

Advent 2011-ANGEL VISITS-WAITING FOR A GABRIEL  
Luke 1.5-25

Pastor Ed and his friend Daryl were picking up their sons from a youth event.  
You need to know Daryl's son is named Gabriel.

To make conversation Pastor Ed asked Daryl, "Hey what are you doing?"  
Friend Daryl's response, "Just waiting for Gabriel."  
Pastor Ed nodded his head yes, but in his head, though, "Aren't we all."

Pastor Ed was thinking about the angel Gabriel bringing the Good News  
To Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.

In a sense, aren't we all waiting for a good word, an encouraging word,  
a message from, and a movement of God in our world and in our lives.  
That's what Advent is about...waiting.

Our theme this Advent is "Angel Visits."  
It's convenient that there are four Angel Visits,  
that is 10% of the angel visits recorded in the Bible, four angel visits connected to the Christmas story  
and four weeks Advent, the season in which we prepare for Christmas.

So we'll match up the angel visits with the weeks.

The angels mentioned in the Bible dwell with God  
and following God's orders are sent to earth as messengers and ministers, Hebrew 1.14,  
**"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"**

Even Jesus was ministered to by angels and some of you have experienced those supernatural visits as well.

We do sometimes call one another an angel because that person is a very helpful person.  
They might have gone above and beyond,  
gone out of their way to do something extra nice for another person.

Now would you believe we as preachers are called angels in the book of Revelations?  
I know that is tough to believe, our halos sometimes looked a bit tarnished,  
but check it out in chapters 2-3.  
The letters to the churches start with, to the angel of the church of, then it names the church.

The angels were the pastors of those churches.  
They were called angels not necessarily because they helped people,  
but because they delivered messages to people, messages from God.

None the less, whether preaching or pastoring, despite what we see in movies or cartoons,  
Angels come from the above and beyond and when we die, none of us will become angels in heaven.

Actually we are higher than angels.  
Remember, **"angels are sent to serve those who inherit salvation."**

Back to waiting for Gabriel. We are blessed as a nation and a people yet we're so often divided, even polarized politically, religiously, and economically. People are protesting on the streets of Wall Street and on the lawns of college campuses.

The economies in many countries are unstable. People of all nations and races are just trying to put food on the table and shoes on their kids.

Weather, water, and winds have reeked havoc; damaged homes and businesses, and displaced people worldwide. Less than a month ago even in Minot, North Dakota there were damaged homes from the summer floodwaters that still needed to be cleaned up and repaired.

And there is the threat of Iran having nuclear weapons and the continued threat of terrorism, hanging over our heads.

And we're at wits end trying to understand the morality of the day, beyond all the graft and greed contributing to the economic upheaval, beyond the right of entitlement that perpetuates our self-centered and narcissist lives, the moral compass for our sexuality has been skewed even more.

Here are just a couple of examples. Do you know what swinging is? It might be good if you don't.

Well, two years ago I discovered swinging wasn't just putting my granddaughter in a swing and giving her a push.

In some circles today the term swinging is used for the popular entertainment of exchanging or swapping husbands and wives for a night.

I was enlighten by a TV Special just last week to learn that there are 50 year old women, young mothers, and even young couples with children making a living on the internet doing soft porn.

Why all the doom and gloom? Why so cynical? Why so pessimistic? Where is the hope? The joy? The peace?

I like what contemporary prophet David Jeremiah says about being pessimistic and optimist. He is pessimistic from the standpoint of humanity saving itself, of our ability, independent of God, to solve the problems, the enormous problems we've created.

But he is optimistic about God. Jeremiah doesn't believe God is just going to swoop down and erase our massive debts; put an end to terrorism; or cause a great spiritual revival to sweep the nation. He finds hope in the promise of Christ's return in the last days.

And he is confidence that God is able keep us from being conformed to the culture and able to transform us in Christ-likeness.

And isn't that what the hope of Advent holds out for us?  
Isn't that pretty much what we heard in the skit,  
that we need to welcome Jesus into our world and our lives?

Isaiah, who was touched by an angel, says that God is going to act, Isaiah 9.6-7,  
**"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...  
Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."**

Remember, Isaiah's warning and encouragement fell for the most part on deaf ears.  
He had told the Israelites that much of their pain was self-inflicted and  
the people just didn't want to hear it, didn't want to hear or do what God had in mind,  
and really didn't even care what God had in mind.

Not much has changed, has it?  
Isaiah spoke 600-700 years before Jesus.  
During that time Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians  
who in turn were conquered by the Persians (Iranians).

The Persians were conquered by the Greeks,  
and the Greeks then were conquered by the Romans.  
The Israelite nation was always under foreign rule and politically, morally, and spiritually bankrupt.

God had not come to their rescue and the last 400 years before Jesus  
there had been no word from God, no sign from God, no prophet until Gabriel shows up.

The future of his nation seemed hopeless.  
And for a man named Zechariah and his wife to have a child seemed hopeless too.  
Zachariah had been waiting for Gabriel, he just didn't know it yet.

Gabriel shows up at Zechariah's work and makes a promise,  
with this condition, that to find hope in the hopeless, one has to **TRUST GOD'S PROMISE,**

Luke 1.5-7, **"In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah...  
His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.**

**Both of them were righteous in the sight of God,  
observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.  
But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive,  
and they were both very old."**

These were good people, people of faith, but were frustrated in their faith.  
Zechariah had all but buried hope.  
But, the thing about hopelessness, it has the word hope in it.  
Hope is found in the barren and broken places of our lives.

That is why we light the first advent candle today,  
a symbol of light in the dark and empty places of our lives, it is a symbol of hope.

Gabriel tells Zechariah not to be afraid.  
 But who wouldn't, besides it's probably good to shake things up in Zechariah's life.  
 Gabriel then informs and interprets God's promise and purpose to Zachariah.

In verses 12-17 he tells Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth that they are going to have a baby.  
 That baby, like babies do, will bring joy, and even more, will be great,  
**"and he will go before the Lord  
 and turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom  
 of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."**

Zechariah's response insults Gabriel, verse 18, **"Do you expect me to believe this?  
 I am an old man and my wife is an old woman."**

His response is basically a slap in the face, to Gabriel, and to God.  
 It's like, "Ya right!!!  
 Don't you know old people don't have babies."  
 The tone in Zechariah's voice and temperament of his heart betray his bitterness.

Zechariah is hurt. We might sympathize with his crude and cynical response.  
 He has prayed and prayed, begged and begged, dreamed and dreamed, hoped against hope  
 all these years that he and Elizabeth would have a baby.  
 He'd probably buried that hope and now God tells him it's going to happen,  
 God is resurrecting that hope.

First, we're not only asked to find hope to TRUST GOD'S PROMISES  
 but to keep hope in hopelessness, we must **TRUST GOD'S PATIENCE**,  
 TRUST GOD'S PATIENCE not try God's patience, even though he might try ours.

Zechariah tried God's patience and found God was very patient.  
 Gabriel responses to Zechariah's nasty response with dignity  
 basically saying your prayer has been delayed not denied.

Then he wisely disciplines Zechariah,  
 verses 19 and following, **"I am Gabriel."**  
 Gabriel identifies himself. His name means, mighty one of God.

He goes on to tell Zechariah why he is there, **"I stand in the presence of God,  
 and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news."**

Translation, this is God's idea. I'm just doing what I'm told to do.  
 Zechariah, it is a good thing God is doing for you, but if you don't like it, then take it up with him.

Then Gabriel meets out what seems to be punishment for Zachariah,  
**"And now you will be silent and not able to speak until..."**  
 Many of us would definitely feel like we're being punished if we couldn't talk.  
 It's like being sent to the corner, or sent to your room.  
 Then again, some of us might appreciate a fast of silence from others.

Actually this is more like a doctor's prescription rather than a judge's punishment. It is a discipline more for Zachariah's good, and maybe those around him.

Think about this, Zechariah could have spread that poison of pessimism at work, home, or in the community much easier if he could talk.

But if he can't use his tongue, then he can't blast away in bitterness and doubt at God's blessing. And maybe, just maybe, the hope beyond hope because of the silence, He might just find time to sit down and listen to God.

Silence is a powerful discipline.

We should use it in the church and in our lives more often.

God understands our need for it. Listen.

Psalm 46.10, **"Be still and know that I am God."**

Zephaniah 1.7, **"Be silent before the Lord God."**

Habakkuk 2.20, **"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."**

Psalm 37.7, **"Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently before him."**

And in Psalm 62.1, 5, **"For God alone my soul waits."**

One of our favorite Christmas carols, "Silent Night, Holy Night" speaks of the blessing and birth of Jesus breaking the silence of the night.

It's interesting to note the change in Zechariah.

After he broke his fast of silence with,

**"His name shall be called John,"**

he went from blasting to blessing God,

with faith renewed, restored, and refreshed;

sang one of the first great hymns of the church, the Benedictus'.

It was first recorded in Luke 1.67-79.

Zechariah had learned and we need to learn

to TRUST GOD'S PROMISE, TRUST, NOT TRY GOD'S PATIENCE,

And we'll realize the hope in hopelessness if we simply **TRUST GOD'S PROVISION.**

Luke 1.23-24, **"When his time of service was completed, he returned home.**

**After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant..."**

Zechariah and Elizabeth got their baby, they named him John,

And as prophesized he was a forerunner of Jesus.

They got their baby and the people would get their savior.

Advent season is not only a season of God's hope, but a season of love, joy, and peace as well.

We wait not just for a Gabriel, but for Jesus.

If you're waiting in hope, please stand let's sing.