is. God’s amazing love offered to these guys out in the field. No ... not just them in fact ... but to all y’all ... God’s amazing love.

Well that was the message to the shepherds. A savior. Imagine that. God loves you people so much that God sent someone who could help you figure out just what it’s all about. What life is all about – how to love one another, how to lift up your neighbor when she’s down, how to make the poor comfortable and send away the rich empty, how to bandage the wounds of the despised and make peace with your enemies, how to heal and how to mend, how to build bridges and how to overcome barriers of hatred and intolerance. The shepherds got it. Do you?

A sign. I had to give them a sign. I almost forgot. I got so wrapped up in the choir and the light and the faces of the shepherds that I almost forgot. The message was so clear that night and they who received it were so changed that I just about forgot about the sign.

“You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” I know, I know ... a manger ... go figure. But that’s how it worked itself out, you see. Nowhere else was available when that little Mary told Joseph that she couldn’t wait any longer and it was time. A manger.

So there in that tiny dark space in this huge, cold world a poor little girl gave birth to a fragile, tiny baby, while her confused yet dedicated husband held her close. And shepherd boys left their precious herds to peek into God’s invitation. And they saw it for themselves – the good news I told them about, the greatest joy imaginable – and they believed. Do you?



I guess I shouldn’t complain after all. This job’s not so bad. Despite the occasional hurled object and the howling dogs and the confused looks, it’s really a nice gig. And when you have that kind of news to give out it makes it all worth while.

You can have the robe and the halo – I’m not much into the trappings of it all. Just let me keep sharing God’s news and I think I’ll stay with this job awhile longer. Good News. Here it is – from God to you at no extra cost – Good News – “to you this day a savior is born.” Enjoy it, my friends, enjoy it and share it with the world ...