

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 4 — LOVE!

The Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love

"I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly." (Psalm 75:2)

The appearance of angels during the Nativity of Jesus is extraordinary. Let's chronicle this activity of angels:

- 1) Zechariah and a named angel Luke 1:5-22
- 2) Mary and a named angel Luke 1:26-38
- 3) Joseph, a dream, and a slight angelic clarification Matthew 1:18-24
- 4) Shepherds and angels Luke 2:9-14
- 5) Magi and dreams Matthew 2:1-12
- 6) Joseph, a dream, and an angelic warning Matthew 2:13-15
- 7) Joseph, more dreams. And an angelic "green light" Matthew 2:19-23

The word *angel* (ἄγγελος or angelos) means messenger. As we have seen, angelic messengers are pivotal in the Nativity story. Everyone focuses on the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. The myriad of angels who join the initial messenger praising God is astonishing, unique in the nativity story. During the appearance to Mary and Zachariah, we learn the name of the angel Gabriel and a little about his duties and authority. We also know that angels are genderless beings although we'd never refer to one as "it."

The angel appearing to Joseph is often overlooked. The first message brought to Joseph stops him from making a decision which will be hard to walk back, and it encourages him to take steps for Mary's protection. We are told that Joseph is a righteous man and he acts the part. Joseph shows himself to be a regular guy, who works hard and is a person of trust.

Think about it, Mary and Joseph must go to his ancestral home in Judea to register. As we learned in the devotional for the second Sunday, *The Bethlehem Candle*, it is Bethlehem where messiah is to be born. Joseph is warned by the angel after the wise men leave to escape the rage of Herod by fleeing to Egypt. When Herod dies the family returns to Israel; the angel again helps Joseph locate a safe place to live. Joseph learns to depend upon the angel's direction and takes steps so that the family is preserved.

As Advent comes to a close, it is important, as Christ followers to remember what kind of people are we to be—as light in a dark place. The Holy Spirit is in us to help us live righteous lives as we anticipate Jesus' second coming. Peter tells us, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." (2 Peter 3:11-12; John 14:16-17)

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1-2)

Without measure! Week 4, Monday

As Zachariah's son, John is to be circumcised on the eighth day. Many well-wishers assume that he will get a family name. Zachariah still can not talk but he confirms the name Elizabeth keeps trying to tell them by writing on paper, "His name is John." At that instant, "he began to speak:" After some glorious and extended praise he continues:"

And you, my child,
will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the
forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow
of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Jesus comes after John and demonstrates the love of God "that surpasses knowledge." Paul speaks of this love as a mystery that is now revealed because of Jesus. Then Paul prays for us. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

(Ephesians 3) Wow! Amen!

With Fanfare! Week 4, Tuesday

How many traditional carols do you know from this list?
 How many can you sing at least one full verse of from memory?
 This is an abridged list from the top 50. The top five are in italics.
 The link to the full list is below.

Angels from the Realms of Glory
 Ave Maria
 Away in a Manger
 Deck the Halls
 Ding Dong Merrily on High
 Go tell it to the Mountain
 God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
 Good Christian Men Rejoice
 Good King Wenceslas
Hark the Herald Angels Sing
 I Saw Three Ships
 It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
Joy to the World
 Love Came Down at Christmas
 O Come All Ye Faithful
 O Come O Come Emmanuel
O Holy Night
 O Little Town of Bethlehem
Silent Night
The First Noel
 The Gloucestershire Wassail
 The Holly and the Ivy
 The Manger Throne
 The Wassail Song
 We Three Kings of Orient are
 While Shepherds Watched

<http://www.songandpraise.org/50-most-loved-christmas-hymns-carols.htm>

In Silence... Week 4, Wednesday

Many of you have seen the movie *A Christmas Story*. Perhaps some of you can relate to the dad or the mom or Ralph or his little brother. It is a time capsule of bitter-sweet memories that many of us can recall at will. The last scene is of the house at night with the Christmas lights twinkling and the snow falling, adding to the large accumulation. We are looking at the front porch and we can see the Christmas tree glittering from inside and the scene is beautiful. I cannot remember the music playing as the credits roll—credits we barely notice. We are caught up in a moment real or imagined of extraordinary peace.

If the Christmas carol, *Silent Night* started playing with a well-tuned choir and orchestra, many of us would begin to relax, feel the stress drain from our bodies, and settle into a place of comfort and peace. Maybe, just maybe, we can sing along with this song of redemption and think upon the implications of the words. And maybe it will be the start of a newer and richer Christmas season than you have ever known.

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, All is bright

Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child

Holy Infant so Tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

(Find the complete lyrics on the next page.)

Written by Charles Phillip Roof for Journey Community Church

Silent Night

Joseph Mohr (1792-1848), 1818

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, All is bright
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so Tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Saviour is born!
Christ the Saviour is born!

Silent night, holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light!
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King!
Christ the Saviour is here,
Jesus the Saviour is here!

Silent night, Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord at thy birth;
Jesus Lord at thy birth.