

Rejoice! Jesus is Here

Sermon, December 24, 2017 at 10:15 a.m.

(Using Rick Kallstrom's illustration from his sermon "Angels amongst us", delivered on Jan 27, 2003.)

Don, Tim and Jim were college students and they all attended the same university in Connecticut. It was Christmas break time, 1983, and they were all looking forward to going home for Christmas. One came from Fort Wayne, Indiana while the other two were from Chicago, Illinois. As they travelled by car on their way home, they finally reached Indiana. They were now only two hours from Don's home in Fort Wayne. The weather outside was bone-chilling cold and the ground was covered with heavy snow from a recent blizzard. The radio station they were listening to was repeatedly giving weather updates and warnings advising travellers not to drive. The wind chill factor had reached a record-setting 80 degrees below zero, which is minus 62 Celsius. To get stuck outside in this weather would be life-threatening.

Travel was slow but they finally arrived safely at Don's home in Fort Wayne. Because of the severe weather, Don's parents invited Tim and Jim to spend the night before proceeding on to their own homes in Chicago. They wanted the boys to wait until the weather improved and it was safer to drive again during the day light, but these college students were anxious to get home for the holidays to their families in Chicago. After all, it was Christmas Eve and they had only four more hours of driving to reach their destination. They sincerely thanked Don's parents for their generous offer but decided to brave the cold and snow and head home.

After leaving Don's house, Tim and Jim continued on their way home. They had travelled approximately 30 minutes and had finally reached the access road that would lead them to the expressway.

Tim's automobile had done well in the bitter cold, but now it was beginning to lose power. The access road they were travelling was eleven miles, 18 kilometers long and it had been built along a hillside. They saw no other cars travelling that night. There were no houses within miles. They assumed that other travellers had heeded the weather warnings and made the smart choice to not travel on such a dangerous night.

Tim's automobile continued to lose more and more power – and, at one moment, the engine completely stopped. They were stuck in the middle of nowhere on the frozen road.

In a few minutes, the inside of the car became freezing cold. No other cars were anywhere to be seen. They realized that to leave the vehicle and attempt to walk to safety in minus 62 Celsius would likely mean death. No one could survive more than a couple of minutes outside in these record cold temperatures. Their feet were getting so cold and their bodies were becoming numb.

They didn't know what to do, so in desperation, Tim began to pray. "Dear God, You are the only one who can help us now. Please help us dear God, please help us!"

Within moments, from out of nowhere, lights appeared, shining brightly through their windows. A big, strong-looking man approached their car and knocked on the window. "Need a tow guys?" he asked.

Excitedly the two boys climbed into the warm cab of the tow truck. From the cab the boys used the driver's truck phone and called Don, telling him that they would come back to spend the night at his house. Also, they asked if they might borrow some money to pay the driver who had rescued them. Don's parents said they would be happy to help.

The tow-truck driver drove through Fort Wayne and back into the neighborhood where Don lived. They thanked the driver for rescuing them and asked him to wait just a moment while they went inside to borrow the money to pay him. They jumped out of the cab and ran into Don's house. Don handed them the money they had asked to borrow and they hurried back outside, grateful to pay the driver, but the tow truck was gone!

Don and his parents joined them outside, also wanting to thank the driver. The boy's car was there, but there was no sign of the tow truck or its driver, and there was not any sign of a tow truck having ever been down that road. Neither Don nor his family had heard any sound when they had arrived, even though they had been waiting and listening for them. There were no tire tracks anywhere on the snow-covered road. There was no tow bill and no tow truck driver either. There was no evidence anywhere that any vehicle had even been down that road!

The boys had no explanation other than that the tow truck driver was an angel sent by God to answer their prayer."

Let me ask you - do you believe in the existence of angels?

Please take two minutes and turn towards your neighbour and ask your neighbours if they believe in angels and why, or why not?

The central message of this story is: You are never alone.

Angels in the Bible

I do believe in angels, because the Bible says that there ARE angels. In the Bible, God tells us what we have to know about Him and about ourselves. As we read the Bible, in 306 places we read about the angels and about their actions. Quite a few times in my own life, I have also sensed their presence around me.

The Bible tells us that Angels are intelligent beings who were created by God: **"things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him."** Colossians 1:16

I don't know how many angels there are, but the Bible says that there are invisible armies at God's command and at our service. They are standing at the throne of God, and they are always ready to do God's will. I would say that the angels are on call at all times. Angels are here next to us, and with us, to help us, and they are prepared for any emergency. The Bible says that angels have the ability to change their appearance and to travel instantly back and forth between the glory of Heaven above and the earth. **"Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation."** Hebrews 1:14 They do not possess physical bodies, although they may take on the form of physical bodies when God appoints them to special tasks.

Next Sunday, I will present the whole concept of angels in the Bible, and today I will highlight just a few stories which are related to Christmas.

In Luke chapter 1, we read the story of the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, advising him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear him a son and that he will be the forerunner of the coming Messiah.

Gabriel appeared again in Luke chapter 1, talking to the Virgin Mary. He speaks to her with some of the most wonderful words written in the Bible, a special message from God to Mary. **"Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, you shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus....And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."**

In Matthew chapter 1, an angel appeared to Joseph with a message: **"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."** Matthew 1:20-21. The angel was telling and assuring him that Mary was conceived with child through the Holy Spirit, and not through another man.

In Luke chapter 2, God sent His heavenly messengers to deliver the news to the shepherds in the fields of nearby Bethlehem that the Messiah, who had been prophesied in the Old Testament, had been born. When Jesus was born, a leader angel appeared to share the good news with the shepherds. Then a group of angels appeared. **"For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."**

When Jesus was fighting in Gethsemane before His crucifixion, an angel came from heaven to support Him.

Jesus said that when He returns, He will show up surrounded by His servant angels.

Again, on the first Christmas night, the angels shared the good news, that a Saviour was born for you and me.

Please take this message seriously. If you will embrace this message today, and you will accept and embrace Jesus today, then tomorrow you can count on His help when you will be in danger. If you neglect the good news and will not follow their proclamation, you can lose God's help which is provided by His hosts.

There are angels. There is a Saviour, who became flesh for you to talk to you as a human being. There is a Redeemer in Christ Jesus. The good news from today is: if you believe in Christ, you are never alone.

Now, please turn again towards your neighbours and ask them how this news about the Saviour affects them now and how it will affect their future.

Only those have a tomorrow who have God's gift, Jesus, today. Amen.