

Title: The Angels  
Text: Luke 2.8-14  
Theme: a picture of what we can be  
Series: Advent 2017 #2  
Prop Stmtnt: Angels are a picture of a life devoted to the glory of God.

I was in Tulsa, OK in January of 1979. A snowstorm hit the city and a friend and me went out in the middle of it. I was 18 and he was probably 19 and we liked the adventure. The streets were basically empty when we spotted a car that had spun off the road. There were two ladies in the car and to them, we appeared “out of nowhere” and were able to get their car out of the ditch and back onto the road. They were so grateful, they wanted to buy us something to eat at the local Jack-n-a-box fast food place. We weren’t about to turn down a free meal. Once we got inside these ladies began telling the workers that we were angels. I know that they were grateful, but they kept saying it, until I realized that they really believed it. I tried to explain to them that my name is Bob and his name is Rick, neither of which are in the Bible and I am from Canton, OH and he is from Muncie, IN and as far as we know there aren’t any angels from those places, and if there were, it certainly wasn’t us – just ask our parents. But, it didn’t matter and they kept insisting that we were angels. So, we just gave up and ate our hamburgers and fries, which tasted heavenly to us and left while they were still praising Jesus for sending them angels. Now in their defense, there really are angels and angels are very capable of doing things like that. What the Bible says about angels is rather fascinating and is probably way more than you may realize. At the very least they makes us aware that we are not alone in this universe – not in the least. There really is another realm, another world, another universe, that we only get glimpses of from time to time. Looking at the role of the angels in the advent of Christ is reminder to us about the reality that is beyond our reality. So, on this second Sunday of Advent, we acknowledge that the Word of the Lord came to and then through the angels. And to them and through them, more light came into our darkness.

Read Text: Luke 2.8-14

After the Reformation, the elaborate altars that used to occupy the center of the church platforms were replaced in many of the Protestant churches with pulpits. Some of the pulpits were extremely ornate and immovable. In Scotland, when a man was ordained into the ministry, he was given two keys. One was to the church Bible and the other was to the church pulpit. In some of those same churches, the people would gather into their pews on Sunday waiting to hear the Word of the Lord. And the service would begin when a young man from the congregation would carry the Bible in, usually high above his head. As he did, every member of the church would stand for the Word. A young man, even a boy at times was used, and not a minister in formal clothing so that everyone knew that we do not stand for the minister, we stand for the Word. The young man known as the beadle would ascend into the pulpit and place the Word on the sacred desk and then the service would begin. God has revealed Himself through His Word to His people. We have revelation. We have His truth. We have the sacred light.

The first service that we held in this Worship Center was Good Friday night, 2004. On that night we borrowed this old Protestant custom. Customs can have a powerful influence upon a person, which is why I like to use certain customs if, and only if they are effective in communicating a biblical truth and if we recognize that they are only customs and not laws. For the past 20 years we have used the advent calendar to help us anticipate the birthday of Christ, when the Light of World came into the world. We have done that by using readings, candles, lights and characters to help us understand what happened when Christ was born. Although Christ was born on that night, his birth was announced and anticipated. The Word of the Lord came down through the ages through the Prophets and through them light came into the world. Then the word of the Lord came through the Angels and more light came into the world. The Word of the Lord came to the Shepherds and the word of the Lord was revealed to the Wise Men. All of this sets the stage for the entrance of the King of Kings and Lord of lords. Today is the second Sunday of Advent. We are celebrating the fact that the word of the Lord came to and through the angels. Remember, it is not the angels we celebrate, but that God has been so gracious to not leave us in darkness. God has given us His Word.

The account of the birth of Christ features angels in a number of critical and prominent ways. An angel appeared to Zechariah and predicted the birth of his son, John the Baptist. An angel appeared to Mary and predicted the birth of Christ and then to Joseph and said the same thing. An angel warned Joseph in a dream about Herod's intentions to kill Jesus and then an angel appeared to Joseph again in a dream to let him know that it was now safe to return to Israel. But there is more. Angels ministered to Christ in the desert following his personal confrontation with Satan. Angels ministered to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Angels were part of the resurrection accounts, at his ascension and are promised to be involved at his return. And of course, we have this fascinating account of the night of the birth of Christ when an angel appeared to the terrified shepherds only to have the whole army show up which no doubt threatened these poor guys with complete cardiac arrest.

But, angels are not the heroes of the story. Angels illustrate a life devoted to the glory of God. Therefore, (and here is intent of this sermon) let's learn from the angels how we can live a life that is focused on pointing people to Jesus. I believe that these fascinating and amazing angels are satisfied, fulfilled, joyful, and wondrously happy because they are doing exactly what they were created for and they not only fully engage in it, but they love it. They love doing what they do.

#### I. **Angels teach us how to respond to God.**

Angels are mentioned in 273 places in the Bible. (108 times in 17 books of the OT and 165 times in 17 books in the NT). That is pretty impressive. They were created by God, specifically by Christ – Colossians 1.16, in the opening moments of creation and said to have sung in response to God laying the foundation of the earth (Job 38.6-7). My personal opinion is that when God spoke the creation into existence that he sang it into existence which is why the angels responded to God's singing the earth into existence with their singing, not only because they heard him sing even as they watched the results

of him singing, but that God himself sang them into existence. As part of the creation they report to God and were created to live forever. These are awesome creatures who constantly live in awe of God. We may be tempted to get our theology of angels from paintings. We need to get our theology from the text. Angels are not cute, little, pudgy, curly-haired cupid like creatures. They are awe-inspiring, fear-filling, sin-awakening, mortal-reminding, knee-knocking, jaw-dropping awesome beings! People who encounter angels do not make a TV series about it; instead, they think that they are going to die! Which is exactly why so many angels, it seems have to be trained in CPR. This has to be puzzling to the angels. They are in awe of God, while mortals are in awe of them, yet we often live as if we are not in awe of God. As fellow creatures, yet unfallen fellow creatures, there are things that we can learn from them. Such as we can learn to:

**A. Praise God without ceasing.** (unending excitement)

In Revelation 4-5 John experiences a vision that drives the rest of the book, and is the vision that drives the whole story line of creation itself. Today, the final four football teams will be selected for the college playoffs. The coach of the Buckeyes said (last night), *“It’s amazing how important this playoff is and how the whole world revolves around it.”* Actually, the whole world does not revolve around college football playoffs. Rev. 4-5 tells us what the whole world revolves around – literally. The vision begins like a close-up view of the throne of God. It then widens a bit and we see the 24 elders and the 4 Living Creatures who are surrounding the throne of God and worshiping him without ceasing. The Living Creatures could very well be a particular classification of angels. Then John sees the myriads and myriads of angels who are surrounding the 24 elders and the 4 Living Creatures. The worship of God by the elders and Living Creatures is accompanied with lightning and thunder that blinds and overwhelms the observer. And the thousands upon thousands and ten thousands times ten thousands angels are described as being engaged with loud praise to God. Then the scene apparently widens even more because John now hears every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them praising God. Do you see why the angels were so amazed on the night of the birth of Christ? They were not a hired group who were paid to do this gig in Bethlehem. They were excited. They knew who this baby was and they wanted the shepherds to know it, so they could praise God too.

That scene, right there underscores the point of this message. The rest of creation worships God in response not only to God and to what he has done for us in Christ, but we learn from the angels how to praise God and do so by essentially saying to God the same things to him that the angels say. The response of the angels in Revelation 4-5 focuses upon the worthiness of God to receive honor and glory. God is worth praising, all of the time. Angels teach us how to praise and how to worship.

**B. Worship God without end.** (unending awe)

The seraphim in Isaiah 6 worship God, day and night, forever and ever. That may seem boring to us, because the things that we have looked forward to the most, repeated without end tend to become monotonous. Some of you are learning how to drive. You

have your learners permit and when your dad says, “hey, want to drive to church this morning?” You are excited to drive. But, if you have to drive 45 minutes every day to work and then 60 minutes every day back in the middle of rush hour, then the initial thrill of driving loses some of its sparkle. Cathi and I were talking to a couple who moved to Hawaii from Iowa. While there are definite advantages to where they now live, they said that you wear the same clothes year round. You are land locked by the island and there really isn’t that much variety. The weather is virtually the same, yada, yada, yada. We didn’t feel sorry for them either. But even Hawaii, you could tell, gets old.

But, not so with the true worship of God. There is no end to knowing Him. These angels are never tired, empty, or short on motivation. God is eternally awe-inspiring because He is beyond the ability of the creation to know Him fully. The seraphim are not tainted by sin. They are not distracted by their own desires. Their hearts are never drawn away in the praise of another. Sin and selfishness never capture the affections of their hearts. Day and night, they worship. They do not get tired. They do not get bored. Worshiping God is never old because they live in a constant state of awe.

Let me try to explain it this way. There are people who are considered to be addicted to gambling. The very idea of going to the casino gets them giddy with excitement. Their palms sweat, they get hyped up, they get nervous, they are happy, and they are geeked. On a more physiological level, there are endorphins that are being released into their blood stream, putting them into a happy zone. They are in awe. They are worshiping. They believe that what they are about to do is going to be awesome. Of course, the very presence of these elaborate casinos and to everything that goes with them is clear evidence that the gamblers will most likely lose it all. Which most of them do. Casinos do not exist because some philanthropist is trying to make people rich. And for so many, by the end of the night, the dream is crushed and the payoff never happens. And yet, people get hooked on that feeling of euphoria and that sense of excitement, that adrenaline rush and anticipation is so powerful that it overwhelms basic common sense. The same thing is true of a drug addict, of an alcoholic, of someone addicted to porn, or even food. That anticipation, that rush, that hope, and that desire is worship! Those things are idols that we want to worship that will suck out our brains and our hearts and our souls because they cannot deliver what they promise. Their awe is a false awe. Not so with God.

God is constantly amazing. God is constantly surprising. We don’t see that all now. We do not experience that all now. We see through a glass darkly. What the angels actually see is veiled to us because we can’t handle it. But it is there and it awaits us and when we see what we were created to see, we, like them will be overwhelmed. So, today, we worship by faith. I know that every Sunday that you gather that you do not always “feel” like worshipping and it is easy to think that maybe heaven will be like that too. But, consider the angels. They are more powerful than us, more intelligent than us, and certainly more amazing than us. And they are never anything less than awed by God. If we, in our current condition were exposed for any length of time to the very throne room of God, I think that most of us would die. In our unglorified state we simply do not have the bandwidth to grasp it all, but one day, we will. Take it from the angels.

### **C. Rejoice in God forever.**

The angels are also described as rejoicing. In response to creation, the angels sang together and shouted for joy! (Job 38.7) If you have ever been to the Big House in Ann Arbor and heard and felt the thunder when 109,901 people are cheering, you have a wee bit of a sense of what this is like. Angels are described as shouting for joy. Jesus said (Luke 15.10) that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Ok, think with me now. What is it that brings you joy? Joy is directly related to the satisfaction that comes from seeing an objective accomplished.

I read the story of a little boy who had Down’s syndrome and for Valentines Day wanted to make a card for every kid in his class. His mother, while not wanting to squelch his desire knew that this was setting himself up for hurt, because it was highly unlikely that he would receive any in return. Her fears appeared to be confirmed when he came that day from school saying, “Not one, not a single one” and he kept saying it, but he wasn’t crying, in fact he looked happy. And she asked him what he meant and he said, “I didn’t miss one of them. Not a single one. He had joy because his objective was accomplished.

Some of you are scrambling and looking for the perfect Christmas gift. If you find it, and you can get it and it brings about the response that you were hoping for, you have joy. It’s beautiful, isn’t it? Look at the angels. Learn from the angels. They rejoice! They rejoice because they have joy. They have joy because they are able to accomplish their objectives. They are doing what they were created for. Your joy is directly connected to you pursuing and living out the very thing for which God created you. If the angels are awesome, then how much more awesome is our God who made them.

## **II. Angels teach us how to serve God.**

### **A. Do your job (and do it with joy)!**

Whenever the angels are sent to deliver a message or perform a task, they do it. They do not argue about their assignment or presume that they have a better idea of what God ought to do. They do their job and they do it with joy because they know that what they are doing is the very reason why God made them. They get a front row seat on what God is doing in this universe and they are all in. They are fully engaged in it all. They do their job and do it with joy because they love God and they love what God loves. They know that God loves sinners, but they did not have it all figured out how this was going to work. That is why I think that this scene in Luke 2 is so utterly spectacular.

The angels who knew God as the very God, and for all of their many years had seen Him in his glory and knew who He was, were absolutely fired up with amazement when they found out that God the Son had taken upon himself the form of a human and was conceived in the womb of Mary and now was born. Their King was now a baby and that baby who depended upon the breast of his mother for nourishment was at the same time upholding the universe by the word of his power. The incarnation was the occasion for these angels to worship. They showed up over a bunch of shepherds and had a praise service in the sky! “Glory to God in the Highest!” It is as if they are saying, “Hey guys –

you have got to see this! A Savior has been born to you! And you are never going to believe this but He is Christ the Lord! Their job, simply put is to point people to Jesus and they do it because they know how glorious he really is. They love doing their job because they know it is true, it is right, it is good and it is worth it.

### **B. Do not accept credit**

When John attempted to worship the angel who had showed him all of those things, John was stopped by the angel who said, “Do not do that I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.” As amazing as an angel is, every angel knows that only God is worth worship. We can learn a lot from the angels.

### **C. Speak the truth.**

The very word, translated angel also means messenger. These messengers do not write the message, they deliver it and they deliver all of it. So Gabriel shows up to Mary and says, “Hey, I know this sounds crazy, but God told me to tell you that you are going to conceive a child even as a virgin. Look, if you ask me, that’s crazy. That’s like – no way man, but hey, I’m just doing my job. But, my own personal opinion is that this makes no sense at all and I cannot see how any of this is going to work out. But, you’ve been notified, so, hey – good luck with that.” Gabriel offered no editorials or comments off the record. This was his job – speak the truth. Hey, that’s our job. Tell people what they need to hear.

### **D. Care for God’s people.**

You are not in this by yourself. You are not on your own. Your heavenly Father has not and will never abandon you. His angels take care of His own. And, if one angel of God could in a single night wipe out 185,000 potty-mouthed, foul-breathing Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19) I think you are in pretty good shape! Angels obey God and worship Him by taking care of God’s people.

### **III. What we can teach the angels.**

Angels realize how important God’s plan is to save sinners, even though they themselves are not sinners. They love God which means that they love God’s plan, and Jesus said that they break into joy every single time a sinner repents of his sin and trusts in Him. Luke 15.10. Angels learn about God’s grace from us. 1 Peter 1.12 speaks about the gospel and how the angels long to look into this. I take that to mean that they know God as Creator, Ruler, King, but we know Him as Savior. There is a dimension to our relationship with God that they angels were never experience. We know what it is like to be rescued from our sin. Therefore, angels can sing Holy, holy, holy with us. They can sing How Great is our God, but when we sing Amazing Grace and In Christ alone then, they can applaud or lift their hands, but they have no voice in these songs, for they do not know what it is like to be lost and then to be found, to be blind and then to see, to be dead

in transgressions and sins and then by the Spirit of God to be made alive. They do not know what it is like to call upon God to save them from sin and to cry to Jesus to forgive and be declared righteous. These songs, they learn from us. We teach them how glorious God's redemption is when we live in awe of being redeemed. You only struggle with sin because you are not awe of being redeemed. God is worthy of your awe because through Christ he has rescued you.

David Cassidy, the star and heartthrob of the Partridge Family show, died at the age of 67. His final words were, "so much wasted time." Danny Bonaduce, the younger brother in the show said David's life "really was a tragedy" because "he never did get the life he wanted." Millions of people have died like that, but no angel has regrets. And you don't have to either.