

## ~ Hark! Heaven's Angels Sing ~

### **A Season of Hopes and Greetings**

Every year as we approach December 25<sup>th</sup>, many in the world are preparing for this season's holidays. Parents are shopping for presents hoping to find the right gift. Homes are being prepared for family and friends to join together in feasts and sharing. For many of the children, the days seem to move ever so slowly. Parents and grandparents tell stories of Christmases past and their plans for this year's religious celebrations and services.

This time of the year is a period for many to reflect and recount the joyful days of seeing an old friend or the birth of a new child. There are also moments of sadness remembering those who died during the year. Hopefully our reflections help us to see how God has been with us during our mountain-top experiences and carried us through the dark valleys of woe.

One of the special blessings of the season is to sing many Christmas songs. We sing to express our hopes in peace with others, brighter tomorrows, and an escape from the hardships of present life. One of those songs is "O Come All Ye Faithful". John Wade is credited for writing this hymn in 1744. Where might John Wade have found reference to the meaning of his lyrics about the birth of a son and the resulting

angels' message in a song?

### **Angels – God's Messengers**

Throughout the history of mankind, God has used angels as His messengers to man. Their messages might have been a warning, as was the case with Lot to leave Sodom. (Genesis 19:15) Or the angelic announcement could be a long awaited answer to prayer as was the situation of Abraham and Sarah for their promised son Isaac. Genesis 18:10

About a year before the birth of Jesus, an angel delivered some important messages. The first of these angelic visits was to Zacharias, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth. Luke 1:8-25

### **God Is Gracious**

The angel, Gabriel, was a chief angel in the courts of God with a special message. God saw the righteous characters of Zacharias and Elizabeth and granted their prayers for a son. As the grantor of the new life, God wanted their son named John, "God is gracious", because of his special mission to Israel. He would be filled with God's holy Spirit and he would speak as directed by God—similar to Moses and Aaron in Exodus 4:10-12.

John's service would be a preparation work for the one to follow him. "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the

disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1: 16-17

### **A Message to Mary**

Six months later (Luke 1:26), Gabriel was sent on another mission with a very important message to ask an equally important question of a young woman named "Mary". God saw a special righteous and caring character in Mary, a virgin, who was engaged to marry Joseph. Moreover her ancestral line led to Nathan and Nathan's father King David. All of these factors were critical to fulfill God's promise to Judah of a scepter (Genesis 49:10), and to David of a throne forever. 2 Samuel 7:13-16

The message was, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1:31-33

Seeing and hearing an angel would have been astonishing at least, but Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to a child who God named Jesus, meaning Savior. More so, the father would not be Joseph, her future husband, because a son produced by him would be imperfect due to the Adamic curse.

She asked, "How shall this be?" since she was a still a virgin. Then

Gabriel proceeded to explain how nothing is impossible with God and that the prayers of her cousin, Elizabeth, were finally answered with a child. God could easily make it possible for her to conceive a child without an earthly father. Thus Jehovah God provided the means for her son to be born a perfect human. Luke 1:34-37

### **According to Thy Word**

We can only imagine what might have been running through the mind of Mary at that very moment. Nevertheless, she answered in full faith and trust in the message and proposition. Mary responded, "...Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word..." Luke 1:38

As you remember, nine months passed. Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem due to a Roman taxation law. (Luke 2:1-4) And in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to Jesus, and laid him in a lowly manger thus fulfilling Micah 5:2. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, ..., *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel..."

### **Who Knew of his Birth?**

Israel's king was born, the promised seed to Adam who would save mankind! But who knew of his arrival? How would the message be sent out that was so long anticipated and desired?

The task as messenger was given to angels, you recall. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by

night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Luke 2:8-12

Your question may be, Why did not the angel bring the message to the king in Jerusalem? Why not to the priests in the temple? Or to the merchants in all the major towns in Israel? Why was the message given to lowly shepherds on the hillsides of Bethlehem?

The message was given to the shepherds who, unlike the self-interested nature of the rulers and the wealthy class, could better understand the blessing to mankind, could appreciate Jehovah as the shepherd spoken of by King David, and could be a faithful witness to all travelers and townsmen.

After hearing the angelic message, they heard a chorus of angels singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Lk. 2:14

Was there a greater meaning or purpose for their words than simply singing glory and honor to God and peace on earth?

### **What the Angels Observed!**

In God's ingenious Plan, angels were created before the earth was

made habitable for plants, animals, and mankind. They saw how the Logos, God's only begotten son, set the heavens and the earth. The angels observed the creation of Adam in "our image", a reasoning and rational being. They saw the breath of life given to Adam, and he became a perfect living soul. Matt. 3:17, John 1:1,2; 3:16,17, Heb. 1:10

These spiritual beings must have rejoiced seeing the terrestrial beings living in Eden and growing in knowledge to be like them. Unlike the angels, God placed a test of obedience upon Adam and Eve to be observed by the entire angelic host. If these beings ate of the forbidden fruit, would God really end their lives?

The prophet Isaiah (14:12-15) tells us how the "Day Star", Lucifer wanted to be greater than his Creator. Pride entered into his thoughts and Lucifer said to Eve, "...Ye shall not surely die". Genesis 3:4

The first lie permitted Eve to be tempted. And Adam, realizing the sin Eve committed, willfully disobeyed. The angels, seeing these events unfold, now saw God pass the death sentenced placed on Adam and all his family. For the following 4000 years, the angels waited for the promised birth of a savior for Adam and his family.

### **Peace! Peace!**

When Mary agreed to be the mother of Jesus, Apostle John tells us that the Word, or Logos, God's only begotten son, became flesh.

(John 1:14) The Logos left the heavenly realm and for nine months remained in the womb of Mary. The development of the unborn child was under the special care of the heavenly Father with His angels constantly by Mary's side. It was at the time of Jesus' birth that the angels saw the beginning of a new era in mankind's history resulting, in their song of "Glory to God" and "peace on earth". There was very little peace on earth during Jesus' days or the 2000 years since. Were the angels wrong?

The word peace is used 35 times in the Gospels. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Yet in John 14:27 he said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The difference between the two statements is that righteousness can never have peace with sin or a sinful world. However there can be peace between God and righteous men.

#### **God Centered Peace.**

"Thus, with abounding compassion and tenderness, did our Lord, on the last night of his earthly life, bestow upon his beloved disciples his parting blessing, his legacy of peace. It was the richest legacy he had to bequeath, and was one of priceless value. It was the promise of that tranquility of

soul, that rest and ease of mind, which he himself possessed—the peace of God. It was the same peace which the Father Himself has always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about; but it was not derived from the same source. In Jehovah this peace was self-centered, because He realized in Himself the omnipotence of power and wisdom; while the peace of Christ was centered, not in himself, but in God, by faith in His wisdom, power and grace. So also if we would have 'the peace of God,' the peace of Christ—'my peace'—it must, like his, be centered in God by faith." Reprint 1834, CTR

#### **When Will the Angels Declare True Peace?**

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3:19-21

The times of refreshing will occur during the presence of the returned Lord Jesus and his Church. Sins will be blotted out. Everyone will know the will of God. (Jeremiah 31:34) Peace will reign forevermore.

And one day all those on earth will join with the hosts of heaven to

"...sing the song of Moses...and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou* only *art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy

judgments are made manifest."  
Rev. 15: 3-4

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