

Sermon :: 04-Jan-2026

Xmas 2, All Years¹

“ ‘Get up ... take ... and go ... ’ ”

You know, it's my wife *Mary's* encounter with the Angel Gabriel that gets most of the 'press.' As things turned out, St *Luke's* account of the birth of our first son, Jesus, proved a lot more popular than St *Matthew's*: Luke's is the one **you all** read every Christmas Eve ... the one Linus recites in that Charlie Brown Christmas special.² Now, I'm not *competitive* or anything—it's not worth a heap of *sawdust to me* ... but still, *I* got visited by an angel not once, not twice or even *three* times ... but *four*! And yet, most people ... most *Christian* people ... don't think of me much more than in passing.

And hey! that's alright by *me*. Mary *carried* the Boy ... gave *birth* to Him ... nursed and weaned and *tended* to Him. When He began His ministry ... traveling all over Galilee and then on down to Jerusalem³ ... Mary was able to go with Him—become part of those disciples who followed Him everywhere: right up to that awful Cross ... and then to the Empty Tomb ... and even the Upper Room and His Ascension⁴ into heaven, God bless Him.

Me? Well, I guess I *could* have gone along, *too* ... but at the *time*, I thought I needed to stay back in Nazareth. We had *other* kids ... and *they* had kids ... all of whom needed some looking after—a bit of *help*, from time-to-time. And I had my *business*, too: customers who wanted their *work* done ... suppliers who wanted their *bills* paid ... apprentices—none, by the way, ever as good at building things as my boy *Jesus* had been, back in the day—apprentices who wanted their *training*. And so, I stayed back ... missed most of the action ... got the stories second-hand, from Mary ... or from folks who'd seen Him preaching or teaching or healing, out-and-about somewhere, and then made a *beeline* for my shop as soon as they were back in Nazareth. Made be both as *proud* of Who He was ... **and** as *anxious* about what they were going to *do* to Him ... as any papa could *ever* be.

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But, let's get back to those *angels*. As I said, Mary ...well, she kinda 'hit' angel 'jackpot.' Gabriel came around ... sat down right beside her ... and the two of them had a nice, long *talk*—a regular *confab* (Lk 1:26-38). I don't know whether I didn't rate ... or was too preoccupied with my work—or too oblivious to my surroundings ... but the angels who came to *me*, always came in my *dreams*.

- The *first* one came to me to say that yes, Mary was pregnant—I knew it wasn't *my* child!—and that this was the work of the Holy Spirit. He said I was to go *through* with our marriage plans ... name the boy *Jesus* ... and *raise* Him as our *own*, for God had some

¹ From among the options, I have chosen the latter part of Matthew 2 for the Gospel lesson this day.

² With the demise of the three-network broadcast grid as the defining (and quite limiting) pattern for television viewing, the idea of a 'special'—a one-time program that would preempt the show usually shown in a particular time slot—has vanished, I think. But back in the day (and for me, that was the 1970s), how exciting it was to tune in for all those Christmas *specials*!

³ I follow the synoptic gospels' pattern here. In St John's account, Jesus goes to Jerusalem several times during His ministry.

⁴ Luke doesn't explicitly say Mary was present for the Ascension, but she's mentioned by name as being part of the 'Upper Room Group' who get organized immediately thereafter (Acts 2:13-14); thus, I think it's a fair assumption Mary was present for the Ascension, too.

pretty big *plans* for Him (Mt 1:18-25). [|] And so, I *did*.

- The *second* angel⁵ came to me in a dream after those wise men, with all their rather ‘eccentric’ baby gifts (if you ask me!), had left. He told me that I needed to hightail Jesus and Mary off to Egypt—that’s over **400 miles**, you know, and all by *foot!*—because crazy old Herod the Great was looking **for** to kill Him. [|] And so, I *did*.
- The *third* angel appeared, some while later—still in my dreams—to give me the all-clear. He said I was now supposed to take them *back* to Bethlehem, where we’d started out ... because Herod had died. [|] And so, I *did*.
- The *last* angel was maybe the one I welcomed the *most*. You see, in Bethlehem,⁶ old King Herod’s son Archelaus had succeeded him by now, and he was just about as cruel and conniving as his pop’d been. I reckoned that if *Herod* hadn’t exactly cottoned to my Boy and His heavenly pedigree ... well then, living under Herod’s *son* wasn’t going any **the** safer. So one more dream, and one more angel: this one telling me that I was to take my little family and make a brand new life for ourselves, way up there in *Galilee* ... in a town called *Nazareth*: Now, that’s a *geographic* distance of, OH, about seventy miles or so ... but a whole *world* away, in terms of the *people* and their oddball ways.⁷ [|] And so, I *did*.

Now, I don’t know if you **all’re** following my *line*, here ... but that’s *four* times ... four *separate* times—all in the space of a **coupla** years ... when I *totally uprooted* my life ... *totally changed* my plans ... did *exactly* what one of God’s angels *told* me to do ... which, each and every one of those times, was also the *exact opposite* of what everyone *else* thought I should do. ¶Marry a woman who was already pregnant; marry the *shame* all those miserable busybodies stared into poor Mary’s innocent eyes as she passed by ... marry the *stigma* of bringing up someone *else’s* child. ¶Then, drop everything ... take little more than the clothes on our backs and maybe a hammer, a chisel and a kneading bowl ... and go live in some strange country we *knew* nothing about ... and *cared* to know, even less.⁸ ¶And *then, just* as we’re getting set up down *there* ... KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK: Here’s *another* angel at the door, telling me to *rewind* ... put it all in *reverse*: go *back* to where we’d *come* from – but *then*, at the *last minute*, not *really* where we’d come from ... but to some *other* town altogether—one not much more familiar to us than *Egypt* had been. (Hey, I’ll say to you, just on the

⁵ Because Matthew doesn’t name the angels, we can’t know whether they’re all the same one, four different ones, or something in-between.

⁶ *I.e.*, in Judea. Herod the Great’s realm was divided among his sons when Herod died, and Archelaus had no authority over Galilee.

⁷ It’s not altogether clear in the gospels *who*—Mary and/or Joseph—is from *where*. Gabriel appears to Mary at Nazareth (Lk 1:26), which may imply that this is *her* hometown. Since Matthew doesn’t offer a story to explain why Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mt 2:1), this at least *implies* that Joseph (and, perhaps, Mary, too) *already* lived there ... which would be in keeping (literarily, at least) with Joseph’s Davidic ancestry—a salient point of Matthew’s gospel account.

For purposes of this sermon, I’m taking the view that Joseph was a Bethlehem native. In general, Jewish residents of Judea (where Bethlehem was located) very much looked down upon those in Galilee (home of Nazareth), whom the Judeans saw as both second-class *citizens* and second-class *Jews*. In John’s gospel, Nathanael (a Judean) asks, “Can anything *good* come from *Nazareth*?” (1:46).

⁸ In point of fact, there was a rather large, stable Jewish diaspora population in Egypt (especially in and around Alexandria), which had begun in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

QT: I wasn't exactly *disappointed* when those cockamamie angel-dreams finally stopped. I mean, I liked the *attention* and all ... but it was getting a little *ridiculous!*)

Nooooo—I'm just *kidding*—just trying to get a little *rise* out of **ya!** **Truth is** ... when I look back on it all, now ... remember all the topsy-turviness of those first couple of years ... when I re-live those angel-dreams—re-feel the flutter they gave my heart, remember the *mission*—the *passion*—the sense of *divine calling*—they stirred in me ... I choke up a bit—get **all kinda misty**.

Mary can always tell when I'm thinking about all this: I 'go off' somewhere, in my thoughts, she tells me: I'll be sitting there, right *beside* her ... but I might as well be back in *Egypt*. And that's because I'm pondering ... remembering ... giving *thanks* for ... all the *ways*, all the *times* ... *God* gave me something to *do* ... and I **did** it. Not that I was ever a *hero* or *superstar* or anything: No, *God* never asked me to do anything I *couldn't* do ... only things I didn't particularly *want* to do.

And now that I'm a whole lot older, and maybe a smidgen wiser, to *boot* ... I think I *get* it: That's the way *God works*. ¶*God* doesn't ask us to uproot our *whole lives* for the sake of others ... but to do the helpful, needful thing when we *spot* it: let *God* know we're *onboard* with *God's* plans. ¶*God* doesn't ask us to give up *everything*, to help *God* out ... but enough to make a *difference*: enough to let *other* folks take notice and wonder how *they* might make a difference, *too*. ¶*God* doesn't ask *us* to save the world ... but to *help* the One Whom *God sent* [|] to save it.

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Well, I guess I've said my piece—time for me to be shuffling along now. Thanks for listening to this old man's stories.

And while I know it's still morning yet, I'm going to bid each of you, "Sweet dreams." For you never know when an angel's going to show up in them ... and **what part in God's** plan they're **gonna** ask *you* to play. And *my* advice? Go ahead and *do* it! You'll be *mighty* glad you *did*!

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