

One of my favorite old TV shows is Highway to Heaven. How many of you have seen that show? It's about an angel named Jonathan, played by Michael Landon, who works with his friend, Mark, who is human like us, and the two of them get assignments from God to help people here on earth who are going through difficult times or need guidance. I love this show because it's so hopeful and uplifting. It shows that God is in control in the middle of situations that seem to be out of control. It sends the message that God loves us so deeply that he sends his angels to watch over us and assist us when we need help.

Angels appear in stories throughout the Bible, but they play an especially big role in the Christmas story. An angel appears to Zechariah and tells him that his wife Elizabeth in her old age would bear a son who would later be known as John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary, tells her not to be afraid and then and tells her that she, who is a virgin, is going to give birth to the son of God. Later in the story, God sends an angel to Joseph in a dream and tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the son she will bear will be the savior of the world.

Notice that the angels in all three of these appearances to Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, tell them not to be afraid. Well, if an angel appeared to me out of the blue, I think I'd feel afraid too, any of us would. But I don't think that the angels were telling them not to be afraid, just because they were startled by their appearance. I think they were telling them not to be afraid of what the angels were telling them to do and how they were going to carry that out. I mean these angels were sharing news that would turn their lives upside down, news that would change their lives forever.

Mary was a poor peasant girl who was only about 13 or 14 years old. Up until the angel's visit, she most likely lived a very predictable life. She was engaged to be married to Joseph and probably had her life pretty much planned out until the day that the angel appeared to her and told

her that her life was going to be taking a very different direction than she thought. It took her a little while to get her head around what the angel is saying, but very quickly she signs onto what the angel (and God) are asking her to do. She believes the angel when he says, "Nothing will be impossible with God."

She surrenders her will to God's and says: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according with your word."

If that's not inspiring enough, Mary then reflects on the path that God is asking her to take in the words we know as the Magnificat. As I read these words to you one more time, imagine a 13 or 14 year old girl saying them. It is really an inspired prophecy of what is to come:

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever."  
(Luke 1: 46-55)

Mary in her young age is voicing the same prophetic vision that Isaiah shares in our other Advent texts of the evening out the high places and the low places, bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry and sending the rich away. **It is a vision of peace and justice for all people on earth.** Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit and chooses to follow the angel's direction to not be afraid. She chooses to

focus on faith instead of fear and that is the reason she is able to follow through with God's plan for her and for the world.

Have **you** been visited by any angels lately? Most of you would probably say "no." But think again,

The word angel in Latin means messenger/messenger from God. Messengers come to us all the time with messages from God, we just need to open our eyes and hearts to see them. They could be called "angels among us." They come in many ways: through people, nature, dreams, literature, feelings, even intuition.

When we have an intuition or a "knowing" about something, we often dismiss it and don't trust it because it's not logical. But of course, nothing, absolutely nothing, in our Christmas story is logical. It's exactly the opposite. Have you ever considered that our intuition is one way that God speaks to us?

God is continually reaching out to us/trying to send us messages and direction for our lives so that He can work through us.  
Are we open, listening, receptive?

We are called to be open to messages from God but we are also called to be God's messengers to others, to be God's angels.

As we enter into this new year, we are invited to seek and to listen for God's guidance, both as individuals and as a church. We are called to trust that God is in control even when we feel like we are not, **ESPECIALLY** when we feel we are not in control.

In this coming week between Christmas and New Year's, I invite you to reflect upon these questions: What is God calling you to focus on this year? What is God calling you to let go of, so that you can make room for

the new? What is God inviting you to do differently this year and how are you being called to be a messenger or an angel for others?

As we prepare to celebrate the birth Christ tonight, remember the words that the angel spoke to Mary and now speaks to each of us, "Do not be afraid, I am with you. With God, nothing is impossible."