



## \*A WONDERFUL LIFE: "HAVE A LITTLE FAITH"

**Biblical Text:** [Luke 1:26-33](#)

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**There are lots of ways to tell the Advent and Christmas story.**

- \*In Church, we light the Advent Candles and sing our favorite Christmas Carols.
  - \*Then, there are the Nativity Scenes we put together once a year – \*large and small.  
*(Provided, of course, that we can remember where we put away all the parts last year!)*
- For some of it's putting up \**"Clark Griswold-esque"* Christmas lights on our houses. There are the movies: \**Christmas Vacation* - \**Home Alone 1, 2, etc.* - \**Elf* - \**A Christmas Story* - no shortage of options, including the \*1946 classic film we're using this year.

**Biblically, there are options too.**

- \*We could trace the prophecies of *Isaiah* and how \*Jesus fulfilled them.
- We could look at the different \**Gospels* and their approach to Jesus' birth.
- We could act out the story with members as \**Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, and Kings.*

However, if you think about it, other than Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and Jesus of course (*we probably shouldn't leave him out of Christmas, just saying*'), it is the angels that are often the most neglected players in the events that led up to the birth of Christ.

Most of our favorite Christmas carols talk about angels: *"Hark the Herald Angels Sing," "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "The First Noel."*

**So, I'd like us to consider them this morning.** We don't talk much about angels, except maybe getting paper wings and pipe cleaner halos out for the \*Christmas pageant. We certainly don't take them seriously. But maybe we should. **Consider...**

- \*The Bible tells us that an angel came to Joseph in a dream to announce that Mary's baby was to be the Son of God, and to say to him, \**"Do not be afraid."* (*Matthew 1:20*)

In our Biblical text for today, the Angel Gabriel brought the surprise announcement to Mary of Jesus' upcoming birth and he said to her, \**"Do not be afraid."* (*Luke 1:30*)

Again in Luke 2, the Bible tells us hosts of angels filled the sky with song, and an angel told the shepherds, these by now familiar words, \**"Do not be afraid."* (*Luke 2:10*)<sup>1</sup>

You're probably picking up the theme! \* Just when the main characters in the Christmas story needed them most, just when they were most afraid, angels appeared. **But most of us haven't been visited by an angel - or have we?**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:30, Luke 2:10, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**We find a different idea in the old classic Christmas film, \* *“It’s a Wonderful Life.”***

Most of us think of that film as just an old, tired, black and white Christmas movie, that TV stations and cable outlets use to fill their air time during the winter holidays. **Well, do yourself a favor watch it, or watch it again. It has a serious message.**

\*Remarkably for 1946, the film deals with a subject that, even in Church, we don’t talk about very often. Let’s watch as we join George Bailey at his lowest point, depressed, contemplating suicide on a cold winter night. \* *(play film clip)*

There is an untold suicide story in many people’s families, including mine. I grew up knowing that my grandfather committed suicide during the great depression, and that depression was something both my parents struggled with in their own way.

I know I’m not the only one. If you have a family history, let me assure you that you are not alone. \*Two years ago, Robin Williams became the public face of what is often a private struggle. The CDC reports \*that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the USA, and that more than one in ten people struggle with depression.<sup>2</sup>

\***Many things can help.** Don’t be afraid to talk to your physician, or the services of a counselor. Prayer helps. And what often makes the difference is a **person**. It’s one of the messages I love in *“It’s a Wonderful Life.”* Let’s watch another scene. \**(play clip)*

\*So what does a fictional angel (2<sup>nd</sup> class) named Clarence Osbody in an old film have to do with angels in the Bible, and what makes a difference in the lives of people?

**Only everything.** As to what difference it makes to George in the film, you’ll have to come tonight and watch it, or come back for my sermon next week, to find out.

\*But let me just say that it’s not an accidental thing that the Bible word we translate “angel” is **ἄγγελος - angelos** (in Greek) which means “messenger.”<sup>3</sup>

In our text from Luke 1, verses 26-27 tell us that it was such a messenger, the angel Gabriel who came to Mary, engaged but not yet married, startled by his presence and even more confused that she was expecting a child. In verses 28-29 he said: *“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”* \**“But she was perplexed by his words and wondered what sort of greeting this might be.”* Well of course she was!

His next words to her were even more startling. Look at verses 30-31 \**“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’”* \**“And you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.”*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Source: United States Centers for Disease Control, [National Center for Health Statistics](#). Information Copyright ©October 6, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> THAYER’S GREEK LEXICON. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. Luke 1:28-29 and Luke 1:30-31, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

\*His next words must have seemed a blur. Being pregnant is big enough news. Ask any of our expecting women. Ask any mother or father here or grandmother or grandfather here! But the son of God? Wow! Talk about pressure! I mean!

But here's my point. The presence of Gabriel made a difference. So much so that Mary answered, look down at verse 38: \* *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word."*<sup>5</sup> Why? She knew she would not be alone.

You understand what she was saying? I believe. **Nothing is impossible if God is real.**

\*And God comes alongside us still, doesn't he? Wrapped up in a person. Is there any one of us here who has not had someone in your life who was there at just the right time? In just the right place. And it made all the difference?

Haven't we all? And they made the difference between giving up and going on? Or running away and finishing the race? Or even between living and not....

I want to ask you to just spend a minute thinking of those persons God has put in your life at just the right time. \*Like Clarence in the film. Can you name them?

\*I can. Elizabeth Warren, Bill Foster, Janice Ashley, Dr. Charles Merrill Smith, Mrs. Rose Marie Hinde, Dr. Marion Brown, Al Hager, Dr. E. Dale Dunlap.

All were strangers when I first met them. \*Is it a stretch to call them angels?

Well, they were for me. Heaven sent. I have no doubt. And I shudder to think what my life would have been without them. I wouldn't be here, here, today, for sure.

And there is this verse of Scripture from Hebrews 13:2... \**"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares..."*<sup>6</sup>

\*You never know the difference you make in someone's life. Stay open to God's presence. I believe he is real and that he comes just when we need him.

\*And Stay open to others, will you? You never know who you might meet. It is a wonderful life. It is. But not everyone knows that, not every day. They need you.

\*Let us pray.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Luke 1:38, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 13:2, *Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.