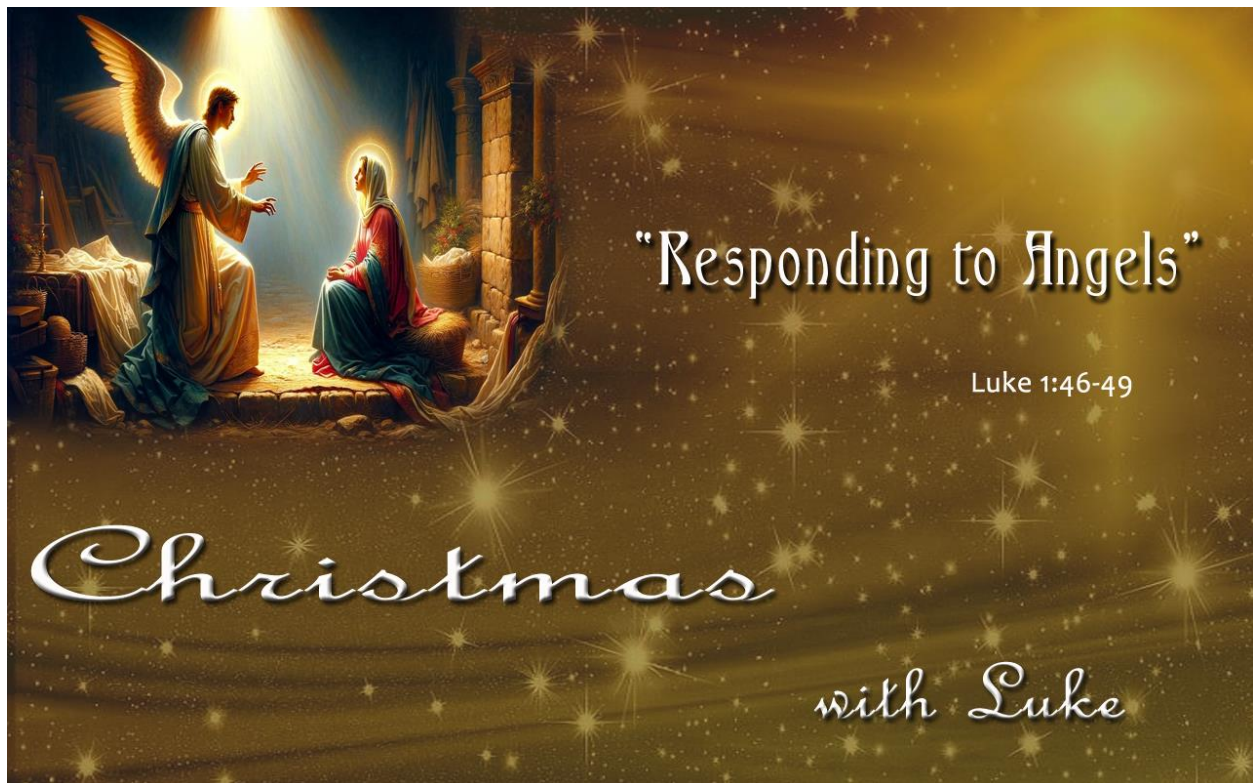


December 8, 2024

“Responding to Angels”



Luke 1:46-49

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Special Music:

“It’s All About the Child”

Rev Walt

ANGEL UNEXPECTED

Things had been going well for Donna. The last few weeks had flown by. Daisy had hired her for the morning shift at the diner, and she was also doing some part-time work for Patty Smithers at her honey farm. Randall Dixon was still in New York, so Donna had his place to herself. It was just her and the cat and dogs. The house was huge. Five bedrooms, three baths, and a hot tub on the back porch near the pool. She wasn't sure how things could be any better. She had food in her stomach, money in her wallet, and a wonderful place to stay where she didn't have to pay rent or utilities. Sure, she was taking care of the animals, but that hardly covered the blessing she was receiving by having such a nice place to stay. Katie had told her that Rebel was the local District Attorney, explaining the house and property.

But Donna also knew that it wasn't going to last. Soon, the holidays would be over, and Rebel would be returning from New York and want his place back. She was starting to think it might be time to move on. The problem was that she liked it here in Parable. And not just because so many people had gone out of their way to help her. Everything was so laid back. When she walked through the town, she got the same warm, fuzzy feeling that one might get from putting on an old favorite coat or sitting in a favorite old chair. Being in Parable felt... well, comfortable. It was good for her soul. It was allowing her to heal.

Right now, she felt safe. She had managed to save up a couple of hundred dollars, but that wouldn't get her very far. Trent Willoughby had managed to get

her car running. He also gently explained to her that he had done his best, but the car was in need of some major repair work and wasn't worth the amount of money it would take to fix it right. So, she just said a little prayer every time she put the key in the ignition.

She had been attending services at First Community Church and Pastor Chuck made sure to check on her as often as he could. Donna had managed to get to know many of the town folk. Working at the diner and attending church made that possible. Still, she knew that she needed to sit down with Katie and come up with an exit strategy before she wore out her welcome.

She had just finished her shift at the diner and was tired after a long day. She got into her car, said her little prayer, and headed toward Rebel's place. She got as far as the stop sign to turn onto Main Street and the car died. She turned the key, but the engine refused to turn over. It was only about twelve blocks to Rebel's place, but she had been standing all day and her feet were killing her. She banged her hands on the steering wheel, then tried the key again. Nothing. Then the tears came. What was she crying for? She still had a place to stay and food to eat, even if the car was dead. She banged on the steering wheel again, opened the car door, grabbed her purse, and began to walk, frustration showing in every step.

She had to pass by the sheriff's office on the way to Rebel's, and Dusty had just through the door. Seeing Donna and how frustrated she appeared, he asked her, "What's up, Donna? You okay?"

Donna realized that her face was probably red and messy from the tears.

“Oh, it’s alright Dusty. I’ll be okay.”

“Now come on, Donna. What’s going on?”

“I’m sorry, Dusty. I’m just a mess. The car died again. I am on my way back to Rebel’s place and when I get there I will call Trent to come drag it over to the station.” Donna sighed heavily.

“Let me give you a ride, Donna. I’ll call Trent from the cruiser. Everything is going to be okay,” Dusty said with a smile, hoping it would cheer her up. He took her arm as he walked her to his car.

Dusty’s radio squawked and Julie Maxwell, the dispatcher, called out, “Hey Dusty. Have you seen Donna? Henry Strawberry would like to meet her over at the place.”

“Dusty here. I have Donna with me. Did you say ‘the place’?”

“10-4 Dusty.”

Dusty turned to Donna, “Do you mind if we go see Henry? I think he has something you will want to hear.”

“Who’s Henry?” Donna asked.

“Henry is our local banker.”

“But I don’t need a banker, Dusty. I don’t have any money to speak of.”

“Humor me, please. Katie’s been cooking up something with him and I think you will want to meet with him. It’s only a couple of blocks out of the way.”

“Well, alright. As long as you stick close,” Donna replied

Dusty drove a couple of streets and pulled up in front of a white cottage with blue trim. The house didn’t seem like much, but it was obvious that someone had recently cut the grass. A relatively new black Cadillac CT4 was in the driveway and the front door stood open. Dusty walked Donna up to the porch, through the door and into the house.

A tall, balding man in a blue business suit, wearing a tie that didn’t match, stood in the front room looking at the ceiling. ‘This must be Henry Strawberry,’ thought Donna. The man turned toward them as they came through the door.

“Hi Dusty! How’s tricks?” he said. “And this must be the Donna Krenshaw that I have heard so much about.”

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Strawberry,” Donna said as she shook his hand. “Dusty was telling me that you wanted to talk with me.”

“Right down to business. I like that, Donna. And you can call me Henry. We really don’t stand on formalities here in Parable.” There was a long pause as they both seemed to be waiting for someone to start talking. “Oh, yes, right,” mumbled Henry. “Katie was telling me about your situation and I wanted to help. This was actually her idea, but I think it is one of her better ones. I know that you are staying over at Rebel’s place right now, but it won’t be long before he comes home from New York and he’ll be wanting his house back.”

“Yes, sir. That’s true,” said Donna. “And I am really not sure what I am going to do at that point. Looks like I am going to be here a while if I can find a place to stay.” And in her thoughts, she reminded herself that her car had just died again. Yes, she wasn’t going anywhere for a while.

‘Well, that’s the thing, Donna,” Henry replied. “I have a problem, and I think you might be the solution.”

“And just what might that be, Henry? How can I help.”

“It’s about this house, Donna. Old Dan Pritchard used to live in this place. He passed away about five years ago. That’s about right, isn’t it Dusty.”

“That’s right, Henry. Went to sleep during Sunday service over at Grace Baptist and never woke up,” Dusty said realizing that he might have said too much.

“hmmmm, yes, right,” said Henry, remembering the day it happened. “Caused quite a stir... But here’s the thing, Dan didn’t have any family. And he still owed some money for the mortgage on the house. There was no money in the estate to cover the mortgage, so I, meaning the bank, repossessed it. Real Estate doesn’t move fast here in Parable. So, the house has been here for five years, furnished just as it was when Dan passed away. There wasn’t anyone to claim anything.”

“So, what is it you want from me, Henry?” Donna asked

“Don’t you get it, girl? I need to do something with this house to get it off the bank’s books. I let Esther Collins, our local real estate agent and part-time hairdresser try to sell it, but there was nary a bite. Not even one showing or phone call on the property. It’s been on the bank’s books for too long now.”

“Henry, you still haven’t told me what you want me to do,” said Donna with exasperation.

“Well, young lady, I want you to buy it.”

Donna laughed uncontrollably. Didn’t he realize that she had no money, no credit, nothing of value? All of the credit cards and accounts had been in John’s name. It was hilarious when she thought about it. It was obvious that Henry the banker had not thought things through.

Henry spoke up, cutting through her laughter. “What’s so funny, Donna? Why are you laughing?”

“Because Henry, I can’t afford a house. I can’t even afford to get my car fixed properly. Why would you think I could afford this house?” said Donna as she continued to laugh out loud.

“You silly girl. I know far more about you than you think I do. I always do my homework. I know everything I need to know, and I am the only banker in town. And the bank owns the house. I can make any deal I want. You forget who you are talking to.”

Donna stifled her laughter as Henry continued.

“Young lady, I can sell this house for whatever I want. The bank has already made its money on this place, and now it’s becoming an albatross. Here is what I am prepared to do if you are interested. Dan only owed \$8000 on the house when he passed. I’m willing to give you a personal loan, nothing down, payments that you can afford, and all you will need to do is pay off the balance so I can close out the books on this place. It needs some TLC but you’re young and I think you can hack it. So, what do you think?”

Donna’s jaw dropped. This was impossible. It made no sense. She almost started laughing again but she could see that Henry was quite serious.

“Oh, Henry. I Don’t know what to say. You can’t do that!”

“Look, Donna, take some time to think it over and let me know what you want to do. Go ahead and take the key. You can move in whenever you are ready and at the very least, you will have a place to stay when Rebel gets back. I’m sorry, but have to go now. I’m already late for a meeting. Call me later to let me know what you decide. Think about it, Donna, but don’t take too long.” He grabbed his hat on the way out the door.

Donna stood in the living room unable to move. All she could think was, “How do you respond to an angel?”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

How do we respond to an angel? How do we respond to an angel when we don’t even know if we are talking to an angel? How do we respond to God when he reaches out to us to do angel-type work? It’s not like there is some kind of angel protocol or user’s manual.

There are two types of angels that we can encounter. Most of us have never seen the first (at least that we know about) and the second we may not recognize as an angel at all. Both types are messengers from God. Both types often defy our understanding.

The first type of angel is like the ones we read about in the Bible, messengers from God sent specifically to us to serve a purpose. We find them in both the New and the Old Testaments. Some are sent in disguise and others are dressed to impress. Most often they come to bring information so that God’s will can be better understood or to announce that something major is about to happen. Sometimes they come in dreams, like the one who appeared to Joseph to help him understand that Mary’s pregnancy was a part of God’ plan.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:20-21

And sometimes the angel is sent in person, like what happened to Mary herself.

26 Six months after Elizabeth knew she was to become a mother, Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth. Nazareth was a town in the country of Galilee.

27 He went to a woman who had never had a man. Her name was Mary. She was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. Joseph was of the family of David.

28 The angel came to her and said, “You are honored very much. You are a favored woman. The Lord is with you. *You are chosen from among many women.”

Luke 1:26-38

Finding oneself in the company of this kind of angel can be frightening and somewhat disconcerting, which is why the angels often says, “Do not be afraid.” As humans, we have an instinctive fear of the unknown or unexplainable. Those fears need to be addressed so that the message doesn’t get lost in the magnitude of the wonder and awe. It is not a common occurrence for these angels to be sent, and when they do come to people, the matters discussed are often

extremely important. But the appearance of these angels, either in person or in dreams, doesn't overshadow the other type of angel.

God often uses ordinary people to meet the needs of his people, and they don't think of themselves as angels. Because of this, I believe it is important for us to expand the definition of 'angel' to include those who allow themselves to be used by God to serve his children. The messages and interactions with this type of angel are also profoundly important. As God brings these angels into our lives, they deliver messages and moments of hope, grace, and mercy that might otherwise go unaddressed. Imagine a world where Christians of all denominations submitted to the will of God to become his hands and feet in a world so in need of angels.

"Okay, preacher, you're going to need to step into that statement a little more." I get it. Nobody should be thinking of themselves as an angel. Most of us don't consider what we do as angelic in nature. If I ask you, "Are you an angel of the Most High?" you would probably tell me 'no'. And yet, many of the things that you do may be affecting the people around you in a positive way.

I want you to think about the Three Wisemen for a minute. There is no question that they wanted to come and worship the new King, and they traveled a long way to do it. They were foreigners. They weren't even Jews. They brought gifts for the Child. They were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, but they were never told why. When an angel was sent to Joseph in another dream to tell him to take his family and flee to Egypt, it was to escape Herod's plan to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were under two years old. Fleeing

takes resources and God provided those resources through the Wisemen. These Wisemen never associated their gifts with the needed resources. They were just gifts meant for a king. And yet, God used these gifts to provide for Joseph and his family. Now, that's angelic. That is God at work through people. That is God moving in a world that is struggling and in need. That is God providing hope and encouragement through his servants, angels, or humans.

The one common element shared by both humans and angels is the desire to serve God in whatever capacity he needs for us to serve. That could be almost anything, from delivering a message to providing resources. Being a child of the Most High means being responsible for our siblings, the people that we encounter whom God demands that we treat with kindness, respect, and servitude. It means stepping up to the plate and meeting the needs of God's children. When we fail to do that, we become less than angelic in nature and our orbit around our Creator grows more distant.

In our story today, Donna never asked for special attention. Yes, she did feel overwhelmed and more than a little sorry for herself, a pretty human response when we consider the situation she found herself in. We've all been there at some point in our lives, those moments when we watch as hope fades as door after door slams shut, leaving us a little more in despair with each click of the lock. We find ourselves asking God what we have done wrong? What caused him to turn his back on us? Is it possible that he just doesn't love us like we thought he did?

Nothing could be further from the truth. When those doors shut, it is God providing us with direction toward the door he wants us to go through. Sometimes he closes a door to protect us. Sometimes he closes a door to protect someone else. Sometimes he has a blessing waiting for us that can only be provided if we walk through the correct door, at the correct time, and into his grace. And sometimes, and this is important so please listen carefully, sometimes he needs us to walk through a specific door so that he can use us to meet the needs of someone else. That's what angels do. That is what servants of God do. That's what Katie Callaway did. That is what Henry Strawberry was doing, even if he didn't realize that was what was going on.

The very second we put someone else's needs above our own, is the moment we step into angel shoes. It is what Christ showed us how to do. It is what Christ expects for us to do. It is what God is expecting of us when he sends angels into our own lives to provide us with emotional, Spiritual, or physical resources, allowing us to use those blessings to help and encourage the people around us.

So, returning to the question for today, "How do we respond to an angel? How do we respond to a message from God?" It's really quite simple and as frightened as Mary was, she had the right answer:

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

Now take that message to heart and go be an angel.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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