**January 1, 2023 Matthew 2:13-23**

***Angels Among Us***

**Scripture: *Matthew 2:13-23 NRSV***

*(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." (16) When 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. (17) Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: (18) "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." (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. (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."*

**Notes:**

1. ***Angels*** are frequently referred to throughout scripture.
   1. ***Angels*** appeared throughout the ***Exodus*** of the Israelites from Egypt.
   2. Angels ***ministered*** to Elijah when he fled from Jezebel.
   3. An angel ***protected*** Daniel in the Lion’s den.
   4. Gabriel ***delivered*** ***news*** to Mary that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit.
   5. Angels also ***appeared*** to Joseph three different times.
2. The angel ***warns*** Joseph that he should escape to Egypt.
   1. God uses his angels as agents of ***wisdom*** and ***protection***.
   2. Angels are God’s ***messengers*** who give ***assurance***.
3. God can work through ***anyone***.
   1. Whenever there is love, God is ***present***.
   2. In our own power we cannot ***duplicate*** the work of the Lord and His angels.
4. Angels must certainly be ***real***.
   1. Angels are a frequently found in ***songs***, ***stories*** and ***poems***.
   2. Lives become filled with ***hope*** and ***love*** because of the angels who confront them.
   3. How has your life been ***transformed*** by the hand of God?
   4. We must rely on our ***father*** in heaven.
   5. Whenever we are confronted with the situations of life pray that the Lord would ***intervene*** in our lives.

**Script:**

Are angels real? So many people put a lot of stock in angels, and rightly so. I have seen numerous photos where the sun plays tricks with the camera lens and people are able to see in the pictures, images of what appears to be angels. I remember one time when I was maybe 10, I got angry with my sister. I took a candle and scribbled all over her bedroom mirror. Once I finished scribbling, I looked at what I had done in my haste and anger; low and behold the image on the mirror appeared to be an angel. Needless to say, I didn’t wash it off and nobody else cleaned it for many months. For me it was a reminder of my anger and the fact that the Lord is always watching. So to answer my initial question, Yes, I believe angels are among us, both seen and unseen.

What about you, do you believe there are angels among us. Have you seen some strange occurrence which may be attributed to the supernatural, maybe even to angels. Have there been instances where things have taken place, times where there is no clear explanation for what is happening. How do you explain it, could it be that the occurrence was just some freak coincidence, or perhaps there were angels working in our midst, or just maybe it was the divine had of God.

Whether it was coincidence, angels, or divinity; God has a way of moving in our midst; a way of getting our attention and guiding us to divine appointments; places where he has work for each of us to do, if we are aware and willing. Today we see an example of God’s hand at work in the very home of His one and only son. The Magi had just visited the young Child Jesus and left by another route home. Lets look at our Scripture today and see what insights we can gain form Matthew 2:13-23. Stand with me as we share in the reading.

*(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." (16) When 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. (17) Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: (18) "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." (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. (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." Matthew 2:13-23 NRSV*

Angels are frequently referred to throughout scripture in both Old Testament as well as the New. We read of the Angels throughout scripture. One who comforted Hagar and her child Ishmael when they were sent from Abraham’s camp. The Angel that was present when Balaam heard his donkey speak. The angels that appeared throughout the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The angels who appeared throughout the book of Judges, including the one who announced the birth of Samson to his mother. And let us not forget the Angels who ministered to Elijah when he fled from Jezebel. There were angels who dealt with David’s wrong doings and angels who instructed him as well. We see mention of angels throughout the Psalms. It was an angel of the Lord who shut the mouths of the Lions when Daniel was sent to the Lion’s den. It was an angel that delivered messages to Zechariah the prophet.

It was the angel Gabriel who came to Zechariah the priest and gave him the news that his wife would conceive a child who would become John the Baptist. The same angel Gabriel delivered the news to Mary that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and she would name him Jesus. And it was a host of angels that appeared to the shepherds on the night of Jesus Birth. Angels also appeared to Joseph three different times; each time to instruct him on what he should do to protect Jesus and this holy family.

In our passage today we see the second appearance of an angel to Joseph; today the angel brings a warning that Joseph should gather his family quickly and escape to Egypt, away from Herod’s jealous wrath. And finally, after Herod dies another angel appears to Joseph telling him it was safe to return to his home, in Nazareth where they settle.

Every time there is danger; every time an important decision must be made, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to give him instruction. It appears, God uses his angels as agents of wisdom, and protection. When the angels appeared to the shepherds, they proclaimed the good news but they also gave the shepherds assurance and directions. They told them that they had nothing to fear. Angels are God’s messengers who give assurance. They are manifestations of the presence of God. Joseph believed in them because he responded too their instruction. It was clearly an act of faith on his part.

Tony Campolo shared a story he had heard the late Mike Yaconelli. Apparently, there was a deacon in a church who was not deaconing the way he should. So Yaconelli said to the deacon, “I have a group of young people who go to the old folk’s home and put on a worship service once a month. Would you drive them to the old folk’s home?” The deacon agreed.

The first Sunday at the old folk’s home, the deacon was in the back with his arms folded as the kids were doing their thing up front. All of a sudden, someone was tugging at his arm. He looked down, and here was this old man in a wheelchair. He took hold of the old man’s hand and the old man held his hand all during the service. The next month that was repeated. The man in the wheelchair came and held the hand of the deacon. The next month, the next month, and the next month.

Then the old man wasn’t there. The deacon inquired and he was told, “Oh, he’s down the hall, right hand side, third door. He’s dying. He’s unconscious, but if you want to go down and pray over his body that’s all right.” The deacon went and there were tubes and wires hanging out all over the place. The deacon took the man’s hand and prayed that God would receive the man, that God would bring this man from this life into the next and give him eternal blessings. As soon as he finished the prayer, the old man squeezed the deacon’s hand and the deacon knew that he had been heard. He was so moved by this that tears began to run down his cheeks.

The deacon stumbled out of the room and as he did he bumped into a woman. It was the old mans daughter. She said, “He’s been waiting for you. He said that he didn’t want to die until he had the chance to hold the hand of Jesus one more time.” The deacon was amazed at this. He said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well, my father would say that once a month Jesus came to this place. ‘He would take my hand and he would hold my hand for a whole hour. I don’t want to die until I have the chance to hold the hand of Jesus one more time.’” (from Homiletics, December, 2004)

God can work through anyone. Whenever there is love, God is present. God is always with us. Perhaps the angelic image on my sister’s mirror was there to remind me of the presence of God as I stood there in anger. Over time as I would look at image I was reminded of my anger and the moment that this image first appeared to me and how I was in awe of it. After the image was washed away. I tried to duplicate the image but was not able to do it. In our own power we cannot duplicate the work of the Lord and His angels.

The existence of angels is not something that can be proven logically. Like God, they are often unseen to the naked eye. However, Angels must certainly be real because they appeared at crucial moments in the life and story of Jesus. As well as many others in scripture. They also can be seen in countless paintings over the centuries. They are commonly sculpted in thousands of buildings in the world. People of faith have maintained them as part of religious culture since the beginning of time.

Writers, singers and poets have made Angels a frequent dimension in their songs, their stories and their poems. Charles Dickens used angels to appear to Ebeneezer Scrooge on Christmas eve. In Frank Capra’s movie “It’s A Wonderful Life” an angel named Clarence appears to George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart. Clarence shows George what the world would be like without him that his life is more than mistakes, disappointments and missed opportunities. But in many ways the joy and blessings that we bring to others around us. In each case angels make a difference as these two men are transformed. Their lives become filled with hope and love because of the angels who confront them. How has your life been transformed by the hand of God? Did he send his angels to warn you?

Did he send his angels to instruct and guide you? Did he send his angels to instruct comfort you? Angels may have appeared to you in moments of deep distress; Moments when you felt there was nowhere else to go, Moments when you were trapped? No matter when, they may have appeared, they were sent by God so that you would know that he loves you and is looking out for you.

We must not rely on angels to give us enlightenment and protection. We must rely on our father in heaven to do what is right, and in many situations that may be sending his angels to watch over us. So, when we are enlightened, we can be assured that in some way God has touched us, perhaps it was through an angel. Whenever we feel safe and assured, we can be comforted by the fact that the Lord and his angels are watching over us. Whenever we are confronted with the situations of life, Confronted by our hopelessness or sinful ways, pray that the Lord would intervene in our lives and perhaps he will send his angels to get us back on the right path.