



Am I Listening to the Angel?

Luke 2:10: (KJV) *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*



Christmas is such a great time of year! It gives people something to look forward to, something to be excited about. Decorations spring up and brighten our environment. We love giving gifts, and we certainly love receiving them. Most of us get some extra time off to be with family or to just be able to do things. Sadly, the foundational reason behind this great time of year has become less and less relevant. All of this giving and goodwill stems from recognizing and honoring the birth of the most influential and heroic human being in all of world history. With the birth of Jesus, the world began to

change. For most people, that change has been imperceptible for the last 2,000 years, but it is happening. How do we know? An angel told us! Did you hear what he said?



Here is the angelic proclamation that signaled the change of everything:

Luke 2:8-14: (KJV) *⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

While this proclamation gives us a broad-stroke picture of God's plan being carried out through Jesus, there were several other angelic proclamations to fill in the details. We will walk through several of these to better understand the world-changing power that Jesus' birth began.

Jesus' birth and life were prophesied in surprising detail long before he came. Even more amazing is that the prophecy also held the promise of one whose role it would be to make the Messiah plain to all of Israel.



The final words of the Old Testament lay out this prophecy:

Malachi 4:5-6: (NASB) *⁵Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ⁶He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

Four hundred years later, this prophecy is ready to be fulfilled, as there would be the coming of one who would prepare the people for the Messiah, one who would do the work of Elijah. This man would pave the way for hope and for Jesus!

**END OF
OLD TESTAMENT**

Book of Malachi

**BEGINNING OF
NEW TESTAMENT**

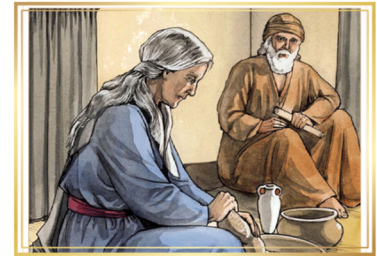
Book of Matthew



400 YEARS

Zacharias and Elizabeth were chosen to be the parents of John the Baptist. They were both very faithful, and the Scriptures say they were righteous in the sight of God.

Zacharias served the people as a priest of God, and yet in spite of their faithfulness, his wife was childless. Though they prayed as they grew older, their hopes for children would have grown faint. In spite of such disappointment, they went on with their lives, humbly serving their God.



One day, the providence of God suddenly began to manifest itself while Zacharias was serving in the Temple:

Luke 1:8-10: (NASB) ⁸Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

Zacharias was doing the job God had providentially arranged for him to do. He was serving alone in the Temple, and the people were in prayer outside waiting for him to emerge.

(Source: Abbott's Illustrated New Testament) Burning the incense in the temple was a duty of the highest interest and solemnity. The number of priests was so large that the falling of the lot to any individual was an important event in his life. He was to go alone into one of the most magnificent apartments in the world, and one which was connected, in the mind of every Jew, with associations of the deepest religious veneration and awe. There he was to perform a most solemn ceremony - to burn incense in the very antechamber and almost in the presence of Jehovah while thousands were waiting without in silence and solemnity. Thus this first announcement of the approach of the Messiah was made.

The people were waiting for this solemn, important ceremony to end. Zacharias was delayed and they were waiting for him to come out, but Zacharias needed to stay and be able to hear what God was about to reveal.



God sent His angel, His messenger, to Zacharias while he was serving God in sacredness and quiet in a holy place:

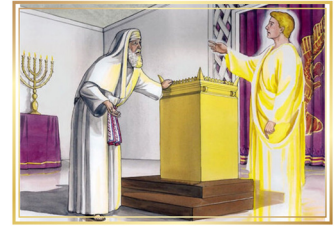
Luke 1:11-13: (NASB) ¹¹And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹²Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. ¹³But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

So much information and power in so few words - do not fear, your prayers were heard, you will have a son and his name will be John!

The scripture continues:

Luke 1:14-17: (NASB) ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the holy spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷It is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

This was God's providence revealed to a humble servant of God. Zacharias was to have a **DIRECT** role in the fulfillment of prophecy! How hard it would have been to absorb such news - how hard it would have been to believe that prophetic fulfillment was going to work through you and your wife! How hard it would have been to go home and tell your wife.



Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayers have been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son...many will rejoice at his birth.

God's messengers do **NOT** just randomly visit people to chat. They **ONLY** come on errands directly from the Father Himself. When they appeared, they needed the attention of those to whom they spoke.

This news was so overwhelming that Zacharias doubted the angel:

Luke 1:18-20: (NASB) ¹⁸Zacharias said to the angel, How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years. ¹⁹The angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

We can see why Zacharias had doubt because he and his wife Elizabeth were old. But there was divine intervention here. Zacharias was now *unable to speak* because he did not believe the words of the angel.

Zacharias' new inability to speak created a poignant reminder of God's providence and will. He would now have to navigate his life on a deeper level of faith and trust, as this inability to speak would be a constant reminder of God's power, His providence and His prophecies.

Luke 1:21-23: (NASB) ²¹The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. ²³When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.



Just because Zacharias could not speak, it did not deter him from fulfilling his temple duties. He could not go home right away and tell his wife.

When we think about it, God's providence in our lives is a direct proof of His power in our lives. In the case of Elizabeth and Zacharias, this blessed power in their faithful lives was necessary for the good of the people, and most



importantly, to bring forth the Messiah. It is a humbling experience to see God's power manifest in our lives.

Elizabeth's reaction to all of this shows her humility and her fierce obedience and gratitude:

Luke 1:24-25: (NASB) ²⁴After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵This is the way the LORD has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.

(Source: John Lightfoot's Bible Commentary) She hid herself, because the Lord had dealt so with her, till he had taken away her reproach; giving her so remarkable a son, one who was to be so strict a Nazarite, and so famous a prophet. Lest therefore she should any way defile herself by going up and down, and thereby contract any uncleanness upon the Nazarite in her womb, she withdraws, and sequesters herself from all common conversation.



Elizabeth kept herself away from the rest of the world in respect, perhaps, to this Nazarite approach to life the angel told her husband their son would have.

While God's prophecies are a guarantee of the future for all people, His providence can be a specific gift for individuals. Both prophecy and providence were handed to Zacharias and Elizabeth after a 400-year period of God's silence to Israel.



The angel Gabriel spoke, and his words enlightened and blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth. This would eventually reignite hope among the people and gave Israel the opportunity to prepare for their coming Messiah. Think about how long they existed without hope, and the hope came in the holy place, in a conversation between an angel of God and a humble servant. This is how the hope of the entire New Testament began.



God sent Gabriel to Zacharias with a potent message of change, hope and prophecy fulfilled. The magnitude of this message rendered its recipient speechless but not actionless. Zacharias and Elizabeth embraced the message, its privilege and its responsibility and thereby became tools in God's hand. Am I listening to what the angel said? Am I willing to act in accordance with the call to walk with a higher level of loyalty to my Lord?

It is incredibly difficult to wrap our heads around the gift and responsibility that Zacharias and Elizabeth were given.



This first angelic guidance was just the beginning.
How would Gabriel's next and even more dramatic message be received?

We cannot stress enough that angelic visits in biblical times were rare, but when they did occur they were massively important. Gabriel had just informed the childless Zacharias and Elizabeth that they would have a child who would fulfill prophecy. This was God's way of giving assurance to His faithful ones that His will was being done in their lives. This was God's way of helping them realize the powerful privilege they had been given.

God commissioned the angel Gabriel with more to say. After informing a couple who were old and barren they would have a child, Gabriel's next message would be delivered to one in an entirely opposite circumstance. He would now speak to a young, unmarried woman and inform her of a most unlikely pregnancy.

We really do not know anything about Mary before her angelic visit except that she was a faithful, God-fearing, Jewish girl. The depth of her faith can be understood by her response to the angel's message. Mary would grow to understand the providence of God, as she would grow to understand the power of the prophecies of God.



This next verse in Luke picks up right after Elizabeth's five-month seclusion:

Luke 1:26-29: (NASB) *²⁶Now in the sixth month **the angel Gabriel was sent from God** to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And coming in, he said to her, Greetings, favored one! The LORD is with you. ²⁹But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.*

Talk about an unexpected greeting! How do you process something like that?

With the privilege of being a "favored one" comes challenge, discomfort and even fear, because standing up as a chosen vessel of the will of God is never an easy task.

For Mary, the privilege of being "favored" would demand powerful faith and trust, requiring all of her dedication:

Luke 1:30-34: (NASB) *³⁰The angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.*

Gabriel repeats that she is favored of God. What a powerful preparation for her coming experiences and responsibilities.



Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High; and the LORD God will give him the throne of his father David; ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end. ³⁴Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I am a virgin?

From unexpected greeting to impossibility! For Mary, great privilege came at great cost.



HOMEWORK



Read
Acts: 3:19-21



Can we pause and consider this prophecy Gabriel is giving? David's throne was an earthly throne, and this kingdom would be an earthly kingdom.

The Messiah was sent to restore what was lost. What was lost? Perfection on the earth before sin entered in.

The greatest privilege of Mary's life would begin with the greatest challenge of her life. She would become miraculously pregnant - an entirely unexplainable event, and before being married - an entirely scandalous event. No wonder the angel assured her twice AND cited the prophetic significance of King David's throne and an everlasting kingdom.

Luke 1:35-38: (NASB) ³⁵The angel answered and said to her, The holy spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child shall be called the son of God.

She must have been thinking, *Could this be the Messiah?*

Listen to what the angel said in one little message:

1. You will miraculously conceive, even though you are not married.
2. Your son will be called the son of God.
3. He will hold the throne of David.
4. His kingdom will last forever.

³⁶And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.

The news of Elizabeth being six months pregnant would have been both shocking and relieving. This showed Mary that God truly was in all of these events, and she and Elizabeth were both most blessed and privileged.

³⁸And Mary said, Behold, the bondservant of the LORD; may it be done to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

Such privilege changed Mary, for it showed her how to see and believe the impossible. Privilege gave her life a focus, and it made her an unmistakable part of the greatest story ever told!

God's gift of privilege within His providence will elevate a life from average and ordinary to usable and pliable in God's hands.





Mary, against all human logic, accepted being pliable in the hands of God and fulfilled her role with humility and faithfulness.

Let's look at what Mary did soon after being given such honor.

There was a practicality that needed to be solved with this miracle, but God had that all well-in-hand and we will touch on that soon.

For now, let's follow what Mary did soon after her encounter with the angel Gabriel:

Luke 1:39-42: (NASB) ³⁹Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

Notice this does not say she stayed at home until there would be physical evidence of her pregnancy. There was NO hesitation, and she acted in full assurance of faith in what she had been told!



Mary LISTENED TO and BELIEVED the angel

⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the holy spirit. ⁴²And she cried out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

Remember, the baby John also was filled with God's spirit in his mother's womb. No wonder he leaped inside her. His Messiah was just inches away as their mothers hugged.



Elizabeth had also LISTENED TO and BELIEVED the angel who spoke to her husband

Upon hearing Mary's voice, she knew exactly what was happening! She knew that her baby, who would be named John, would lead the way for Mary's baby, Jesus, who would save the world!

Elizabeth's humility was profound:

Luke 1:43-45: (NASB) ⁴³And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the LORD.

Elizabeth again reassures Mary that her faith in God's plan for her would yield the fruitage of all that Gabriel had spoken.

With Elizabeth's example of living at a high standard, her piety would rub off on Mary as she mentored her. There is something special about having these two women of very different ages going through this similar experience, and we see the maturity of Elizabeth's mentoring.

Mary's response was one of faith, humility and praise.



First, she recognizes her own honored position:

Luke 1:46-49: (NASB) ⁴⁶And Mary said: My soul exalts the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. ⁴⁹For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.



Second, she recognizes the power of God's mercy upon all men, especially Israel:

Luke 1:50-55: (NASB) ⁵⁰AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. ⁵¹He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. ⁵³HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; and sent away the rich empty-handed. ⁵⁴He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.

No wonder Mary was selected by God - she brought praise, honor and glory to Him for all He has done and what He will do, forever.

These two blessed women who were visited by the angel Gabriel encouraged each other, until right about the time John was born.

Luke 1:56: (NASB) And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

The Scriptures do not say this, but Mary probably watched the birth of John before she left Elizabeth. By the time she departed, Mary's pregnancy would have been beginning to show. This would open up an entirely different set of circumstances, but she gained strength by being with Elizabeth who was older and more mature. They both honored and praised God for their difficult and miraculous experiences.



God sent Gabriel a second time to deliver the most important and timely message of those days, this time to Mary. This young, unmarried woman heard, accepted and responded to the challenges and blessings the angel brought to her. She heard his grand message with both her heart and her mind. She then immediately acted based on her faith in that message.

Am I listening to what the angel said with my heart, mind and actions?

These two faithful women were beacons of light when it came to listening and responding to God's direction.

First was Zacharias and then Mary.

Joseph would be next to hear angelic instruction. How would he respond?

It is important to realize the differences in each of these angelic visits. Zacharias was performing a sacred service to God when Gabriel appeared with news and instruction. Mary was simply being her young, faithful self when Gabriel appeared to her. Joseph was in an entirely different position. He had to deal with his espoused being pregnant, which in those days in the Jewish culture was a major disgrace.



God saw fit to - according to prophecy - have a virgin conceive, and He chose the young woman Mary. She was a truly faithful worshipper of God, and she was betrothed to an older man by the name of Joseph. God sent His messenger Gabriel to tell this young woman she will miraculously conceive, and it will be before she is married. Mary humbly accepted this unique favor from God and had to somehow inform Joseph.

This may well have happened after Mary went to visit with Elizabeth:

Matthew 1:18: (NASB) *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the holy spirit. (This was three months after the angel gave her the message.)*

For Joseph, this would have been a completely unexpected, unique and horrifying dilemma. What should he do?

He could have exercised his right to have Mary sent away in public shame, but as we will see, Joseph was stronger than that:

Matthew 1:19: (NASB) *And Joseph her (betrothed) husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.*

The fact that Joseph did not seek to make her a public target for disgrace helps us see his strength of character.

This was extraordinary and life-changing decision that had been laid before him, so he needed to think this through carefully.

This again shows us his compassion and wisdom:

Matthew 1:20: (NASB) *But when he had considered this, behold, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the holy spirit.*

The angel began by addressing Joseph as a *son of David* and then eased his fear.

The angel's reassurance was certainly in harmony with Mary's claim, but it was still confusing.

The angel continued:

Matthew 1:21-23: (NASB) *²¹She will bear a son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. ²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the LORD through the prophet: ²³BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL, which translated means, GOD WITH US.*

Once again we see an angel, a messenger of God, delivering important information with a solid basis in prophecy. And this was not just any prophecy; it described the coming of their long-awaited Messiah! It was NOT some wildly contrived explanation. Mary, his espoused, was carrying the savior of all, and Joseph would have the opportunity and privilege to raise this savior to manhood! Glory to God in the highest!

There is something very powerful in the prophecy from Isaiah:

Isaiah 7:13-14: (NASB) *¹³Then he said, Listen now, O house of David!... ¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.*





How was Joseph addressed in **Matthew 1:20**? *Joseph, son of David*. He was told, *do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife*. Joseph was listening to the angel. He was saying: You are part of the prophecy in Isaiah. This baby will be called Immanuel.



Joseph LISTENED TO and BELIEVED the angel

Matthew 1:25: (NASB) *but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus.*

Joseph's account shows us how a fear of the impossible can, by the grace and overruling power of God, be turned into faith that sees through the impossible. Joseph believed the angel and acted on that belief. He would be a godly man and protect his family in the face of sure misunderstanding and persecution. Joseph took the reins given to him by God and forged ahead with courageous humility.

Joseph's experiences with angels did not stop here. For the next few minutes, let's jump ahead in the story and track the strength, faith and leadership of Joseph as he continually followed angelic leading. These instructions enabled him to best save and protect his baby son, the baby boy who would become the future savior and protector of the world.



Traditional depictions of the nativity scene - the birth of Jesus - show the three wise men there in the stable with Joseph, Mary, Jesus and the animals. **Actually, they came around to Bethlehem much later. The Scriptures say they found Jesus and his family in a house, and it was there that they worshipped him and gave him gifts.** The Magi's visit was also a trigger for Herod, who was going to have nothing to do with any savior being born and raised in his jurisdiction.

This meant danger was on the horizon:

Matthew 2:13: (NASB) *Now when they (the Magi) had gone, behold, 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 going to search for the child to destroy him.*



Joseph LISTENED TO and BELIEVED the angel

All the angel had to do was to tell Joseph "the what, where and why" and Joseph's response was immediate and complete. Keep in mind that they had not been living at home, but in Bethlehem - since Jesus' birth - and were being instructed for a second time to relocate, this time to another country. God's faith in Joseph was well-placed, for he again courageously walked his family into the unknown. God had also provided the gifts of the Magi as a way for them to sustain themselves while in Egypt.

God provided, and so did Joseph. We can see clearly how Joseph, as the leader of his family, had mastered the art of following God's will and direction. It is safe to assume that Joseph would be content to stay in the foreign land of Egypt until he had been otherwise instructed, for to move without instruction would have been to run ahead of God.



Soon enough Joseph received his directions:

Matthew 2:19-21: (NASB) ¹⁹But when Herod died, behold, *an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt*, and said, ²⁰Get up, take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the child's life are dead. ²¹So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

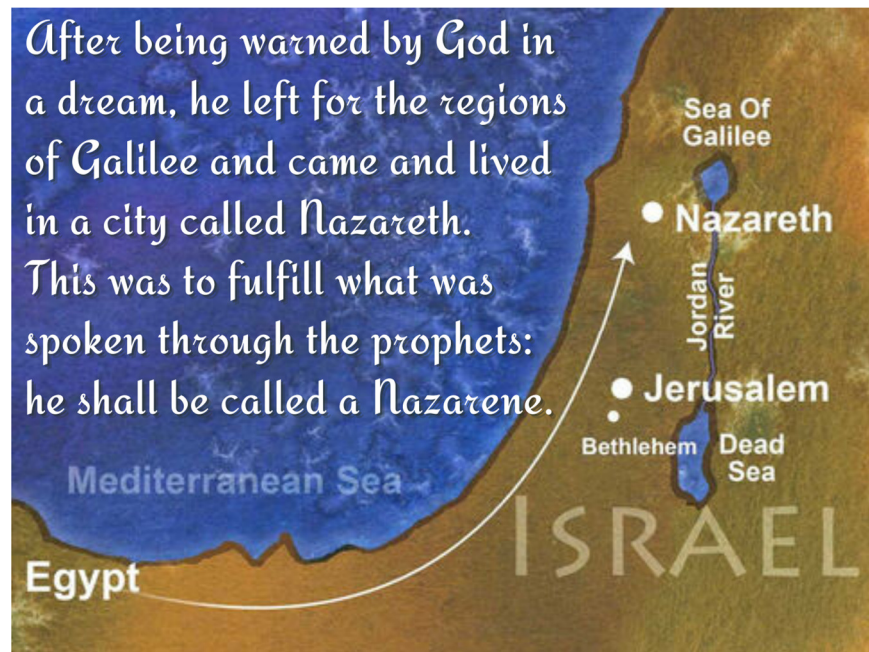


Joseph LISTEN TO and BELIEVED the angel

Again it was time to relocate, to lead his family through another series of steps for their protection and well-being. Remember, the world then was not the way it is now. There was no 24-hour news for him to check. No one texted him that Herod had died and all was well. He was going back into Israel on just the word of the angel. He was continually listening to, believing and acting on what the angel was telling him in his dreams. Joseph most likely was going to head back to Bethlehem.

But as he drew closer and discovered the current political landscape, his fatherly instincts raised great concern:

Matthew 2:22-23: (NASB) ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, ²³and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: he shall be called a Nazarene.



After being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: he shall be called a Nazarene.



Joseph LISTENED TO and BELIEVED the angel

He was again guided by God, and again he changed course and finally came to settle in Nazareth.

Other than a brief mention when Jesus was 12-years old and left behind in Jerusalem, this is pretty much all that we know about Joseph, but what we know of him teaches us profound lessons. Think about it; God's plan is a plan of hope. For that hope to be sure it must be built upon the firm foundation of prophecy, but also must be built with the sturdy and enduring materials of godly character.

We do know that Joseph had other children with Mary and he was a carpenter.



Joseph! He listened to and believed the angel many times.

We know that Jesus' character was thoroughly competent and pure, but we do not often think about the strength of character necessary for his "supporting cast." Joseph was chosen as a critical example and support for the young and tender Jesus. He was strong as a man, courageous in his decisions, daring in his actions and most importantly, humble in his obedience to God's will. Joseph listened!

Am I listening to what the angel said with my heart, mind and actions?

The difference in Joseph's experiences with the angel versus the other angelic proclamations is that Joseph heard the angel speak to him specifically in DREAMS. This required a little more faith. In the other proclamations, the angel actually *appeared*. As a dad, Joseph was his baby's primary example of how to grow up into a mature man. Joseph had that responsibility and privilege with the savior of the world.

Joseph seems to be an unsung hero by listening to the angel. His role was to protect the child Jesus, and God showed him how.

Zacharias, Mary and Joseph all listened to angels before Jesus was born. Who heard angels after his birth?

Finally, we will get back to the scriptures we began with. Our journey back to these scriptures has taught us some very valuable lessons. God's will sometimes unfolds in unexpected ways. In biblical times when God wanted an unfaltering response, He sent an undeniable messenger (an angel) for enlightenment. While God does not do that kind of thing any longer, we still can learn to listen to those angels from ancient times.



Sometimes when there is a world-changing event in God's plan, there are those who get to observe and participate by virtue of being in the right place at the right time.

The humble shepherds who were out tending their sheep that night in Bethlehem would be given this distinct gift:

Luke 2:1,3-7: (NASB) ¹Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ³And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. ⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, ⁵in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

This journey is said to be about 90 miles by way of the winding roads of the day. Traveling at the speed of donkey, this meant it would probably take approximately five days. It would have been a grueling trip, especially for a woman ready to give birth.

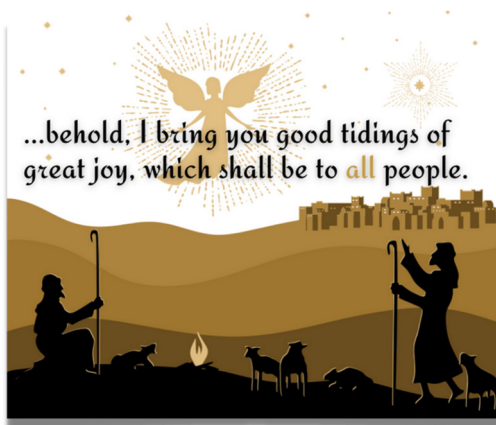
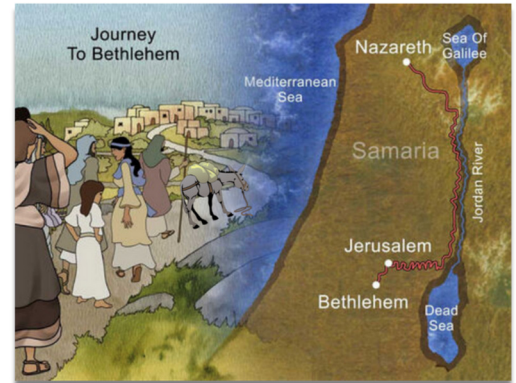
Once again, Joseph is taking the lead as they traveled to the city of his ancestors to pay their taxes.

⁶While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The birth of Jesus began as a very private event. Only Mary and Joseph were there with a stable full of animals. The savior of the world is born and seemingly no one knew about it! For Joseph and Mary, this may have been a preferred circumstance. After all, they were now going to have to nurture, raise and protect this precious baby who would eventually save the world. This kind of responsibility makes you want to pause and think.

God's providence did give them some time, but also designed it so word of this world-changing event could get out in a most unorthodox way:

Luke 2:8: (NASB) *In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.*



Hope was about to be revealed, and that would bring rejoicing. When you think about it, true rejoicing in something works best with those who are sincere, who work hard and have relatively simple lives. These shepherds were simple, hardworking people.



They were chosen to be a witness to and then proclaim this announcement for the ages of the birth of the Messiah:

Luke 2:9-11: (KJV) ⁹And, lo, *the angel of the Lord came upon them*, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, *behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Think about the angelic perspective. They saw Lucifer fall from heaven to bring sin and all its misery to humanity. For thousands of years they have seen its awful effects, war, disease and death. But on this day, God has given them hope and a final solution to eradicate sin by the gift of His only begotten son, Jesus.



Already the message is overwhelming! An angel, a glorious appearance and a prophecy fulfilled!

Luke 2:12-14: (KJV) ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Singing in the heavens! Praising God in a way that had never been seen before! What a privilege to see! What a privilege to hear:

Luke 2:15: (KJV) And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

There are actually seven points described here:

1. *Fear not* - God is a God of love and not a God of torment.
2. *Good news* - The original gospel.
3. *Great joy* - What hope!
4. *All people* - Who is left out? No one! Good news for everyone who has ever lived.
5. *A Savior* - Messiah, the son of God, became a perfect man.
6. *Glory to God in the highest* - He deserves our praise for this amazing plan.
7. *On earth, peace and goodwill toward men* - The future peaceable kingdom on earth with Jesus as the king.





They simply and joyfully responded to this message, for the hope they had seen was powerful, of divine origin and certain.

They were given a gift of such magnitude they had to witness it in person. They listened to the angel:

Luke 2:16-18: (KJV) ¹⁶And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

The shepherds courageously set out to deliver the good news they had seen, for their rejoicing could not be contained.

Let's take a minute and put this all together. Humble shepherds were sent to verify everything the angels told Mary and Joseph. Why shepherds? King David was a shepherd on these same hills around the city of David. What would Jesus become? The great shepherd! Only God could give us all these beautiful connections.

Let's look at how this affected Mary:

Luke 2:19-20: (KJV) ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

These lowly men, shepherds, were given a glimpse of God's glorious plan and their simple response was to let everyone know.



...that angel and all that followed?
Are we listening to John the Baptist?

Thirty years later, John the Baptist confirmed what the angel said:

John 1:29: (KJV) The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist confirmed everything the angel said. Are we listening?



...Jesus' own words?
He FULFILLED what the angel said!

John 3:16-17: (KJV) ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.



...Old Testament prophecies?
They are in EXACT HARMONY
with what the angel said!

Daniel 2:44: (KJV) *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*



...New Testament prophecies?
They ACCENTUATE what the angel said!

Revelation 21:4: (KJV) *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

This scripture is pretty straightforward - God shall wipe away all tears, there shall be no more more death, neither sorrow, nor crying or pain. Why? Those things are passed away because Jesus came and paid the price.

When we ask, am I listening to the angel - we are saying, am I listening to the entire word of God? Throughout all of human history, this word of God has sounded the hope of God's plan.



The experiences surrounding the birth of Jesus were filled with angelic messages. These messages calmed fears, quoted prophecies, gave instruction, provided encouragement, and instilled hope and courage into those who heard them. We, too, can benefit in these same ways from those same messages. The question is, are we listening to the angels?

Every year we talk about the birth of Jesus. We get inspired by it, appreciate and love it. It is a beautiful story we want to tell everyone. But the question is, are we really listening to the magnitude of what that birth began? This is an enormous world-changing event. Once it started, it could not be stopped. Jesus was born, he died, he was raised to immortality - divine nature, and now he is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who comes to rule the earth.

**So, am I listening to the angel?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated



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See:  **CQ Rewind**
SHOW NOTES

1. Who is mentioned in the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6? Who does he represent? What was his role in Jesus' life? How long did it take before this prophecy was fulfilled?
2. What was Zacharias doing when the angel came to him in the Temple? Describe some of his duties. Why was Zacharias surprised at what the angel told him? What was the result of Zacharias' doubt? Of what would this disability have reminded Zacharias? How did Elizabeth react to the news? (See Luke 1:8-25)
3. Are you "listening" to what the angel said? How are you willing to act in accordance with the call to walk with a higher level of loyalty to our Lord?
4. What was the angel Gabriel's next message? In what way will finding favor with God make demands on Mary? What were the four things predicted of Jesus in the angel's message? How did Mary react to this message? How would you have reacted if you were in Mary's shoes? (See Luke 1:26-42)
5. Mary listened to the angel, but did she believe? Did Elizabeth believe? Did the baby in Elizabeth's womb believe? How do we know? How did Elizabeth mentor Mary? How did Mary respond? (See Luke 1:43-56)
6. Do you listen to what the angel says with your heart, mind and actions? How have you accepted and responded to the challenges and blessings in your life based on your faith in that message?
7. When did Joseph find out that Mary was pregnant? What was his reaction? What does this tell us about Joseph? On what Old Testament prophecy was the angel's message based? What did Joseph face in accepting Mary's condition? (See Matthew 1:18-25, Isaiah 7:13-14)
8. What did the visit of the Magi trigger? What was the angel's second dream message to Joseph? How did Joseph respond? What sustained Jesus' family while they lived in Egypt? What were the third and fourth dream messages given to Joseph by the angel? How did Joseph respond to these? (See Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)
9. What part in Jesus' life did Joseph play? How was he a strong example for the young Jesus? In what way did Joseph's experiences with the angel differ from Mary's and Zacharias's experiences? Do we have either of these kinds of experiences in this day and age?
10. How did God design spreading the knowledge of Jesus' birth? How would the angels have felt about Jesus' birth? Why? Summarize the seven points the angel declared to the shepherds. Why was this privilege given to lowly shepherds? How did Mary feel about all the events surrounding Jesus' birth? (See Luke 2:1-20)
11. Explain four things we should be listening to from the angels based on the summary in the CQ Rewind Show Notes. What did the angelic messages surrounding the birth of Jesus provide to those that received them? How do these messages resonate in your life? How are you listening to the angels to realize the magnitude of God's plan?