

## “What is your response?”

December 6, 2015

Luke 1:5-20

### I. Introduction

It is impossible to read the Christmas story without talking about angels—it begins and ends with them. The birth of Jesus Christ was so incredible and so earth shaking that only the angels—God’s special messengers from heaven—could be entrusted by God to deliver these mind-boggling messages. No human being could possibly be persuasive enough to get this amazing message out. There is no other event in the Bible that has as many messages from so many angelic messengers.

If we were to take time to look at all the various appearances of angels in the Bible, we would find some similarities. 1) First, *angels appear suddenly to ordinary people doing ordinary things*. The coming of an angel isn’t announced beforehand. When they come bearing the announcement, they often break into our world unexpectedly with messages of immense importance. 2) *Angels cause people to be afraid*. When an angel appears in Scripture, a sense of fear and wonder is immediate. Knowing that they have this kind of effect on humans, some of their first words are: **“Do not be afraid.”** 3) *Angels are never to be adored or worshipped*. They aren’t to be the center of attraction. In **Revelation 22:8-9**, the Apostle John was so overcome by all that he had seen and heard that he wrote, **“I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’”** 4) *Angels don’t stay long*. They deliver their message or do their appointed task and then they are gone. They don’t want the focus to be on them; they want us to worship God.

### II. Four Angelic Encounters

**A. To Zechariah—Response: Refused to believe and doubted the angel’s message.** This morning we are going to look at four angelic encounters related to the birth of Jesus. In the Scripture we just read we saw the 1<sup>st</sup> encounter. Here we saw the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Zechariah telling him that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son and they were to name him *“John.”*

This probably wasn’t the first time that Zechariah had served in the Temple and burned incense. He knew the system, but this time things didn’t go as expected. An angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him and **verse 12** tells us that Zechariah **“was startled and was gripped with**

fear.” Who wouldn’t be afraid?! So the angel comforted him and said in [verse 13](#), “Do not be afraid, Zechariah.” The angel’s announcement that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son was an earthshaking announcement for Zechariah, since as [verse 7](#) said, “they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.” The angel then proceeded to describe what kind of person John would be—he would be a Nazirite. And as a special person, John would have a special purpose, he was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” ([verse 17](#)).

Even though Zechariah was a religious man and had been praying in the temple, this was just too much—they were old so he refused to believe and he doubted the angel’s message. Because of his lack of belief and his doubts, the angel Gabriel said that Zechariah “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” ([verse 20](#)). Zechariah’s response to his angelic encounter: he refused to believe and doubted the angel’s message. But it’s not right to leave the story here, so [turn to Luke 1:59-64](#) for the rest of the story. All the angelic prophesied came true.

**B. To Mary—Response: Unsure but submissive to God.** The 2<sup>nd</sup> angelic encounter is found in [Luke 1:26-38](#)—[turn to Luke 1:26-38](#). Once again Gabriel suddenly appeared and this time it was Mary who was greatly troubled. So we see the same words of comfort in [verse 30](#), “Do not be afraid.” Mary was then told that although she was a virgin, she would become pregnant and would give birth to a son and she was to give him the name Jesus. As he did for Zechariah, Gabriel told Mary a little about the baby she would give birth to: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David” ([verse 32](#)).

Zechariah refused to believe and doubted when he heard the angel, but Mary was simply unsure about how all this would happen—in [verse 34](#) she asked, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” Gabriel gave her some more details but they were still difficult to comprehend—to be fair, this had never happened before. But Mary responded with the heart of a servant and in [verse 38](#) she said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” Like Ruth, Mary was unsure about how it was all going to work out, but she submitted to God anyway. Mary’s response was unsure but submissive to God.

**C. To Joseph—Response: Accepted and acted on the angel’s message.** The 3<sup>rd</sup> angelic encounter is found in Matthew. [Turn Matthew 1:18-25](#). Joseph got off easy—God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream. Joseph needed some divine intervention after he found out that Mary was pregnant and he knew he wasn’t the father. His reputation was on the line. Mary’s life was on the line, too.

What was he going to do? Because he was a righteous man, he had decided to end the engagement as quietly as he could.

I suspect that Joseph had had many sleepless nights wrestling with this problem until he had a dream. In [verses 20-21](#) this unnamed angel filled in some of the blanks for Joseph. Because it was in a dream, Joseph didn't need to be comforted with the rather familiar words, **“Do not be afraid.”** Through His messenger, God asked Joseph to raise a child that would not be his. And then Joseph was given a glimpse of the glory of this child as the angel told him that this baby would be the Savior who would fulfill the prophesy from [Isaiah 7:14](#): **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”** Joseph immediately accepted his assignment from God and acted on it; in [Matthew 1:24](#) we read, **“He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”** This was Joseph's response: he accepted and acted on the angel's message.

Joseph had two more encounters with angels in the following months. In [Matthew 2:13-14](#) we read, **“When they (i.e. the wise men) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.”** Once again Joseph's response was to accept the message and act. Sometime later, in [Matthew 2:19-23](#), Joseph had another dream in which he was told by an angel to go back to Israel because Herod had died. We see his obedience again in [Matthew 2:21](#), **“So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”** Zechariah refused to believe and doubted. Mary was unsure but submissive. Joseph accepted and acted.

**D. To the Shepherds—Response: Believed and went and then told others about the angel's message.** The final angelic encounter is that of the shepherds that Karen and Alden read earlier from [Luke 2:8-20](#). While the shepherds were quietly going through the evening's chores, [verse 9](#) says that **“an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”** Into the darkness of a quiet night in the country came the brightness of the glory of the Lord. I'm sure they were rubbing their eyes and shaking in their sandals. In fact, the word **“terrified”** means more than just little scared. We'll look more at the shepherds themselves in a couple of weeks.

Like Zechariah and Mary, the angel had to comfort them, too, so he said, **“Do not be afraid.”** Instead of being frozen with fear, they needed to hear the message the angel brought them, **“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.”

As the shepherds were trying slow down their beating hearts and digest the message, they were shocked again when “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God.” The word “suddenly” means that the heavenly host—God’s army—came unexpectedly and without warning. After witnessing this incredible demonstration of adoration and praise, the shepherds knew that they had to move. In Luke 2:15 & 16 we read, “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.” There was no delay. They believed the angels and went immediately to Bethlehem.

After they saw the Baby, Luke 2:17 says that “when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.” The shepherds’ response: they believed and went and then told others about the angel’s message.

### **III. Conclusion—So what is your response to the message of Christmas?**

Are you like Zechariah, do you doubt and refuse to believe? Others have doubted, but after studying the Bible with an open mind they no longer doubt, but believe. Some have written books about their studies, men like C. S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, and Nabeel Qureshi. If you doubt and refuse to believe, I would challenge you to take time to read this Book, study God’s Word yourself—don’t rely on hearsay from others.

Are you like Mary, a bit uncertain but ready to submit. Mary wasn’t sure about everything, but she submitted anyway. In Luke 2:11 the angel said that “a Savior is born to you.” Christmas must become personal. Have you personally received Jesus as your Lord and Savior even if you don’t understand everything? Christmas is a time for gift giving and God has given you the greatest gift of all—eternal life in heaven through the life and death and resurrection of His Son. But a gift is not of any use until it is opened and accepted. Have you opened you heart to Jesus? Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

Are you like Joseph, are you ready to accept and then act? Joseph is a good example of someone who put feet to his faith. What is God asking you to do right now? No matter how difficult it is, if God is telling you to do it, that’s what you need to do. You need to accept and act on His Word.

Are you like the shepherds, do you believe and do you tell others the good news? Now we are called to believe and then tell others, just like the angels and then shepherds did—this is our prime directive—[turn to Matthew 28:19-20](#). The shepherds told others the Christmas story. Now we are the messengers of the manger story. Who can you point to the Savior this season?