

Imagine: Angel Armies Advent Series Week 3

Good morning Connection! Can you believe that Christmas is almost here?! Just 4 days to go! Wow! So much excitement and hurry and chaos that it so often brings.

But during this Advent season, we've spent time Imagining a different kind of Christmas. Different than the kind the world offers. Not an over-commercialized, watered down version of Christmas, but a simple yet powerful one.

The first week, we imagined what it would be like to have a prayer answered that you had forgotten about as we looked at the promise and the prophecies fulfilled through the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Last week, we imagined what it would be like to hear from heaven and truly trust God with all that we are and all that we have as we looked at Mary's story of immediate obedience to God.

Each week so far, we've had a visit from an angel, and a song in response. Zechariah's song of praise (after regaining his voice!) and Mary's song of reverence and obedience. We're continuing that theme again today as we look at the angels' visit to the shepherds.

This week, we're going to imagine together the hope and the awe that the shepherds experienced that night when they encountered an entire sky full of angel armies and their lives were changed forever.

Before we continue, let's pray.

The 3rd angel visit of Advent and the song in response might be the simplest and yet the most magnificent one yet, along with the largest production.

Join with me in looking at [Luke 2:8-14-](#)

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Wow. Imagine, being a shepherd out in the field that night. Seeing at first one angel and hearing this wild news that your savior has been born, and then seeing many angels, "a great company of the heavenly host" and the whole sky erupting in song as they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

If you were in your place of work, and an angel appeared to you, how would you respond?

What would you be feeling or thinking? Confusion? Amazement? Fear? These shepherds were literally on the job. They were working, they were dirty, they were probably exhausted working the night shift.

Of all of the different things that could have been going through their head at the time, scripture tells us that when angel of the Lord appeared to them with a great light, these shepherds were terrified.

I think it's safe to say we all would be. To be minding our own work and going about our business to then be confronted by not just one, but many angels. Yes, I think terrified might not even be enough to encompass that feeling that we would be experiencing.

How many times do we read this part of the story and skip over to the part where they go and visit the baby king? This event right here would have been absolutely mind-boggling and shocking to these simple shepherds.

Shepherds had a very low social status. They were marginalized and poor. They were often made up of young men who weren't suited yet for harder manual labor. Because sheep were important to own and have back then for food, wool and sheepskin, shepherds had to stay with them and protect them day and night. So although the sheep were valuable, shepherds held a pretty low role in society and were often overlooked.

And yet, in these verses, we see that as these ordinary people were going about their ordinary work in their ordinary workplace, something extraordinary happens.

That should be encouraging to us. The Bible is full of moments where God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways, and here is a great example.

The sight that the shepherds beheld that night is probably one that we can only imagine. The brightness of light of the angels against the dark night sky, the sound of the angelic voices singing and praising as the multitude of angels filled the sky. The sounds and the sights for us today are nearly unfathomable.

What's even more fascinating is when we look at the Greek word here describing this angelic multitude. It's the word "*stratia*", (*straTEEa*) which translated literally means "army". These simple, poor shepherds were not just approached by a handful of sweet baby angels or by beautiful feminine portrayals like we sometimes imagine or see in children's stories. This heavenly host was a troop of angel soldiers that would have in fact been both horrifying and holy, both fabulous and frightening.

A similar militaristic form of this word can also be found later in the New Testament when Paul talks about the divine power of our weapons in spiritual battle in [2 Corinthians 10:4](#), where he says-

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”

The word fight here is extremely similar, “*strateia*”, (*stratAYa*) meaning warfare or military service. That same portrayal of heavenly military assistance in fighting against the spiritual darkness of the world is what the shepherds were experiencing firsthand that first Christmas night.

How does your view of the evening change when you put it into perspective that this was an Angel Army, an entire cavalry of angelic beings, who from out of nowhere appeared in the sky, stopping everyone and everything with their demanding presence and praise. Can you imagine the sight? Can you imagine the sound? How loud would this multitude of angels have been? Earth and heaven shaking in that very moment.

That is what the shepherds experienced. How impactful would that moment have been for them? After seeing and hearing and feeling all of that, how could they NOT go and find this baby. Luke continues by telling us that they did just that- **Luke 2:15-18-**

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

Luke tells us that the shepherds “hurried off” and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. I think I would have hurried away too after such an announcement! After meeting them, the shepherds proceeded to tell many others who were just as amazed by this news of a baby savior and king born that evening in the little town of Bethlehem. And their lives were never the same again. They may have gone back to being shepherds but with a totally new perspective and truth in their hearts!

Now, we know that it’s actually not a surprise that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Hundreds of years before, many different prophets had foretold that this savior would come. **Micah 5:2** says-

“But you, Bethlehem... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel...”

The people knew a king was coming. A long-awaited savior to rescue them. What they didn’t know was how. How would this savior come? As a conqueror and king? As a mighty and powerful military leader with several victories under his belt?

They probably thought he would come with similar fanfare as the angel armies did that night in the sky-the light, the sounds, the splendor. But here is the ultimate plot twist- this long expected savior wasn’t IN the bright and flashy angel army announcement, rather, this glorious announcement pointed to something completely different- a baby, in a manger.

Anna Grace Legband, author with Seedbed Ministries says, "That's where the real glory is. God's glory and presence were not found in the angelic visitation or the heavenly host on display. Instead, the presence of God was found in a manger, hidden in the darkness of the night."

Wow. What did we say earlier about the ordinary in the extraordinary?

And isn't that God to surprise us just when we think we have it all figured out.

A few weeks ago, I had the great opportunity of filling in back in the gym with our Connection Kids ministry-shout out to Miss Amy and her amazing volunteers back there, it's all kinds of crazy and fun!- and I was teaching on the story of Elijah in 1 Kings when he experienced the presence of God. Do you remember how it happened? 1 Kings 19:11&12-

"The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."

Elijah didn't meet the presence of God in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. But in a "gentle whisper". The children's bible says a "quiet whisper." The kids in the gym were just as surprised as you would think they would be to hear that the quiet whisper is where Elijah experienced God.

The shepherds didn't encounter the presence of God in the bright light, or the heavenly host, or the angel's song. But in a baby, in a manger, in a stable, in the dark of the night.

God chooses many different ways to reveal Himself to us. Sometimes, it is in the fire, like Moses' burning bush, or during a raging storm with the disciples on a boat in the middle of the sea.

But sometimes, it's small, and quiet, and simple. And if we aren't paying attention, we might miss it.

As we get even closer to Christmas, we need to ask ourselves-"Are we paying attention to what deserves our attention?" Are we focusing on Jesus and the real reason we have anything to celebrate? Or are we getting caught up in the fanfare and frivolity that the world says is so important to do and to have this holiday season that we're completely missing the point?

I think if we're all honest with ourselves, we've all had a moment or 2 this holiday season where we can admit, yea, I was focusing on the wrong thing. I was too focused on the shopping and the gifts, and the stress of the wrapping and the amount of money it squeezes out of us to make it all work. Yea, I was too focused on the painful thoughts of Christmases past and wishing for the joy of Christmases gone by. Or yea, I was focused on creating a plan

in my head for dealing with the difficult family members I'm inevitably going to come into contact with at awkward family dinners. We get lost in focusing on what doesn't even really matter that we miss what Jesus wants to reveal to us in this advent season.

Advent is meant to draw us close to and focus on Jesus. That's it. Plain and simple.

This season, we need to draw near to the simple truth of it all- that the God of all creation, the God who created earth, moon, and stars, loved you and me enough, to want to come to this earth to save us. He loved us enough to become flesh. To be born as a helpless baby, by humble means, into our dirty, sinful world. All with the purpose of saving us from the judgment and wrath and pain that we deserve.

John 1:14, a familiar verse I'm sure you've heard before says it this way:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John Wesley says this about John 1:14-"The whole verse might be paraphrased thus: And in order to raise us to this dignity and happiness, the eternal Word, by a most amazing condescension, was made flesh, united himself to our miserable nature."

The God of all, wanted to unite Himself to our miserable nature. Why? Because He loves us. And He loves us too much to leave us to our own demise.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

This is unarguably greatest gift we've ever received. We give gifts this time of year to remind us of the ULTIMATE gift that we've been given.

And here's some more good news, it's not too late to recenter. It's not too late to refocus and make the main thing the main thing again. You've got four more days. In those four days, how are you going to focus on Jesus? A helpful exercise might be this.

I encourage you to take some time, just a few moments, and think about the times that God has revealed Himself to you. Maybe they were in big, loud, ways. Or maybe they were in small, quiet ways. But think about those times that you have experienced God and write them down. As you write them down, you can think about how you felt and what you thought as you were experiencing His presence. Then, take time to pray and thank God for what He has done and is doing in your life. Ask God to continue to reveal himself to you and for you to be open and aware to the new ways He may be moving and speaking. You can even end it with the same song the angels sang that night- "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth, peace on whom His favor rests."

And if you've yet to experience God and what He wants to do in your heart and soul that's okay! I invite you to ask God to seek your heart and pray that He would reveal Himself to you. Just be prepared that it may be in ways that you don't expect and you may miss it if you're not careful!

The altar is always open, and we're here to pray with you and help you take those first steps in knowing Jesus more, especially this time of year, when His love is made real to us in such a beautiful and tangible way.

How perfectly ironic it is that the ultimate gift was first presented to some lowly shepherds, as Jesus himself was coming into our world to be our good shepherd?

Let's Pray.

Benediction:

It's important to remember that another part of advent is also looking ahead and preparing our hearts for when Jesus is coming back again. This baby who was born to grow up and die for our sins because of His love for us is one day returning.

1 John 4:17-18

"If God's love is made perfect in us, we can be without fear on the day when God judges the world. We will be without fear, because in this world we are like Jesus. Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love takes away fear..."

Preparing for the return of Jesus isn't about fear, it's about living in God's perfected love. I hope that promise brings you hope this Advent season. Remember that you are loved, you have the hope of Christ's return, and that God has a plan and you have a secure place in it.

Go in that hope and peace and have a great week! We hope to see you on Tuesday at 7pm or Wednesday at 5 or 7pm! Merry Christmas!