

SERMON WRITER

RESOURCES FOR LECTIONARY PREACHING

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A THOUGHT ON PREACHING: There are talkers who have what may be called jerky minds. They say bright things on all possible subjects, but their zigzags rack you to death; their thoughts do not run in a natural sequence. After a jolting half-hour with one of these jerky companions, talking to a dull friend is a great relief. It is like taking a cat in your lap after holding a squirrel. (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

TITLE: An Angel on Your Shoulder

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: God has surrounded each one of us with angels bearing messages that we need to hear — messages that have the potential to bless our lives.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:13-23

EXEGESIS:

MATTHEW: FULFILLED PROPHECY

Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. Matthew is Jewish, and writes for Jewish readers. He has great interest in the fulfillment of prophecy, because he expects to persuade Jewish readers by it. Also, by his frequent references to these prophecies, he makes it clear to us that Jesus did not just appear on the scene unexpectedly. All along, God has been laying the groundwork for the coming of the Messiah. All along, God has been telling his people to expect the Messiah to come. The surprise is not that the Messiah has now come in the person of Jesus, but rather that he has come in such a humble manner.

Matthew's Gospel makes sixteen references to fulfilled prophecy (1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 24:15; 26:54, 56 and 27:9), more than twice the number in the other three Gospels combined.

Matthew stretches far in his search for fulfilled prophecy. He refers to texts that were not originally intended to be messianic prophecies. In one case (2:23), he refers to a text not found in Hebrew scripture.

VERSES 13-23: AN OVERVIEW

Matthew's Gospel includes a number of parallels between Jesus and Moses, giving us a sense of Jesus as another Moses. This Gospel lesson includes several such parallels:

- Jesus' flight to Egypt to escape Herod (2:13-15) parallels Moses being hidden in the bulrushes to escape Pharaoh, who schemed to murder infant Jewish boys to lessen Jewish power and the danger of a Jewish takeover (Exodus 1 - 2:10). It also parallels Moses' flight to Midian to escape prosecution for murder (Exodus 2:11-22).
- The murder of baby boys by Herod (2:16-18) parallels the murder of baby boys by Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-22). Both Moses and Jesus escaped the murderous plans of their respective rulers.
- Jesus' return to Israel (2:19-23) parallels Moses' elevation to Pharaoh's palace as an infant (Exodus 2:1-10) and his return from exile after the death of the king of Egypt (Exodus 3-4).
- "for those who were seeking the child's life are dead" (2:20) parallels "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead" (Exodus 4:19).

However, there is a significant twist in the New Testament account. When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, God killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Moses then led the Israelites through the Red Sea, killing the Egyptian soldiers. God led by might. The story in Matthew is quite different. God does not kill Herod or his soldiers (although verse 19 does report Herod's death of ordinary causes). Instead, Herod kills the infants and other men will, in a few years, kill Jesus. In the Old Testament, God leads by power. In the New Testament, God leads by vulnerability.

The places cited in this lesson are important. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the city of David. His journey to Egypt is like that of Jacob's family, who went to Egypt to escape famine; Farris says that Jesus is driven to Egypt by a famine of justice (Farris, 9).

The events of this lesson show how Jesus happened to grow up in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem. In Galilee, he will grow up rubbing shoulders with Gentiles, which is appropriate to a Gospel that begins with Jesus being honored by wise men from the East (2:1-12), requires him to live for a time in Egypt (2:13-23), and concludes with a mission to "all nations" (28:19).

"In Herod's attempt to kill the infant King, we encounter evil for the first time in the narrative. In Matthew's perspective, evil continually stands in opposition to the purpose of God, who in Christ brings the kingdom. The resistance comes to a climax in the crucifixion narrative, of which, to some extent, our passage is an anticipation. At

the same time, abundantly evident in our passage is the protection of the holy child by divine guidance. The gracious purposes of God cannot be thwarted" (Hagner).

VERSES 13-15: GET UP; FLEE TO EGYPT

*13*Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, *Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.* *14*Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, *15*and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, *Out of Egypt I have called my son.*"

"Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (v. 13b). Imagine how Joseph must feel. Not long before, he was a middle-class, respected citizen, soon to be married. Now, a few weeks later, he is a fugitive from the king and his soldiers. In between, we have a wedding (1:24), the birth of a new baby, the visit of the wise men and their odd gifts (2:1-12), and the visit of an angel (2:13). Joseph must feel as if he has stepped onto a carnival ride.

"Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt" (v. 14). Joseph takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt, where they remain until Herod dies. It is a journey of at least 150 miles (240 km), so the journey will take many days. However, Joseph obeys immediately, not waiting for daylight. He begins his journey in the dead of night.

It is not unusual for Israelites to seek refuge in Egypt when life becomes difficult elsewhere. It is not far from Israel, but is outside Herod's jurisdiction. Egypt has a substantial Jewish population, about one million people according to Philo (Boice, 39), so Joseph and his family will not live in isolation.

As noted above, this trip echoes the story of Moses as an infant. It also echoes the story of the earlier Joseph (Genesis 37-50), whose going into Egypt laid the foundation for the birth of the Israelite nation and the Exodus. That first Joseph was a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams. God also appears to this new Joseph in dreams (1:20; 2:13, 19).

A forced exile poses hardship, especially for poor people. Joseph and his family depart "by night." They were away from home when the angel appeared, and could not return home to settle affairs or pick up Joseph's tools. They will have to pay for food and lodging on their journey. The gold, frankincense and myrrh that the Magi gave to the baby Jesus (2:1-12) are part of God's provision for the journey. These gifts are valuable and portable. Joseph can take them on the journey and sell them as needed until he gets established. For the longer haul, Joseph can find work as a carpenter in Egypt.

Joseph models unwavering obedience. As peculiar as his situation has become, Joseph obeys without complaint. He says not a word. We know little about him, but his prompt obedience is crucial to God's plan. He knows nothing except the next step of the journey, but he takes that step. So also is our obedience crucial to God's plan. We cannot see the fullness of God's plan for our lives any better than Joseph could see it for his life, but we can be assured that our faithfulness will lead to great things too. We will not always be aware of them. Sometimes a seed that we plant in one place will blossom, unseen by us, in another. In any event, God will not fail to bless our faithfulness.

"and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son'" (v. 15). The verse is Hosea 11:1. The original reads, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This was not a prophecy, but was instead a comment about God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. "We shall see, again and again, that this is typical of Matthew's use of the Old Testament. He is prepared to use as a prophecy about Jesus any text at all which can be made verbally to fit" (Barclay, 27). "Undoubtedly Matthew would fully agree that in the first instance Hosea's statement had this meaning, but he would insist that the text could well have a second reference: it looked

backward and forward" (Hare, 15).

Israel had gone into Egypt many centuries earlier, and had come out of Egypt under Moses' leadership. "The fact that Jesus was taken to Egypt and returned from Egypt was one of God's ways of alerting us to how significant Christ's tie with his people really was" (Boice, 40).

VERSES 16-18: HEROD KILLED ALL THE CHILDREN

16When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

*18A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."*

"Herod... killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under" (v. 16). There is no record of this incident other than Matthew's account, but the story is fully in keeping with Herod's murderous ways. He kills anyone whom he thinks to be a rival, including his wife and three of his sons. There is no reason not to believe this account of a massacre of babies.

Bethlehem is not a large city, perhaps a thousand people, so the male infants under two years of age would be few — perhaps ten or twenty (although the early church greatly exaggerated its estimates of this number). In a tyrannical time and place, the incident could easily escape notice except by those directly affected.

It would be hard to imagine such evil behavior if we had not seen it. Murderous behavior by one tribe — or religion — against another is still rampant today. Herod is alive and well — and not just in other people. There is a bit of Herod in each one of us when we feel threatened.

It is worth noting that God does not stop the massacre. God allows us freedom to do good or evil.

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more" (v. 18). Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15, which portrayed the grief of Rachel, Jacob's wife, at the fate of her people as they were led into exile. Rachel was dead, of course, and was reputed to be buried at Ramah — or perhaps in Bethlehem — on the route to Babylonia. Even in her grave, she wept at the fate of her children as they paraded by her in chains. Again, the verse from Jeremiah has nothing to do with the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem, but the verse from Jeremiah can look forward as well as back.

Matthew makes the exile a major turning point in Jesus' genealogy (1:11-12). There were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen between David and the exile, and fourteen more from the exile to the Messiah (1:17). With the exile, "the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the Exile are now being 'fulfilled' — i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (Matt. 26:28) promised by Jeremiah" (Carson, 95).

Rachel refused to be consoled. Any mother who has lost a child can understand Rachel's inconsolable grief. "Nothing can alter the fact of the exile and nothing can alter the fact of the killings at Bethlehem. Thus the grief remains. Yet we should add that Jeremiah's prophecy goes on to the note of hope (Jer. 31:17) and to the making of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)" (Morris, 46).

VERSES 19-21: WHEN HEROD DIED

*19*When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, *20*Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." *21*Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

"When Herod died" (v. 19a). "The good news is that Herods die.... Kings come and go, but God's people endure" (Hauerwas, 42). Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Jesus' birth had to take place 2-3 years earlier — perhaps 7-6 B.C.

"an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt" (v. 19b). This is the third appearance of an angel to Joseph in a dream (see 1:20; 2:12).

"those who were seeking the child's life are dead" (v. 20b). "The plural suggests the complicity of the 'chief priests and scribes' (2:4) and perhaps even 'all Jerusalem' (2:3). This expression points forward to the passion story and to the enemies of Jesus there (see 26:3)" (Harrington, 45).

The angel, who was silent for some period of time, puts God's plan back in motion. As noted above, the angel's words echo God's call to Moses (Exodus 4:19).

"Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel" (v. 21). Again, Joseph obeys without complaint or comment.

VERSES 22-23: HE WILL BE CALLED A NAZOREAN

*22*But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. *23*There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, *He will be called a Nazorean."*

"But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there" (v. 22a). When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided among his sons. Archelaus became tetrarch (a lesser title than king) of Judea. His extreme violence causes so many problems that the Romans will depose him in 6 A.D., after which Judea will be ruled by a Roman procurator except for the reign of Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 41-44). Joseph knows Archelaus' reputation and is afraid.

"And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee" (v. v. 22b). For the fourth time, Joseph receives his guidance in a dream, and again he obeys. Herod Antipas reigns in Galilee. Antipas is Archelaus' brother, but is a more enlightened ruler — although he, too, is known for unethical behavior and violence.

"There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean'" (v. 23). Joseph and his family settle in Nazareth. Matthew attributes this to the fulfillment of the prophecy, "He will be called a Nazorean." There is a problem here, because none of the words, Nazareth, Nazarean, or Nazorean, appear anywhere in the Old Testament. There are several possible explanations.

"Nazorean" might be a play on words. It sounds much like two Old Testament words, *Nazarite* and *neser*.

- A *Nazarite* is a person set apart as holy, and is required not to cut his hair, touch a dead body, or consume wine (Numbers 6; Judges 13:3-7). Jesus is set apart as holy, but he will touch a dead body (9:18-25) and drink wine (26:26-29; Luke 7:34), so he cannot be a faithful Nazarite.

- *Neser* appears in Isaiah 11:1, a messianic text: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (*neser*) shall grow out his roots." Jesus is clearly the branch to grow out of those roots.

- However, a number of scholars (Boice, 42; Bruner, 61; France, 94-95) note that Matthew said, "This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (singular) in verse 15 and "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet" (singular) in verse 17 — but in verse 23 says, "so that what had been spoken through the prophets (plural) might be fulfilled." They conclude that, when Matthew speaks of a "Nazorean" in verse 23, he is not speaking of a specific prophecy by one prophet but rather of a more general series of prophecies that tell of the humble circumstances that the Messiah will experience.

For instance, Isaiah speaks of "one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers" (Isaiah 49:7) — and one who "gave (his) back to those who struck (him), and (his) cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; (who) did not hide (his) face from insult and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6). Isaiah also speaks of one who "was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity" (Isaiah 53:3). Daniel speaks of "an anointed one (who) shall be cut off and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9:26). The Psalmist tells of one who is "scorned by others, and despised by the people" (Psalm 22:6) — and one who has experienced insults, shame and dishonor (Psalm 69:19).

These scholars note that Nazareth was a very small town, probably only a few hundred people — sufficiently obscure that Josephus doesn't even mention it in his list of towns. Nathanael helps us to understand Nazareth's humble status when he asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Nazareth is as modest as a hometown can be.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Luke 2:4, 11), an auspicious birthplace. However, he grew up in Nazareth, and was known as Jesus of Nazareth rather than Jesus of Bethlehem. Therefore "He shall be called a Nazorean,' ...may mean at least this: 'he shall be considered a nobody.' It is the Great God's way to work exactly with nobodies in order, in Paul's words, 'to bring to naught the somebodies' (1 Cor 1: cf. Judg 6-7 and Gideon)" (Bruner, 61).

CHILDREN'S SERMON: Why We Obey

By Lois Parker Edstrom

Objects suggested: Examples of things babies shouldn't put in their mouths, a bike helmet, or other safety items.

Let's talk about the ways your parents try to protect you. When you were a baby your parents taught you not to put certain things in your mouth; things that might make you sick or things that could cause you to choke. You probably didn't understand why you couldn't put certain things in your mouth, but you learned to do what your parents asked of you.

When you were a toddler your parents taught you to stay off the road. They wanted to protect you from fast moving cars and trucks. You may not have understood the danger, but you needed to learn to trust your parents and to obey them.

As you grow older your parents are still trying to protect you. They ask you to use a seatbelt when you travel in the car. They teach you about healthy foods and take you to the doctor for checkups so you will stay healthy. They ask you to wear a helmet when you ride your bike. Can you think of other ways your parents protect you?

In the Bible there is an example of a good parent who does whatever is necessary to protect the child, Jesus. Joseph was told by an angel of the Lord in a dream that Herod, the king had heard about the birth of Jesus and that Herod wanted to harm the child. The angel told Joseph to "take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you...." to return.

Joseph wanted to protect Jesus so he did exactly what the angel of the Lord told him to do. When Herod was no longer king, the angel told Joseph in a dream that it was safe to go back to the land where Jesus was born and that's exactly what they did.

Joseph obeyed God even though it had meant moving his family to a foreign land. He did everything he could to protect his child.

So, this is a story about obedience to parents and to God. It is a good story for us to think about and remember today and every day.

SERMON: [\(Top of page\)](#)

Wouldn't it be nice if we could have an angel sitting on our shoulder to raise the alarm when we're in danger! Wouldn't it be nice if our angel would speak up at critical moments and say:

"Be sure to shut off the fire under the pot before you smoke up the whole house."

Or "Your car is about to die in its tracks. Get it to a mechanic now! Check the radiator!"

Or "The bridge ahead is about to fall. Stop the car now!"

Or "Your son has begun to take up with questionable friends. Spend more time with him. Get to know him better. Place some limits on his comings and goings."

Or "The market is about to tank. Sell your stocks now."

Or "It's time for a medical exam. Schedule one now! Do what the doctor tells you."

Or (and this is the one that I need to hear) "You have said too much already! Stop talking NOW!"

Wouldn't it be nice to have an angel at our disposal to tell us how to avoid trouble — how to handle problems before they get out of hand — how to minimize pain and maximize enjoyment! Wouldn't that be wonderful!

Joseph had an angel like that. The angel appeared to Joseph three times, in each instance telling him what to do. In the first instance, Joseph was about to divorce Mary, who was pregnant — but not by Joseph. The angel told Joseph not to be afraid to marry her, and explained the importance of her baby. Then Matthew reports what Joseph did.

"When Joseph awoke from sleep,
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;
he took (Mary) as his wife,
but had no marital relations with her
until she had borne a son;
and he named (the son) Jesus" (1:24).

Then the angel appeared a second time to Joseph, warning him that he needed to flee to avoid Herod's murderous wrath. The angel said:

"Get up, take the child and his mother,
and flee to Egypt,
and remain there until I tell you;
for Herod is about to search for the child,
to destroy him" (2:13).

Then Matthew reports what Joseph did. Joseph did exactly as the angel had instructed — EXACTLY! (1:14).

And then some time later, the angel appeared to Joseph again, saying:

"Get up, take the child and his mother,
and go to the land of Israel,

for those who were seeking the child's life are dead" (2:20).

Once again, Joseph did exactly what the angel told him to do — EXACTLY! (2:21). Joseph obeyed the angel, who was delivering a message from God, and the whole world has been better for his obedience.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had an angel to tell us what to do! Wouldn't it be nice if we had someone to help us make the best of our lives!

I believe that we do have an angel like that! Angels, after all, were only messengers of God, delivering God's messages to people who needed them. I believe that we have angels like that today — delivering God's messages to us — messages designed to keep us out of trouble and to help us live happy, productive lives.

Who are your angels? (PAUSE) Think about that for a moment! (PAUSE) Can you think of anyone or anything that God might be using to get a message to you — a message that you really need to hear — a message that will help you to avoid trouble and to live a happy, productive life?

Speaking for myself, I can say that one of my angels is my wife. I don't always like what she has to say and I don't always want to hear it, but I have learned to listen carefully. I know that she is on my side, and I know that she won't try to mislead me. I also know that she is wise in some ways that I am not. I might not always agree with her and I might not always do what she suggests, but I always listen (or almost always listen), because I know that God sometimes delivers his messages through her. She is one of my angels. Maybe your husband or your wife is one of your angels.

Sometimes our children are angels. Sometimes our children deliver a message from God that we need to hear. I heard about a mother who heard her children arguing loudly. She went to their room and asked why they were quarreling. One of the children said, "We're not quarreling. We're just playing Mommy and Daddy."

Could it be that there was a message from God in that child's words — a message that those parents desperately needed to hear!

You never know what kind of wisdom children might have to offer. I read about a Sunday school teacher who was getting ready for church when she snagged her pantyhose. She stopped at a drugstore on the way to church and bought a replacement pair, and then went to the ladies room to change. She then went to her classroom and began teaching the lesson for the day. But then one of the little boys noticed the pantyhose package that she had been foolish enough to place near her Bible. He began to spell the words out loud (NOTE TO THE PREACHER: For best effect, say these letters slowly, as a child might say them):

"Q-U-E-E-N S-I-Z-E."

And then he said, "Wow! Mrs. Marshall, you're the same size as our mattress."

(NOTE TO THE PREACHER: Don't rush! Give the congregation time to laugh!)

Well, nobody ever said that you will always like what your angel has to tell you!

There are angels to help you right here at this church. I like to think that I am one of them. I like to think that you will occasionally hear a word from this pulpit that you needed to hear. But I am only one of many angels here at this church:

- The friends that you make at coffee hour could be angels in disguise — could have a word from God that you need to hear.
- If you attend a Sunday school class or an adult Bible study class, you might find that the teacher is an angel — or that one of the other students has a message from God that you need to hear.
- If you serve on a committee or participate in one of our small groups, the people with whom you rub elbows there

might be angels who have a bit of wisdom from God to guide you — or a bit of comfort from God to console you — or a bit of encouragement to keep you going.

This place is full of angels. You just have to open your eyes to recognize them — and to open your heart to receive the blessings that they have come to give you.

And then the Bible is an angel. It is just full of God's messages that you need to hear — full of wisdom that has the potential to change your life for the better. I would like to encourage you to set aside a few minutes each day to read a few verses of scripture and to pray a brief prayer. Sometimes you won't feel like you have gotten anything out of it, but other times you will feel like God has spoken to you very directly. Over time, God will use your prayer and Bible reading to reshape your life. The Bible is just full of God's angels — God's messages to you — God's messages to help you untangle the unruly knots of your life — to help you to live the life that God created you for.

But you have to be like Joseph — willing to listen and willing to obey.

In his book, *Wake Up, America!* Tony Campolo tells of addressing the Southern Baptist Convention some years ago. They were having quite a ruckus at the time over the inerrancy of the Bible. The super-conservatives were insisting on inerrancy. The just-plain-conservatives were advocating a more moderate position. It had developed into a huge fight — a civil war. When he addressed these warring factions at the convention, Campolo said:

"I don't know why you're worrying so much
about the inerrancy of the Scripture.
After you prove that it's inerrant,
you're not going to do what it says anyway."

Then he said:

"It's true. If you're supposed to be a pacifist,
if you're supposed to give your money to the poor —
you're not going to do all this stuff.
Wouldn't it be better if you agreed
that the Bible didn't speak the truth all the time,
and then maybe you could get out of some of these obligations."

I love that story! Campolo was speaking "tongue-in-cheek," of course. He didn't want them to take the Bible less seriously. He wanted them to understand how UN-seriously they were taking it, so that they could move toward real obedience.

Let me be your angel for a moment right now. I have a message from God for you. The message is simply this. God has surrounded you with angels. God has provided an abundant supply of angels to bless your life — to help you straighten out the kinks in your life — to help you live a full and rich life. Your angels probably include members of your family — people here at this church — the Bible — and God only knows who else. God's angels are all around you, just waiting to bless you. Open your eyes. Open your heart. Hear — obey — and receive the blessings that God wants to give you.

Amen.

ANOTHER SERMON ON THIS TEXT: You might also find the following sermon helpful.

Pastor Steven Molin, "They Grow Up So Fast"

<http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Molin/Matt/Matt%2002.13-23,%20GrowFast.htm>

TRUE STORY:

See the Tony Campolo story in the sermon above.

THOUGHT PROVOKERS: [\(Top of page\)](#)

Today angels cannot appear as they once appeared....
They will come in other ways....
In the Bible, angels are not at all religious.
They almost never...confront us
in the specially religious contexts of worship, cultus,
religious language, or theological reflection....
Angels encounter people where, to our way of thinking,
we would never expect to find messengers of God.

- Claus Westermann, *God's Angels Need No Wings*

* * * * *

To pursue joy is to lose it.
The only way to get it
is to follow steadily the path of duty,
without thinking of joy,
and then, like sheep,
it comes most surely, unsought,
and we "being in the way" the angel of God,
fair-haired joy is sure to meet us.

- Alexander Maclaren

* * * * *

Chris Zorich played defensive tackle for the Chicago Bears. He is also known for helping disadvantaged young people.

Zorich's father left before he was born, and he was raised by his mother, Zora Zorich. They were extremely poor, but the mother kept them going. Zorich says of his mother:

"She was an angel on earth.
I remember that when things were bad
and we didn't have anything,
my mom was always there for me.
I want to give other people that same feeling.
I want to let them know there is hope."

* * * * *

I throw myself down in my chamber,
and I call in and invite God and his angels thither,
and when they are there, I neglect God and his angels,
for the noise of a fly,
for the rattling of a coach,
for the whining of a door.

- John Donne

HYMNS:

HYMNALS

Baptist Hymnal (BH)
Chalice Hymnal (CH)
Collegeville Hymnal (CO)
Common Praise (CP)
Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)
Gather Comprehensive (GC)
JourneySongs (JS)
Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)
Lutheran Service Book (LSB)
Lutheran Worship (LW)
Presbyterian Hymnal (PH)
The Faith We Sing (TFWS)
The Hymnal 1982 (TH)
The New Century Hymnal (TNCH)
United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)
Voices United (VU)
With One Voice (WOV)
Wonder Love and Praise (WLP)
Worship & Rejoice (WR)

GATHERING:

Joy to the World (BH #87; CH #143; CO #208; CP #154; ELW #267; GC #343; JS #194; LBW #39; LSB #387; LW #53; PH #40; TH #100; TNCH #132; UMH #246; VU #59)

Lift Every Voice and Sing (BH #627; CH #631; ELW #841; LBW #562; LSB #964; PH #563; TH #599; TNCH #593; UMH #519; WR #729)

PROCLAIMING:

Dona Nobis Pacem (CH #297; CO #598; CP #562; ELW #753; GC #730; JS #348; TH #712; UMH #376; VU #955; WOV #774)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (BH #88; CH #150; CO #222; CP #138; ELW #270; GC #348; JS #195; LBW #60; LSB #380; LW #49; PH #31; TH #87; TNCH #144; UMH #240; VU #48; WR #185)

I Wonder as I Wander (CH #161; CO #192; WOV #642; WR #225)

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (BH #106; CH #163; CO #194; CP #125; ELW #276; GC #354; LSB #393; PH #37; UMH #229; VU #58; WR #221)

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (BH #80; CH #124; CO #377; CP #48; ELW #490; GC #540; JS #203; LBW #198; LSB #621; LW #241; PH #5; TH #324; TNCH #345; UMH #473; VU #473; WR #232)

Let There Be Peace on Earth (CH #677; GC #731; JS #565; UMH #431; WR #614)

Lully Lullay Thou Little Tiny Child (CO #209; TH #247)

O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High (CP #628; ELW #322; LBW #88; LSB #544; LW #275; PH #83; TH #448, 449; TNCH #209; UMH #267; VU #348)

On This Day Earth Shall Ring (CP #150; PH #46; TH #92; UMH #248)

Once in Royal David's City (CH #165; CO #212; CP #123; ELW #269; GC #372; LSB #376; LW #58; PH #49; TH #102; TNCH #145; UMH #250; VU #62; WOV #643; WR #183)

There's a Song in the Air (CH #159; UMH #249)

What Child is This (BH #118; CH #162; CO #215; CP #137; ELW #296; GC #380; JS #209; LBW #40; LSB #370; LW #61; PH #53; TH #115; TNCH #148; UMH #219; VU #74; WR #184)

SENDING:

Ah, Holy Jesus (CH #210; CP #196; ELW #349; LBW #123; PH #93; TH #158; TNCH #218; UMH #289; VU #138; WR #262)

In the Bleak Midwinter (CO #193; CP #122; ELW #294; PH #36; TH #112; TNCH #128; UMH #221; VU #55; WR #196)

Love Came Down at Christmas (BH #109; CP #131; LW #46; TH #84; TNCH #165; UMH #242; WR #210)

HYMN STORY: Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

The origins of this hymn are lost in the haze of antiquity. It probably comes from the fifth century and probably originated in the Orthodox churches — but those are simply our best guesses.

But regardless of its origins, it continues to inspire us today. The first verse calls us to silent meditation — to pondering Jesus' incarnation. The second verse acknowledges Jesus as "King of kings, yet born of Mary" — what a mystery it is that a baby born in such ordinary circumstances could be King of kings and Lord of Lords. The third verse celebrates the "host of heaven" — God's angels, tasked with clearing away the darkness and bringing in the light. And the last verse celebrates the cherubim who endlessly cry, "Alleluia, alleluia, Alleluia, Lord most high!" (NOTE: Check your hymnal to make sure that the verses in it track with the verses noted above.)

SCRIPTURES FOR UPCOMING WEEKS: [\(Top of page\)](#)

We follow the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) and use Sunday texts only. When possible, we use supplementary mailings to accommodate denominational differences.

NOTE: For the Old Testament readings, I will provide only the exegesis.

Jan 6	Epiphany	Matt. 2:1-12 AND Isaiah 60:1-6
Jan 13	Baptism A	Matt. 3:13-17 AND Isaiah 42:1-9
Jan 20	Epiphany 2A	John 1:29-42 AND Isaiah 49:1-7
Jan 27	Epiphany 3A	Matt. 4:12-23 AND Isaiah 9:1-4

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