

“Echoes of Angels” Matthew 1:20-21 Christmas Eve 2017

With the possible exception of the cross, there is probably no more stylized and varied religious symbol than an angel. Angels as ornaments, tree toppers, in various colors, sizes, and complexity. You may have your favorite version of an angel, and at this time of the year, it's on display in your home. They certainly are here, as I count about 8 in this room.

While these mysterious heavenly spirits have been around from the beginning, we know less than we think we know about angels. Tonight, I don't intend to say all I know, or show you how little I know about angels. I want you to hear a few of the echoes of angels throughout the history of God's saving plan work. What role did they play, and why were they so prominent on Christmas night?

When I say echoes of angels, I mean the repeated sound heard from God, voiced by angels, throughout time. It is remarkably consistent, hence an echo, no different from the changeless Word of God.

Hebrews tells us that angels are ministering spirits sent by God to serve those who will inherit salvation. They exist to glorify God and His Son, that you may believe and be saved. The word angel means “messenger”. We get evangelism from the same root, meaning Good Message, or Gospel. For the saved, angels have a good message for you.

They aren't always so benevolent. Angels blinded the wicked men of Sodom to prevent their assault. An angel took the lives of all the first born of Egypt when Pharaoh would not free his Hebrew slaves. An angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night to end their siege of Jerusalem. Angels will usher in the final judgment. There is no lack of strength among these awesome creatures of God.

But God delights to save, not to destroy. His angels have often brought peace to His people, as when the angels in Jacob's dream assured him that God would be with him in a fearful time in his life.

They also zeroed in on the fulfilled promises that we celebrate tonight. Shortly before they went to Sodom to rescue Lot, the angels tell Abram that he will be the father of a son in his old age, which was 99. This angel echoed God's promise that of Abram's seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. From further back, it also echoed God's original promise to Eve that one of her offspring would destroy the work of the serpent, Satan, who had just led her and Adam into sin.

As mentioned above, mighty angels protected the people through whom God made this promise up until the day Jesus was born. As that day nears, an angel echoes Abram's promise to elderly priest Zechariah that he too will become a father. His son John would prepare the way for Christ. And John did, calling many to repent and baptizing them.

But thirty years before that, Jesus' birth was announced not only to his mother Mary, but also to his stepfather and guardian Joseph. Angels tell them both separately that their son's name would be Jesus, and that he would be conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. The angels know that nothing is too difficult for God and so they have no problem echoing God's promise.

But tonight it is that famous unnamed angel that gets our attention. He tells shepherds the evangel, the good news that the Savior, Jesus, is born to them and where to find him. They suddenly are joined by a skyful that sing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” I like to think that under their breath, or in their minds were also the words, “We told you so. We told you so.” This is news to you, but to us, we've been echoing this to your ancestors all along. The promise in Eden is fulfilled tonight for you.

What do we make of that? Two things. First, from the start, God planned your salvation and the good news of that has been echoing with joy all through history. Why would there be any reason to doubt that also *your* savior is here. Why would you, of all the billions in the history of the world, be excluded from that promise? Your sins are forgiven too.

Secondly, you have the privilege of being an evangel, a messenger of good news, an echo of joy. Luke tells us that as soon as the heavenly host hurried back to heaven, the shepherds hurried to witness what was told them. Then they hurried to tell others what they saw.

If Christmas is so full of wonder, so important that we interrupt our normal lives so much to mark its value to us, then why don't we too hurry to tell others? Echo the joy, the echo of the angels: Christ is born for you, for all. Amen.