

AN ANGEL'S ROLE, LK.2:8-15

Casting Call #1

◆ **Intro:** Angels in the Bible had many duties: The Book of Job says angels watched with rapt attention as God created our world. After Adam sinned an angel guarded the entrance to Eden and the access to the Tree of Life. Angels speak with Abraham before destroying the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorra. Angels provide food for Elijah in the desert. Elijah's servant is allowed to see the spirit realm and realizes that armies of angels were all around them as far as he could see! Angels are warriors, and constantly at war with evil and demons. Angels advocate, protect, teach, comfort and guide. Angels freed Peter from prison. Angels spoke to a Roman Centurion who prayed to God. Angels killed the wicked king Herod because of his sin and pride. Angels showed John what to write in the book of Revelations. Angels sat outside Jesus' empty tomb to proclaim he was risen.

◆ But mostly angels are messengers of God. Angelos means messenger. Ev-angelism is the "good (greek "eu") message". Angels proclaim the reality of God, his goodness and his love, and nowhere do they appear more than at the birth narratives of God's Son, Jesus which captures in one birth all the meaning of the universe as we know it.

◆ **1. Like the angels, we have the privilege of telling the most amazing story known among men.** We are the IMs (Instant Messenges) those around us about God. We SMS (short message service) folks that God exists and is operative in our lives. It is the one story everyone who has ever lived or will live

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needs to know. And maybe that's the first thing we need to ponder today; that this story needs to be told. In our text, the angels leave heaven to tell humans to their face what's happening! The shepherd go and tell everyone they run into what's happening. Our Christmas carols have all along urged us to do this same thing, although plenty of us sing the carols but never tell the story to anyone.

◆ "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere... that Jesus Christ is born."

◆ "Joy to the world, the lord is come. Let earth receive her king."

◆ "Good Christian men rejoice with heart and soul and voice, give ye heed to what we say, Jesus Christ is born today."

◆ Jesus did not come as a king in a palace. He was surely born of royalty but in obscurity. But he was dramatically announced, albeit to redneck field hands. Yet the armies of heaven couldn't not proclaim it. That's what "heavenly host" means btw. Host is *stratia*, *army* in greek. Have you ever heard an army sing a song together? These are not cherubs in gold foil, just saying... The Holy Spirit has seen fit to have the story recorded in his written word as well. It's a genuine cause for celebration, worship, and hope! Why would we not tell it? Angels, messengers from heaven, have brought a message to the earth. That tells you God want us to know!

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- ◆ Listen. God of heaven wants you to tell your children this story at Christmas, and all year for that matter. Do not skip it. Do not let Frosty, Santa, and Rudolf eclipse this story. After all, this is the only real one. Reflect on it aloud with your friends. Find a way to bring it up. Read your kids books about it. Mention it in your Christmas letter.
- ◆ There are a lot of fanciful stories floating around at Christmas, aren't there? An old man in a sleigh that flies, with four-legged creatures that fly without wings. A frosty man of snow that helps the children laugh and sing. A crabby green guy who lives in the ice mountains and hates happy people. A deer with a lightbulb for a nose! (Come on, man! He'd be the first one shot on opening day!) Well, talk about great stories, Rebecca McLaughlin puts it this way.
 - ◆ *"When we stop to think about it, Christmas stretches our credulity. It comes complete with an angel appearing, a virgin conceiving, a star guiding, and heavenly hosts singing. How can rational, scientifically literate, 21st-century people like us believe such things...?"*
 - ◆ *However, to believe in the God of the Bible who created the universe and not to believe in miracles is rather obtuse. It would be like my daughter believing her dad could make bread from scratch (which he can) but that he couldn't toast a Pop-Tart. In fact, if you are a Christian you are already*

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signed up to believe that the universe and everyone in it is God's handiwork."

◆ I urge you to pass on this story. Pass it on in your Christmas cards. Pass it on with your wrapping paper, and in your yard displays; certainly it beats the story of elves. Make Christmas traditions that tell your kids about it. Certainly it outshines a fat red chimney sweep with a sack of toys. How sad that a child might grow up believing in the North Pole, but not in Prince of Peace. Does that mean it's wrong to say a present is from Rudolf? No, it just means the truth gets told more. Our mission is to tell the story.

◆ What are some important parts of this Greatest Story Ever Told? Let's summarize the realities of what that angel said that first Christmas as a model for what we want our friends and children to know.

◆ **2. Fear not.** (remember to tell people to fear not) **God does not come to pay you back, but to save you forever!!!**

◆ **A.** Seems like almost every time we read in the Bible about angels appearing to humans they start out with "fear not." And not without reason. Even though it happens in our TV shows all the time, if a being (any being) really, actually, suddenly materialized right in front of you you'd likely need a dry pair of pants. Not to mention the descriptions of God's holy angels: shining with the brilliance of fire, powerfully built. Remember too

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that the glory of the Lord "shone all around them" according to the text. What was that? Did it make shadows or eliminate them? Was it like a flare going off or football stadium lights coming on? Whatever it was, there you are in plain sight, nowhere to hide, with your mouth hanging open, pretty sure you're not as important in the grand scheme of things as you acted like with your friends a little earlier around the camp fire, huh? There's plenty right there to be afraid of.

◆B. There may be more to it when you think about it. People in the bible always experience fear of sorts when they get near anything of God. Think of Adam and Eve, who once they've sinned, hid from God. Think of Isaiah in his temple vision of God, so big only the hem of God's robe fit into the temple. He's afraid because he is "a man of unclean lips." He says, "Woe is me..." which being interpreted means, "I'm in trouble now!" Think of Peter when he realized Jesus is more than human and says, "get away from me lord, for I am a sinful man." Think of why bars often don't have windows. Or why kids on the playground make fun of kids who won't do join them them in naughty things. Holiness makes us uneasy because we know that we are not.

◆Fear is at the core of every fallen person on the planet because we are alienated from God by sin. We fear what people think of us. We fear the future because we can't control it. We fear viruses because they may steal our health, and that would ruin our holiday plans, and then

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what? We fear death. Nobody wants to die really. And we fear God, because we know wrong ought not to be, and everyone of us knows we have done wrong even if we won't admit it. We are alienated from God by our failure at holiness.

◆But, If we could be sure of the love of God, if we could be filled with the knowledge of the love of God -all fear would evaporate! The Bible says "perfect love casts out fear." This is the Christmas Story: the world is messed up but we don't need to fear even the end of the world. Jesus came to save us.

◆Angels don't appear in the Scriptures as monsters trying to frighten us. They come as messengers of God. These angels say "Fear not". The reason of course is that they have good news of great joy (mega chara). There is a savior. There is forgiveness of sins. There is healing of brokenness. There is light in the dark. Hope. Always hope.

◆Fear not! To people who are overwhelmed by the sheer possibilities of what the COVID pandemic *could* do among us such that they even wear a face mask on their motorcycle or when raking the leaves! Fear not. To the student anxious about every exam and whether it will change the course of their entire future. Fear not. To the one girl without a boyfriend right now. To the kid cut from the team. To the old man about to die who says to the

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preacher, "Everything in my life has not been on the up and up, if you know what I mean."

◆The reason we can "fear not" is that God has come not as a Grim Reaper but as a Joyful Savior. He doesn't come in a black robe with a blade, but in swaddling clothes intending to take your death. So as Christians we are messengers against fear. We are prophets of comfort.

◆*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, Isaiah 40:1-2*

◆Tell your friends with Jesus they can "fear not."

◆**2. Behold. See that there is an answer.** When the angel says, "behold" we tend to think of it as a theatrical attention getter. It's an attention getter all right, but a serious one. It's like saying, "Look here, and I'll fill you in." or "Pay attention, you're gonna want to remember this." or "clue phone", or "lightbulb moment!", or "I've got just what you're looking for." In other words, you don't have to be afraid, there is an answer to every problem and I'm going to tell you what it is. Many people have given up on the idea that there is an answer.(truth)

◆A. It might surprise some folks that the angel did not have the usual answers that so many of us give.

◆Behold, socialism will finally cause the equal distribution of wealth. No, not once in history has that happened.

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- ◆ Behold a change in the Oval Office will set America back on track. No, we change that in four year intervals, swinging back and forth.
- ◆ Behold, just give up racism, that is the central problem in your country. No, that's only one of many sins.
- ◆ Behold, it's the governments fault. No, they are a reflection of us!
- ◆ But what were the glad tidings? None of these. None of these are the world's answer. The glad tidings were that a savior has been born. Not a president. Not a lawyer. Not a teacher. Not an unstoppable assassin who can get every shady power monger. Not an Iron Man. Not a Hulk. But a savior. The messiah. God's representative. The "Lord."
- ◆ "Savior" gets right to the root of the problem; sin. And that is the Christmas message you and I carry into the world too. The problem is us; the answer is Jesus.
 - ◆ We can't get better on our own. It's time to stop pretending. The people protesting injustice are being unjust to society around them, stealing, vandalizing -what? In the name of justice? The people protesting intolerance are often intolerant of anyone not sharing their opinion. Some people angry about racism are often furthering racism from their own side. People's votes are not the answer. Democracy is not the answer either; the majority could want something

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evil! No, *a savior of the human race is the answer.* And that's the message of the angels.

◆ Look, "behold", there is no peace on earth without glory to God in the highest. True religion is the hope of this country. Jesus is the hope of this country because Jesus bridges the gap between God and man. In Jesus, God and sinners are reconciled because Jesus is both God and man. Getting people to be conservative or progressive will not save a country. Getting people more educated will not save a country. Making people into Christ followers, that will save a country. Don't be shy about it.

◆ **Conclusion:** Do we really grasp the weight of the angels words, that the "Lord" as been born to the humans. Who is the Lord? Go back to the text. Verse 9 says an "angel of the Lord" stood before them. So the Lord is the commander of angels. This baby, yes believe it or not, is the Commander and Chief of heaven's armed forces, of the angel appearing right then! Verse 9 goes on to tell us that "the glory of the Lord" shone around them. That's Jesus' glory lighting up the Palestinian sky, because that baby is "the Lord." God in the highest has come way way down to the lowest. What does that say about how much you mean to him?

◆ I suggest that all the stories floating around Christmas give us an excellent opportunity to tell the real one, the one the angels sang! Just ask a friend which of the traditional Christmas movies/specials they like the best. Share your favorite too, and

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simply add something like, "When you think about it, the only true story of Christmas is pretty supernatural too, don't you think? But unlike the others, this one actually changed world history.