

Angel in the Everyday – Luke 1:1-4, 26-38

Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, here we are in the middle of another day...Sunday, December 11th, 2016...6,020 years or thereabouts, according to some good estimations, since the Word, the true Light, spoke the universe into being. Has your day seemed ordinary so far? Does today just seem like any other day? Are you trudging through your daily routine, perhaps feeling like life's a bit monotonous and repetitive? Or maybe you're running your way through a jam-packed day struggling just to quiet your mind for a moment and find space enough to interact with God and hear his voice? Are you expecting to hear his voice today or see him at work or does it seem like he's quiet and invisible and detached from your everyday life? Does life itself just seem ordinary and mundane?

Well, going back in time around 2,020 years ago, I'm quite certain that most people felt much the same as we often do today: stuck in the daily routines of life, going about ordinary business, eyes focused on what's right in front of them, and expecting little out of the day. There's just something about the repetitive, daily cycles of life, the monotony of repeated duties and tasks, and the endless need to provide for ourselves and our families, that can just leave us numb, bored, unimaginative, and lacking in any sort of expectation beyond the passing excitement of some new toy or pleasure...the monotony of life, some have called it.

But this isn't the way God intended us to view our lives, and the miracle of life itself is anything but ordinary. And though we're often blind to it, there is much more going on around us than meets the eye. The kingdom of the heavens, the invisible heavenly realm, is at hand...it's right here all around us. The God who created us and is holding us together is active and on the move right now and inviting us to trust him and walk in his ways and power. He's right now carrying out his eternal plan to redeem a people for himself and show them how to live life with him and enjoy him forever.

But the sobering reality is that the kingdom of darkness, led by the prince of the power of the air, the serpent, the devil, the father of lies, is active all around us as well, using every means possible to convince us God is dead or never even existed, and to keep us thinking of life as boring, meaningless, mundane, or just a random and cruel accident of fate and chance, full of pain and hardship, from which we can only hope to escape when we die. And those who buy into his lies, and there are many who do, fall victim to the greatest deception of all time, a deception that results in the worst consequences imaginable.

Life may seem ordinary and uninspiring if we live by sight, believing that all that exists is what we see with our eyes. But when we learn to live by faith, believing that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6), we operate in the kingdom of the heavens and the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. This is what we're going to see today as we continue on in our study of the gospels. I've called today's message, "Angel in the Everyday," and we'll be in Luke chapter 1. Go ahead and turn there in your Bibles, if you would.

II. THE UNIQUE PURPOSE OF LUKE IN WRITING HIS GOSPEL (LUKE 1:1-4)

Before getting into the meat of our passage today, verses 26 to 38, I want to briefly look at the introduction to Luke's gospel in verses 1 through 4. Last week we began our study of the gospels in John chapter 1, and as you may know, the gospel of John is different from the others in that it's arranged thematically rather than consecutively, focusing on certain significant miracles and happenings in the life of Jesus. John arranged it this way with the stated goal of demonstrating without a doubt that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that people would believe in Jesus Christ and come to new life in his name. We know this is how and why John wrote his gospel because he states it clearly in John chapter 20, verses 30 and 31:

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

This means that John wasn't concerning himself with the exact order of events, but was rather focused on hand-picking certain ones that showed Jesus really is the Son of God, since there is no one else who could perform these miracles and signs.

Luke, on the other hand, has a different focus in writing his gospel and he states it for us in verse 1 through 4 of chapter 1. Luke begins this way in verse 1:

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke, in writing his gospel, is concerned with the order of events and is attempting, through his careful investigation and research, to present a more comprehensive picture of what happened in consecutive order as the events occurred. He wants Theophilus and us to know the exact truth about what God accomplished through the various aspects of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is good to keep in mind as we look to harmonize the 4 gospels and try to move through the life of Christ in consecutive order. Luke has made a specific attempt to put things in the right order, so following his structure should keep us on track.

Interestingly, Luke also provides us with almost all the information we have about the events leading up to and surrounding Jesus' birth. The only exception to this is Matthew 1, verses 18 to 25, where we read about Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy, the angel speaking to Joseph in a dream about it, and Joseph's response to the dream. So as we focus on the birth of Christ for the next few weeks, we'll be in Luke quite a bit.

III. GOD SENDS THE ANGEL GABRIEL (LUKE 1:26-27)

So let's look now at verses 26 and 27 of Luke chapter 1, where we see God sending an angel on a mission into everyday life on earth:

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

For any who view God as being distant and unconcerned about the daily affairs of life, these verses show us a much different picture. Here we see our God, who measures the universe by the breadth of his hand, zeroing in on one specific person at one specific time and one specific place. God the Initiator is making contact with a young virgin named Mary living in a back-water town called Nazareth, and he's doing it at a specific time he pre-determined before he created the universe. God is not watching from a distance, he is intimately involved and holding together you and I and everything we see around us. And he's actively carrying out a grand rescue plan in the everyday events of our lives.

That reference to the sixth month means the sixth month of Mary's relative Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. When John the Baptist was a 6-month old baby in his mother's womb, God sent the angel Gabriel to have a conversation with an ordinary girl named Mary about something extraordinary that was about to happen. A miraculous sign promised in an ancient prophecy of Isaiah was about to be performed through unsuspecting Mary. Would you be ready if it happened to you?

Now Mary was engaged, betrothed, to a man named Joseph who could trace his ancestry to all the way back to King David, through David's son, Solomon. Mary herself was also related to King David through David's son, Nathan. Coincidence? I think not.

So as God sent his angel Gabriel on a mission to Mary, we can imagine that Mary was just going about her everyday business, in relationship with God and seeking to follow him, but also just living an ordinary life like you and I and probably looking forward to her marriage day... dreaming about whatever future she had envisioned with her fiancée, Joseph.

IV. GABRIEL'S ARRIVAL AND GREETING TO MARY (LUKE 1:28-29)

We don't know what time of day the angel arrived, but Mary was likely just going through her daily routine, cooking a meal, washing clothes, feeding animals, cleaning house, visiting with friends...everyday things like you and I would do on a daily basis...definitely not expecting an angel to arrive with a message from God. Perhaps she was just cleaning up after dinner or getting ready for bed when suddenly the kingdom of the heavens burst in upon her. As she put away the last of the dishes, perhaps she heard a knock at the door.

Let's pick up the story in verse 26:

28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

So we see that the angel Gabriel just came on in...he walked into her home. Whether he knocked or just came in through the wall, only God knows. We just know he came in and that something about him made Mary realize she wasn't just talking to an ordinary man off the street. Whether he obviously looked like an angel or not, she knew he was different. And the fact that she never questions who he is as we continue through this encounter, makes me think she knew she was talking to an angel. If some random, ordinary man off the street walked in and told you the amazing things Gabriel told Mary, you would probably ask for some credentials.

And then there's the way he greeted her: "***Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.***" Has anyone ever greeted you that way? That sounds like a pretty nice way to be greeted to me. In looking at the original Greek, the greeting could be rephrased: "Rejoice, you who have been provided with grace! The Lord is with you." The greeting is not telling Mary that she deserves God's favor or blessing or has earned it in some way, but rather that God has been at work within her, transforming her through his grace, his power. The reason she should rejoice and be glad is because God's presence and power is at work within her. Mary was not perfect or sinless, but her heart was turned toward God and he was actively giving her grace as she trusted in him and tried to walk in his ways.

But Mary was perplexed or greatly troubled by the sudden arrival of the angel and this encouraging, yet foreboding greeting. It must have made her think, “Why has God sent an angel to me and what is he about to ask me to do?” It’s not every day that an angel shows up on your doorstep and tells you to be glad because God’s at work in your life. And if she knew her Scriptures, when angels appear, God’s up to something and miraculous things are about to happen. Her mind was working overtime trying to figure out what this was all about and what it meant for her.

V. GABRIEL’S MESSAGE TO MARY (LUKE 1:30-33)

Fortunately, Gabriel was aware of the fear and foreboding Mary was feeling at his sudden arrival and strange greeting, and he began working to calm her fears and bring clarity to her reasoning about why he had come. We pick up the story in verse 30:

30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Wow! He gets right to the point doesn’t he?...no small talk or beating around the bush! He briefly addresses the fear she was feeling and then tells her about an amazing miracle God was about to perform within her.

In thinking back to the various times throughout Scripture when angels appeared to people, fear seems to be the natural response of all of them when the kingdom of the heavens bursts in upon them. When eyes are opened to the spiritual world that is every bit as real as the physical world we see all around us, people tend to get a bit uncomfortable and feel kind of inadequate. But in response to Mary’s natural fear, Gabriel said, “Do not be afraid.” And he even gave her a reason. He told her there was no need to fear because she had found favor, or grace, with God. God’s heart toward her was kindness, grace, and blessing. Despite her imperfections, God was pleased that her heart was turned toward him and her trust was in him rather than herself. His intentions toward her were good.

In what he was about to do through Mary, God was beginning the fulfillment of the kind intention of his will that we read about in Ephesians chapter one. According to his kind intention he brought about our adoption as sons through this miracle that was beginning right here with Mary, and according to his kind intention he made known to us the mystery of his will which is all centered around Jesus Christ. God's intentions toward those who will trust him are kind and full of spiritual blessing. We don't need to fear when we look to him.

So after calming Mary's fears, Gabriel started right in with the prophetic message he had come to give. He started off with two prophecies relating to Mary: 1) she would conceive a child in her womb; and 2) the child would be a boy. Then he gave her a command about what to name this miraculous son: she was to call him, Jesus, or in the Hebrew pronunciation, Yeshua, meaning "Jehovah is salvation." His name itself was to turn human eyes away from themselves to their only hope for salvation: God himself.

Then Gabriel gave Mary a powerful picture of who this miraculous son would be: **"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."** Do you think Mary got the idea that he was going to be someone special? My guess is that Mary was well aware of an ancient prophecy from the book of Daniel that had some unmistakable similarities to this description of the baby that was to be conceived in her. Listen to the words of Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 to 14:

13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

The Hebrew people, through this prophecy of Daniel and many other prophecies in Scripture, knew that there was a coming Ruler who would look like a human being, like a Son of Man, but would function like God...coming on the clouds of heaven, ruling and having power over all people and nations, and having an

eternal kingdom that would never pass away or be destroyed. This was the coming Messiah that all Jewish people were waiting for. And now Mary has been told that she's about to have a son, a human being, who would be a descendant of King David, would receive David's throne from God himself, and would rule over the house of Jacob with an everlasting kingdom that would never pass away or be destroyed. Do you think Mary may have thought: Messiah? Who else could fit such a description?

VI. MARY'S PRACTICAL QUESTION (LUKE 1:34)

We can imagine that Mary's mind and thoughts were spinning and the significance of what the angel was telling her was causing her heart to pound. But a big, practical, very large problem popped into her mind and she decided to go ahead and ask about the elephant in the room in verse 34:

34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

Seems like a pretty good question, doesn't it? Um, Gabriel, there's one big problem that you may need to know about. Did God mention by chance that I've never been with a man? I'm a virgin. As far as I can see in my life so far, it's pretty much an unalterable rule of life that it takes both a man and a woman to have a baby. So is it OK if I ask: "How? How is this going to be possible?"

And isn't this a struggle all of us have as we consider living by God's power in the unseen kingdom of the heavens? We're so used to the laws of the physical world and being aware only of what we see with our eyes, that we struggle to believe that God who created the laws of the physical world can also break them whenever he pleases. We struggle to believe in miracles...that all things are possible with God. Perhaps we know God could do a miracle, but our practical side won't allow us to believe he actually will. And this idea of a virgin having a baby would certainly stretch the limits of anyone's concept of what's possible.

VII. GABRIEL'S EXPLANATION AND CONFIRMATION (LUKE 1:35-37)

But fortunately Gabriel was happy to oblige Mary with not only an explanation of how this was going to happen, but also a confirmation that God was more than able to make this miracle happen.

In verse 35 we read:

35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 "For nothing will be impossible with God."

First, Gabriel deals with the explanation of how this was actually going to happen. The conceiving of a baby in her womb was going to be a special act of God himself, done completely without the help of any man. The Holy Spirit would come upon her and conception would take place through the power of the Most High God himself. The baby's conception would be a miraculous work of God. And this is why he would be called the Son of God. Jesus, being God, has always existed and was never created. However, there was a moment in time when he took on human flesh in the womb of Mary, and this was done without a man by the power of the Most High God.

So Mary now had an idea of how this process was going to work and that she wouldn't need a man to conceive this baby. She didn't need to speed up her marriage to Joseph or do anything else to make this come about. But Gabriel also offered her a confirmation that God was more than able to perform this *never-before-heard-of* miracle. He told her that her own relative Elizabeth, an old woman who had been unable to have kids for her entire life, was at that very moment 6 months pregnant with a son. And I love what Gabriel told Mary this proved. He said, "***For nothing will be impossible with God.***"

We so easily try to put God in a box and limit the possibilities of what he can accomplish, but God loves to explode that box into a million pieces and show us how big and powerful and awesome is the One who spoke the universe into being by the word of his power. And while I love that phrase, "Nothing will be impossible with God," when you look at the original Greek it's even more powerful. A more literal translation says this: "No word of God shall be void of power." God's words are never wasted or powerless. When God says a word, things start to happen...power comes to life and the impossible is accomplished in an instant. God's word will accomplish what he intends it to accomplish, no

exceptions! And that is just as true today, and in the everyday of your life, as it was back in the time of Mary.

VIII. MARY'S SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD (LUKE 1:38)

And this brings us to the final act of Mary's encounter with an angel in the everyday. Having just digested God's version of her future...probably quite a bit different than what she had planned...and having just encountered some incredible claims about miracles that had already occurred within Elizabeth and were about to occur within her own body, what would she do? Would she resist? Would she say, "This is too much for me to bear?" or "Not in my body...what about my rights as a woman?" Would she ask for more signs to prove the angel was really who he said he was?

Well let's read how Mary responded in verse 38:

38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

I didn't see anything there about her rights or her own plans. No holding on tightly to the vision she already had of her future. No anger that God didn't ask her permission. No doubting of God's intentions. No resistance of any kind. Simply a humble submission and surrender to the will of God and an invitation for God to have his way in her life. Mary entrusted herself to her God and traded her will for his. "My whole self is yours, God. Do with me as you will." And the angel departed from her. Oh, that we would have this same attitude and invitation to God, for him to have his way within us.

IX. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So what can we learn from Mary's encounter with an angel in the everyday? No doubt you've heard this historical account many times. But what difference does it make for us today? What can we, 2020 years after the fact, apply to our everyday life? Well, there are many applications from what we've studied today, and I hope you've already made some. But I'd like to leave you with a few that stood out to me.

First of all, the kingdom of the heavens, the unseen heavenly realm, is all around us and is as real as what we see with our eyes. There is a spiritual reality behind and involved in every aspect of our daily lives. Do you believe that today and do you live like its true? Do you think an angel could appear to you today or is that something that only happened in the distant past? Before accepting such a conclusion you may want to consider the words of Hebrews 13, verses 1 and 2:

Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Angels are still active and still involved in human activity. Are you looking for and expecting God's miraculous activity, or are you living life as if all that exists is what we see with our eyes? I'll tell you that Satan wants us blind to the spiritual realm so that we'll fall into the traps he's constantly setting for us and never to learn to operate in the power of God. Let's not let that happen. Let's watch for angels in the everyday and constantly be on guard against the fiery arrows the evil ones are sending our way. God wants to burst into our lives in unexpected ways. Let's be on the lookout and ready for whatever assignments he may have for us.

Secondly, we can be pleasing to God as we trust him and walk by his power. Mary found favor with God, not because she was perfect and sinless, but because her heart was turned toward God. She was trusting him and as she did he was giving his grace to her. He was with her and he was pleased. Sometimes even as Christians, I think we can have this idea that since we'll never be perfect in our behavior and motives, God can never really pleased with us. We can get into the "filthy rags" mentality, thinking that every good thing we try to do or every choice we make is tainted with selfishness and mixed motives and could never actually be pleasing to God. But we need to remember that in Christ we are new creations and that God knows where we've come from and the progress we're making and is pleased with our sincere efforts to grow in holiness by his power, however imperfect they may be.

An illustration from the book, "The Hole in Our Holiness," is helpful here for those of us who have come to faith and new life in Christ:

Our God is not a capricious slave driver. He is not hyper-sensitive and prone to fits of rage on account of slight offenses. He is slow to anger and

abounding in steadfast love (Ex. 34:6). “He is not hard to please,” Tozer reminds us, “though he may be hard to satisfy.” Why do we imagine God to be so unmoved by our heart-felt attempts at obedience? He is, after all, our heavenly *Father*. What sort of father looks at his daughter’s homemade birthday card and complains that the color scheme is all wrong? What kind of mother says to her son, after he gladly cleaned the garage but put the paint cans on the wrong shelf, “This is worthless in my sight”? What sort of parent rolls his eyes when his child falls off the bike on the first try? There is no righteousness that makes us right with God except for the righteousness of Christ. But for those who have been made right with God by grace alone through faith alone and therefore have been adopted into God’s family, many of our righteous deeds are not only *not* filthy in God’s eyes, they are exceedingly sweet, precious, and pleasing to him.

Do you believe that today, or are you stuck thinking God is perpetually displeased with you, so why even try?

A third thing we can learn from Mary’s encounter with Gabriel, is that the power of God working through the Holy Spirit within us is beyond what we have practically believed in our daily lives. Conceive a baby without a man? Piece of cake. Raise Jesus Christ from the dead? Done. Bring spiritually dead people to life? Millions of times. Heal the sick? Everyday. Free people from slavery to sin addictions? Absolutely. Give believers the courage to speak the word of God boldly? Just ask and watch it happen. Holy Spirit power is within us and is ready to fill us up and transform our lives...to walk us into actually living the new life that’s already been born within us by his power. Just ask and keep asking.

And finally, Mary teaches us the attitude toward God that brings him great glory and opens the door for him to have his way in our lives: **“Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.”** A humble offering of her whole self to God and complete surrender to his will, knowing that his will is so much better than what we could ever come up with for ourselves. This is the kind of attitude toward God and desire for him that readies us to live the new life that’s been born within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s desire God’s will for our lives and expect his power and presence and miraculous work in the everyday of our lives. Let’s watch for him and listen for his guidance and surrender to his purposes in everything we do!