Preaching Series: Christmas through the Eyes of Others
Sermon Title: Christmas through the Eyes of the Angels

Text: **Luke 2:8-14 -- And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**

Introduction: This morning, in the third message in our series "***Christmas through the Eyes of Others***," we're going to consider the birth of Christ from the perspective of the angels. Most people come to their understanding of angelic beings not through the lens of Scripture, but through the media. Shows like "***Touched by an Angel***" lead us to believe that they look like women and talk with a British accent. On the other hand, the film "***Michael,***" starring John Travolta, portrayed an angel as one who enjoys a good beer and a good time. Or perhaps your understanding has been influenced by a story you've read, like the following from the newsletter ***Our America***: **Dodie Gadient**, a schoolteacher for thirteen years, was traveling alone in a truck with a camper in tow along I-5 near Sacramento, CA, when the water pump blew in her truck. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping her, so she prayed. "***Please God…send me an angel…preferably one with mechanical experience***." Within four minutes, an enormous man with long, black hair, a beard, and tattooed arms pulled up on a Harley. Displaying an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off the bike and went to work on the truck without even glancing at Dodie. A few minutes later, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump. Dodie was too shocked to talk, especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: "***Hell's Angels…California***." As he finished, she finally got up enough courage to say, "***Thanks so much***," and then carried on a brief conversation with the man. Noticing her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, "***Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to***." With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, straddled his Harley, and was gone as fast as he had appeared. Did she receive help from an angel in response to her prayer? Probably not, but only God knows. The Bible, however, is not silent on the topic of angels. It informs us that angels are ***a class of heavenly beings that*** **(1) act as God's messengers** and **(2) serve as agents to carry out His will**. Scripture distinguishes between **holy angels** (**Mark 8:38 -- For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels**) and **unholy angels** (**Matthew 25:41 -- Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'**). This message is focused on God's holy angels. I invite you to join me as I point out what some of them observed at the 1st coming of Jesus Christ to our world.

At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw A HUMBLE CAST OF CHARACTERS (**Luke 2:8-9 -- And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear**). In **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**, Paul told the church at Corinth to consider the kind of people that God had chosen for Himself. **Listen to what he said:** "**Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before**

him." Perhaps there is no better place to see these verses fleshed out than in the birth of Christ. **Think about the key characters that the angels interacted with in the story**.

- **First, there was Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist** (**See Luke 1:5-20**). Zechariah was a priest and probably enjoyed **a certain amount of stature** because of the office. **You would expect that he was supposed to be a little more holy than your average Israelite (**that is why he was allowed to be closer to the presence of God in the temple). **He was portrayed as a doubter who received the discipline of God because he could not bring himself to believe the words of the angel**. That's why he asked the question, "**How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years**." The angel answered, "**I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time**." Not really too impressive, was he?
- **Second, there was Mary, the mother of Jesus** (**See Luke 1:26-38**). The angel described her as '***highly favored***," because she was God's choice to carry the Messiah in her womb, yet little else was really known about Mary. Her family of origin was not mentioned, likely because they were not prominent. As one commentary says: "***She is not introduced in any way that would recommend her to us as particularly noteworthy or deserving of divine favor*** (See The Gospel of Luke, Joel Green, p. 86)." The fact that she was betrothed to a carpenter, someone who almost certainly could not pay a very high bride price, was a further indication of her humble status.
- **Third, there was Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus** (**See Matthew 1:20-25**). He was a righteous man (**See Matthew 1:19**), but he did not live in a prominent town like Bethlehem where the royal line of David came from (*though he was a descendant of the greatest king of Israel*). Instead, he lived in Nazareth (**See Luke 2:4**), a place viewed with some contempt. That's why Nathaniel later asked the question, "**Can anything good come from Nazareth?**" (**See John 1:46; Acts 24:5**). As previously mentioned, Joseph was a carpenter by trade (**See Matthew 13:55**) so he was not a rich man, and though he was obedient to the Lord, he seemed to lack spiritual insight at certain times, like when he didn't know where to find Jesus when he had left his Son behind in Jerusalem (**Luke 2:49-50 -- Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"**).
- **Finally, there are the Shepherds who were tending sheep outside of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born** (**See Luke 2:8-12**). **They were probably among the people who owned and worked very small amounts of land that, unfortunately, did not produce sufficient crops to feed their families or pay their taxes**. Often, these men would hire themselves out to work for wages as shepherds. Most likely, then, the men standing watch over their flocks on the hills outside of Bethlehem that night were peasants and located toward the bottom of the scale of privilege and power. ***All in all, then, the angels realized that God was working through a pretty humble cast of characters when it came to the incarnation of His Son***.

At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw THE UNFOLDING PLAN OF GOD (**Luke 2:10-12 -- And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger**"). As we consider these verses, the question to ask is, "***To what degree did the angels understand the plan of God as it played out two thousand years ago***?" There are two passages that indicate that prior to the event, they did not grasp everything that God was doing. In **Ephesians 3:8-10**, Paul reflects on the great honor bestowed on him by God to open the door to the Gentiles to join the Jews in becoming a part of the body of Christ. ***He refers to this as a mystery hidden since the creation of the world*** (**To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places**). **God intended that through the formation of the church, His wisdom would be made known**

to…rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Who would that be? He has to be referring to angels! Elsewhere in **1 Peter 1:10-12,** we read, "**Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look." *The prophets spoke of a future day of salvation and deliverance***. In the coming of Jesus, his ultimate death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, it had finally come to pass. The day of salvation came in such a way that not even the angels understood it all for "***they longed to look into these things***."

Though angels are created beings that have been around for a long time, and while they possessed some understanding of what was going to happen, there was a lot that God did not divulge to them. So just imagine what it must have been like for Gabriel and the heavenly host that night! ***The mystery long concealed was finally revealed*** so that they could bring the message to the shepherds: "**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger**."

Carly Simon topped the music charts in 1972 with "You're So Vain." Since then, she has been quizzed about the person mentioned in the lyrics. Carly has always said she would never tell who the lyrics, "***You're so vain, you probably think this song is about you***," describe. A while back, however, Simon agreed to reveal the song's secret to the highest bidder in an auction benefiting ***Martha's Vineyard Community Services***. The organization provides childcare, counseling, substance abuse treatment, and visiting nurses to the island community. At the auction, the **president of NBC Sports, Dick Ebersol,** was the highest bidder, offering **$50,000** to hear Simon's secret. Ebersol traveled to Simon's home for a luncheon of Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches and a private performance of the song before learning who the song was about. Several male celebrities have topped the speculative list about the song. They range from Simon's former husband, James Taylor, to Mick Jagger, who sang backup on the recording. The only catch with Simon's secret was though Ebersol paid $50,000 to learn who the song was about, he had to promise not to tell anyone else. **Imagine paying that kind of money just to learn just to learn the identity of someone whom Carly Simon thought was vain. Ebersol must have really wanted to know the answer to that question**. Now think about, for a second, how much the angels wanted to know the rest of the story that God concealed in the Old Testament, and what it must have been like when He revealed it to them at the incarnation. (**Review: At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw A HUMBLE CAST OF CHARACTERS – Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds; At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw THE UNFOLDING PLAN OF GOD – that they had longed to see**.)

At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw THE AWESOME GLORY OF GOD (**Luke 2:13-14 -- And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased"**). I can't help but think that when Gabriel announced to the shepherds the birth of Christ, it must have caused a spontaneous eruption of praise from the heavenly host. "**Glory to God in the highest**," they cried out! Imagine what that must have been like for those angels and the shepherds who saw them. And then, knowing more fully the implications of what He was doing, they pronounced peace to every recipient (*not just Jews*) of His grace and mercy.

(**Review: At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw A HUMBLE CAST OF CHARACTERS – Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds; At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw THE UNFOLDING PLAN**

OF GOD – that they had longed to see. **At that 1st Christmas, the angels looked and saw THE AWESOME GLORY OF GOD.**)

So, what can we take away from our look at Christmas through the eyes of the angels? Hopefully, we can see what they saw:

- ✓ **That God works through humble people to achieve His purposes**. I suspect that most, if not all of us, fall into this category, so it should be encouraging to know that God can use us.
- ✓ **God works out everything according to His perfect plan**. However, we are on a '***need to know'*** basis when it comes to His plan. There are at least a few things that, like the angels, remain a mystery to us (**See Matthew 24:36**). It's enough that we can trust Him.
- ✓ **God works in such a way that praise often erupts as a result**. And so, it becomes our duty as we witness God at work in our world to "**Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples** (**Romans 15:11**)."

Conclusion: **I don't know if you know this, but all around us are invisible electronic waves**. In fact, the air is thick with them. It's because of those waves that you can speak to someone on a cell phone, listen to the radio in your car, or watch the football game on TV. **Of course, you cannot see these waves. They are invisible to the naked eye, but when you turn on your TV, all of a sudden, you are able to see that which was previously invisible and in living color, no less**. **Now God is invisible too. The Bible says that no man has seen Him at any time. He's a spirit. The air, however, is thick with His presence. He is everywhere**. The problem is that the human eye can't see Him, so He must then make Himself visible. **Now listen to this: the process by which the invisible reality of God comes across in living color is called "glory**." ***When we say that God is glorious, we're saying that God has worked in such a way that He has become visible***. When Christ was born in Bethlehem, the glory of the event made God visible in a new way not only to the angels, but to us as well, so that we join them in proclaiming, "***Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests***."