

“Make Ready a People: #more hope”

Our Advent theme focuses on the role of Angels and other messengers of God. Angels are sometimes portrayed in the scriptures, and certainly in religious art throughout history, as having wings. As angels are symbols of God’s Messages to us and God’s Presence with us, so feathers symbolize the Spirit of God with its ability to span any distance between heaven and earth – the freedom to fly to new heights in our lives as we claim God’s possibilities for our lives and for our world. This Advent Season you are invited to place a feather you will receive – some place where you will be reminded to keep your eyes open to God’s Messengers in your life. It will hopefully, remind you of God’s empowerment for you to be a messenger of hope in the midst of each day, in encounters you have with each person you meet. **As you come forward for communion this morning, you are invited to receive this gift of a feather.**

St. Augustine said, **“Angels are spirits, but it is not because they are spirits that they are angels. They become angels when they are sent. For the name angel refers to their office, not their nature. You ask the name of this nature, it is spirit; you ask its office, it is that of an Angel, which is a messenger.”** Being God’s messengers or representatives is not just the office of heavenly beings for we human beings are also called to be bearers of our Divine Parent’s Love and Presence.

Someone has said, “There are often people nearby who want to pull you up when you reach out. These are your angels-in-waiting. Jesus taught us and all the rest of his disciples to be those, who help others in need – who share God’s Agape Love to the powerless, vulnerable, rejected, and oppressed.

It has been said, “We are all angels in training.” As Children of God – joint heirs with Jesus Christ, we are learning and practicing his teachings and example – training to be Jesus’ and God’s ambassadors.

As our Scripture Skit showed, it was just another day at the Temple for Zechariah. It was his priestly turn to make sure everything was done properly and in good order. But it turned into something quite different when an angel showed up at the altar. In the Bible, there are many examples of angels or other representatives of God confronting the person or persons to whom God’s message was to be delivered. Each time, the natural response to such an extraordinary event was immediate fear – fear of being harmed and fear – awe – reverence for the Divine. Obviously, a message from God would be crowded out until the angel or messenger was able to quell our fear. Have you ever had a moment in your life after which you knew nothing would ever be the same? In the midst of great change, we often experience fear, so hope is always a welcome thing. The announcements of the angels or other messengers of the Almighty brought comfort and hope. Advent reminds us God makes us ready for whatever unknown may come our way and calls us to be messengers of #morehope in an ever-changing world. Yes, you and I are being called by God’s Son and

other representatives of the Divine Parent to share this Good News – the true reason for hope!

In our Scripture for today, we find Elizabeth lived every day with the fear of rejection. She admitted this in **verse 25a**, *“I have lived with the disgrace of being barren for all these years.”* After learning of Zechariah’s encounter with the angel – of Gabriel’s promise of her giving birth to a son and then her actually becoming pregnant, Elizabeth was filled with hope because her reason for fear was being eliminated, and so, she declared in **verse 25b-c**, *“Now God has looked on me with favor. When I go out in public with my baby, I will not be disgraced any longer.”* She had great hope because God had blessed her!

The opposite of the hope we receive because of God’s Message – the Good News is despair, which comes out of our fear. The message Zechariah and Elizabeth would bear a son in their old age who would himself be a messenger for one, who would be the Savior for the people is a story of the unexpected nature of hope and the call to become a people “made ready” for God’s unexpected call to make a difference. All the Jews were afraid for their safety and the future of their nation because of their oppression by the Roman Empire. They yearned for God to send them the Messiah or Savior to conquer their fears and provide them reason for hope. Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s reason for hope morphed into a reason for their community to have hope. Luke explained in **verses 65-66**, *“A sense of reverence spread through the whole community. In fact, this story was spread throughout the hilly countryside of Judea. People were certain that God’s Hand was on this child, and they wondered what sort of person John would turn out to be when he became a man.”*

Receiving hope because of the message delivered by the angels and other of God’s Messengers comes to us, along with our own call to be angels – God’s Messengers to others, who also need hope – to help others to be ready to live out the hope we have through God’s Son, Jesus the Christ! Unfortunately, another frequent aspect of experiences of God’s Presence, such as of angels, is the recipient’s attempts to reject the call to become a messenger – an angel for others. In today’s Scripture, Zechariah was incredulous “but I am old” to which Gabriel responded, “but I am Gabriel!” Who can argue with that? Perhaps Zechariah’s “but” experience should be an encouragement to us to forego our usual excuses to God’s call with “but I’m not good enough” or “what can one person do?”

The angel appearance is the breaking in of the Divine Parent into ordinary life, a theme in Luke. The appearance of an angel in the first chapter signals that this is an extraordinary story of divine events, and yet, it is set in the midst of very ordinary people. The additional message for us is one person can, and does, make a difference no matter how insignificant our contribution seems. God is calling us to become a people ready to be messengers of hope through our words and actions. **Yes, I believe there are angels among us. God is making us ready to be messengers of hope – confronting fear, in an ever-changing world. Amen.**