

Angel (Gabriel/Gabrielle)—Love

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Luke 1:5-25; Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 1: 18-25; Matthew 2:1-2; Matthew 2:13-15;
Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 1:26-38

“DO NOT BE AFRAID!!” Scared ya, didn’t I? Yeah, that happens...a lot! You see, we angels have been known to do many things—and not all of them have been comforting! Like being agents of death and serving as guides to the afterlife. We’ve even played mean jokes on those who questioned our authority from God, like when old Zechariah didn’t believe me when I told him his menopausal wife was gonna have a child.

So that’s why, when we come to say something GOOD, we try to let people know up front. But it doesn’t usually help. They’re still terrified of us.

See—we serve as God’s messengers. We’re sent to provide instruction and issue warnings. We’ve sometimes provided food and aid, served as protectors and encouragers, and even freed prisoners like Peter and some of the other apostles. Another important function we have is simply to observe. We’ve existed since the beginning of time, which makes us witnesses to everything that transpires. (Think about THAT the next time you’re doing your taxes...or surfing the internet...or wondering if what happens in Vegas *really* “stays” in Vegas...!)

Some of us have specific purposes, like Michael, who is a warrior angel. We may appear in either male or female form...or neither. Some of us have wings; most of us do not. We travel alone...or in pairs...or as part of an uncountable crowd, like the number stars in a desert sky on a cloudless night. We may stand beside or in front of you on the ground...or we might fill the air with our presence. We can speak one-on-one with you...or we may be part of a chanting or singing chorus. Your sacred writings tell of our human qualities—like intellect, emotion and will. We have shown humankind our humor, anger, compassion, and concern. And we rejoice, worship and praise God.

When we appear to people with God’s glorious light shining around us, it’s obvious who we are. Other times, we appear as ordinary people; you might not know us as we walk next to you on the road...or when we appear as a helper after a car accident or other tragedy...or when we sit in the pew beside you.

And because we are less than God, yet greater than mortals, when you see us and we speak to you, you are shocked. But you quickly get over that, don’t you? I mean, you go from cringing fear or being startled, to immediately asking things like (*mocking Zechariah*), **“How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.”** Honestly! I told Zechariah (*shouting, with authority*), **“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”** Psh! Those temple priests sometimes act as if they know everything. But, yeah, that shut him up!

Now, often, we’ll appear in your dreams. I visited Joseph FOUR times! First, to tell him to wed Mary despite her (*ahem*) “unusual circumstances”. Next, I warned him to take his new family to Egypt, to avoid Herod’s soldiers who were looking to slay the baby Jesus. My third dream visit was to tell Joseph that Herod was dead and that it was safe to take Jesus to Israel. But, when Herod’s son took over his father’s throne, I told Joseph to take his family to Galilee

instead. (Even angels can advise only on information currently available!) Now, that Joseph was a smart man—he never questioned my advice or gave me any lip!

You know who else followed directions well? Those shepherds! When I appeared and stood before them, they were absolutely TERRIFIED! I said, (wait for it), “**Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.**” And then I pulled out ALL the stops, see? I was joined by a MULTITUDE of angels, praising God and saying, “**Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!**” Then, we left them and went into heaven. Well, do you know what those terrified shepherds did? They said to one another, “**Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.**” How ‘bout that?? They were smarter, and more obedient, than that temple priest!

Now, Mary was another unusual case. When I came to her, what do you think I said? (*Gesture to congregation and wait for—or lead them into—the response:*) “**Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.**” Well, Mary was not scared! No, she was perplexed! A pragmatic young woman, she asked me, “**How can this be, since I am a virgin?**” So I told her, “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.**” Then (God love that girl!), Mary said, “**Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.**” Bam! Just like that! She was ready to do what God had asked of her.

Now, you already may know that after Jesus was born and the astronomers from the East came to see him, that they, too, received a warning in a dream. They were told NOT to return to Herod because of his plans to kill the infant. So they also listened well, and returned home, avoiding another encounter with that evil king.

So now you know the part we angels played in the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We were like a heavenly version of Western Union or the Post Office. We delivered The Christmas Message to the main characters in this wonderful drama—where they worshipped, in their homes, at work, and even in their sleep. Neither dark of night, smelly sheep, nor doubters or skeptics kept us from our appointed rounds!

And what *was* that Christmas Message? It was a message of Love. A Christmas card in the form of a baby, wrapped in strips of cloth. A special delivery from God on high who would share our toil and sorrows, live among us with all our temptations and tragedies, teach us how to love one another the way God loves us, succumb to the fear and hatred of those whose power he threatened, and—ultimately—conquer death, to show us that this life is a pale comparison to the wonders that lie beyond with our heavenly Creator.

So today, we will light the candle of Love in the Advent wreath. And we will look to the skies for stars and signs, and pay attention to the angels around us. We will watch for those who are radiant and burn brightly, and also for those who may enter our lives quietly. We will heed, share, and try to exemplify their message of Love.