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**December 9, 2018**

**Angels Among Us: Nothing is Impossible - PEACE**

### **Intro to Worship**

When we read the story of Jesus' birth, we meet many characters who were afraid of the circumstances they faced in their day and age. But angels came to visit them, and the message they brought was "Do not be afraid." There are times in our lives when that is exactly the message we need to hear spoken to us! This season, we're listening to the angels and learning from our Biblical characters like Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds about how to respond in the face of fear.

This week we hear the extraordinary story of the Angel Gabriel coming to Mary with the powerful, life changing news that she will conceive a child, his name will be Jesus and he will be the Son of the Most High. Mary, while perplexed, says Yes, and simply: "Let it be so," for nothing is impossible with God. As we ponder this news, and imagine the peace that inspired such a response, let us sing of the coming of this Christ Child, born to be our Prince of Peace.

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### **Luke 1:26-38 (NIV) - The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

<sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.”

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

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Have you ever found yourself in a situation that is FAR from your choosing... A time that you wish you could turn back the clock and choose a different outcome! I know I have... When I was a junior in high school, I started to experience a numbness in my toes that over the course of the next year and a half traveled up my feet, past my ankles, up my calves, and beyond my knees. By the time I graduated high school, the numbness was approaching mid-thigh, and despite my fear and dread of the bad news I knew was coming, it was PAST time for me to seek medical attention. After a few things were ruled out by my GP, I was sent to a neurologist who quickly sent me for an MRI. Within a week of getting that scan, I was in surgery to remove a mass that was growing on my spinal cord. The fear that I had feared was coming gripped me and as my surgeon explained the possible outcomes of the procedure, it felt surreal... like this couldn’t possibly be happening to me. In the week leading up to the surgery, I was surrounded by family and friends and more prayers than I can count, and an amazing thing happened. A peace washed over me that could not explain. I knew that no matter how I woke up from surgery, whether I could walk or not, whether I would have to battle cancer or not, everything would be ok. I was not alone and could face whatever tomorrow held.

There was a song from VBS this past summer that captured exactly how I was feeling! The words went like this... “I know you’re watching over me, I know that you will never leave. I know that you won’t go away, so I won’t be afraid. No matter what comes my way... It is well with my soul....” As they wheeled me back to the operating room, I was reassuring my parents that everything would be ok, no matter what... trying to share my sense of peace with them. .... I woke up to what was close to the best possible outcome... I wiggled my toes, within days was cruising (albeit slowly) through the hospital hallways, and when the lab reports came back, we learned that the two tumors they found were both benign. (*Exhale*) While it would be well with my physical body, it had already been well for my soul, and would have been, no matter the outcome. God’s deep peace had enveloped me and I was not afraid.

When we face the unexpected, there are two typical ways to respond... with fear, anger, and denial... or with acceptance and a sense of peace with what IS. Whether we are facing health struggles, career hiccups, undesired political battles, We can stick with the “how can this be?”, “why me?” mindset, or we can shift to a “Ok... so now what?!” frame of mind.

When the Angel appears to Mary the announcement of a coming baby was more than problematic. Without going into all the details of early Jewish marriage customs, being pregnant meant that Mary could be stoned to death as an adulteress or at least bringing

shame to her family and being greatly humiliated if Joseph rejected her. But even with that fear of what might happen in the future, Mary is reminded that nothing is impossible for God. And even though she does not know how it will all work out, she trusts in what God can do through her and she has a peace that passes all understanding as she boldly proclaims that her heart glorifies the Lord, that she rejoices in God.

Moving into the peace of “what is” rather than getting stuck in the “how can this be?” denial allowed God to use Mary in a powerful way. We spend so much time wishing things were not the way they actually are. Our ability to creatively see how God might be working within our undesired situation is diminished by all the energy we spend on the denial or passively waiting for things to change for us. Peace comes when we accept what is and are able to use our energy to live into the what’s next.

When I think about current reality, I know that we still need to hear this message of peace. It seems that not a day goes by without us hearing about another person being diagnosed with cancer, or another mass shooting, or violence breaking out. There has been so much division and negativity in the news. And in our personal lives I know there are many who are struggling with physical and mental health issues, addictions, overwhelming work pressures, financial pressures and fears of what may come.

Into the anxiety of the unknown and unwanted, I imagine this angelic messenger coming to US, even today, and saying “do not be afraid!” “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The angel reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, and that God is with us, and will remain with us always. Even if nothing changes in our present circumstances, and have to face the very thing we fear the most, we can know that God is watching over us, that God will never leave, that it CAN BE and IS well with our soul, if we but let God’s messengers speak and allow the Prince of Peace to shine light in our darkness!

Last week, we talked about how angels – God’s messengers of hope, peace, joy, and love – did not cease to exist after the scriptures were written, but that they are alive and well... and are in fact you and me! When we hear a bell ring, we can imagine our own wings stretching out behind us! We are God’s angels, God’s messengers tasked with bearing God’s hope and peace for a brighter world everywhere we go!

Angels of God, look around for you are the ones who have been called to share the message of peace to those who live in fear. I believe that there are angels among us. We can be messengers of peace in the face of fear, for nothing is impossible with God.

I challenge you this week to take a white feather, as a reminder of angel wings and peace doves, and find one person or situation to which you can bring peace. What phone call could you make, what card could you write, what person could you help to bring the peace of God into the world this week?

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with us in the name of the Prince of Peace, the one who was sent to bring us the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

