

Christmas Eve 2024

Tonight, I would like to focus on angels. The first time that we hear about angels is back in Genesis. The angel announced to Hagar, after she ran away from Sarai, that she would bear many children. Her first child was Ishmael, Abram's first son. Ishmael played a foundational role in the Islamic religion.

Here we have an angel announcing the birth of someone who turned out to be an important prophet in the Islamic religion. It is important to remember that this was God's messenger. Since Sarai didn't know what to do with the fact that Abram and Hagar were going to have a child, Hagar had run away. The angel came with good news for Hagar, that she would bear a son that would produce many nations.

As we gather here tonight, we can remember that the angels assisted in setting up our Christmas story. The angel Gabriel visited Mary and announced that she would be the mother of Jesus who would be the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Another angel came to visit Joseph to secure his place as the earthly father of Jesus. God used these beings as messengers to carry out the work that needed to be done in order to come to earth.

So many of us have asked the question, are angels real? It seems that there are elusive. The angel Gabriel came to Mary in a sense out of thin air. The angel who spoke to Joseph came to him in a dream. What do we make of this?

Then we hear of the angels coming to the shepherds to announce the good news of Jesus birth. In the case of Hagar, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, the angels came to encourage and tell them not to be afraid and to give them good news. This message was from God and in a sense confirming their role in God's work.

Hagar became the mother of Ishmael, who was an important leader. Mary's role was to be the mother of Jesus and raise him. Joseph became Jesus's early father to raise him. Each angel or angels came to encourage and give good news to each person in order to fulfill God's work.

As we grow in our faith, we learn that we will not understand all of the ways that God works. I believe that what we can learn is that God will work in unexpected ways. God uses many different ways to communicate to us. What is important for me is the role of the angels.

In all of these cases whether one or many, the message was one that each person needed to hear at that specific time and place. Have we not experienced that

in some way? God communicates a message to us through a person, a group or a situation, how different pieces line up and then it is revealed to us.

Many of us are on edge going into the new year. Are we able to hear the message of the angels tonight, Don't be afraid? Think about the fact that none of these people knew what was ahead, but the message of the angels resonated in their hearts, and they sensed that God was speaking to them and that God would be with them.

In Joseph's dream this was part of the message that the angel reminded Joseph of the prophecy that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son. His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us. Again, the angel is preparing Joseph for what is to come. God prepares God's people, if we are paying attention and listening.

The good news that we are hearing again tonight is relevant. There is something about this story that draws us back here. This tells me it is relevant for us in years past and yet again tonight.

Angels have come again tonight to each one of us to tell us not be afraid that God is with us. We may not know what is ahead, but the good news is that we are not alone that God in Jesus Christ walks with us. Can you hear the angel's message for you?

Let us pray, God of the unexpected, we are drawn here again tonight to hear the good news that you came to earth in human form for each one of us. Even though Jesus is not physically here, you have never left us. May your Holy Spirit continue to open our ears to hear the good news that you have for us. May your Holy Spirit help us to hear the message that we do not have to be afraid. As you have sent your angels throughout all of history, we hear them again announce the good news to us. Help us to share that good news with our neighbors. In Jesus name, Amen