

# 2015 First Presbyterian Church



## Advent Book



### **Introduction:**

Many years ago our church officers decided we should publish a book of articles centered on a theme that its readers could enjoy each day of the Advent season. Members were encouraged to set up advent candles, read an article each day as a family and light one of the four candles. It is wonderful that we can continue to keep the time honored tradition of the Advent Book at the First Presbyterian Church, Newton, Iowa.

This year's theme "Angels Among Us", was decided upon by the worship and music committee. This theme brings a wide variance of ideas and thoughts in this year's book. Several of our "advent authors" reference human beings as angels in their lives while others reference the Holy Spirit. The diversity of this particular book makes for a most interesting thought process as well as great reading. Thank you to each of you for your time and effort to make this advent book possible. Your 2015 Advent Book Editor - Jane Repp

# 11-29-15 – Tom Weeks

When our children grow up and get married, their wedding becomes a very special and important part of our life and that is the way it should be. Our son Tom Jr., married a very wonderful and special young woman named Elmira Zahiry from Los Angeles. What made this wedding so special, and most different for us, is the fact she is Muslim. Not once did we hesitate, or feel apprehensive about his choice, and really celebrated when the kids told us last Christmas they planned to wed.

When the big day came, Susan and I felt great pride and excitement. The wedding was held at a beautiful venue just inland from the Pacific Ocean and against the mountains to our east. It was a 22 acre nature preserve called Rancho Las Lomas. This place easily held the couple hundred guests that came from all over the United States, and, from several foreign countries just for this event. Although most were family members of Elmira's, you could hear, and be a part of happy conversation, hugs and greetings all spoken in several languages. Anyone who walked in was warmly welcomed no matter who they were. Our side of the family was well represented too, and widely accepted by all of Elmira's family and friends, just as we accepted them.

We had a gathering of people that were not only Muslim; but, Mormon (Latter Day Saints), Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox and of course Christian. Elmira's great uncle from Paris, France officiated. He conducted the service in English and the Persian language of Farsi. He quickly acknowledged the fact that so many different religions and beliefs were present that day and emphasized that all of us worship one God.... The same God. He also stated that we should never condemn a religion, or belief, because of the actions of some who misrepresent the true belief of that faith. And, this gathering should show that we can all get along.

Christmas is a time for all of us to learn from this experience, that we are all God's children and accept each other as we are. It took a Muslim/Christian wedding like this, to show us there is hope for this world.



"...children of God."

Matthew 5:9, KJV



December	20	10:30 am	Christmas Pageant
	20	4:00 pm	Christmas caroling and chili
	24	7:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service

CLOSING: On behalf of the Worship and Music Committee and me, we hope you have enjoyed the 2015 Advent Book. We wish to thank each of our authors for taking the time to share their thoughts. My thanks to church office manager Jenny Verwers for her assistance with graphics and printing. My thanks to the crew who helped assemble and staple the book to prepare for distribution. I wish for each of you the love and peace that the Christ of Christmas offers. May you continue to be aware of and be an angel among us.

Your Advent Book editor – Jane Repp



## 11- 30-15 – Joan Tyler

You're an angel!" Good words to hear; and most of us have at some time heard them or said them in deep gratitude to someone else. But it's at Christmas time when we seem to hear the most about angels. For example, who does not respond to the music and words "Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains, and the mountains in reply, echoing their glad refrains..."? Glorious! "Gloria" and then some!

They are referenced in the Bible almost from beginning to end, and they are spoken of with greater frequency in the New Testament than the Old. The Old Testament prophet Zachariah tells of them as women with wings, and artists paint them just as composers put them into hymns and anthems.

The name comes from a Greek word *aggelos* which my Oxford Companion to the Bible says means "messenger." And serving as messengers is one of the major roles cast for them. They are also portrayed as subordinate but divine assistants to God. Though angels can misbehave and rebel, principally their messages and ministrations are described as good. Some have names, like Gabriel and Michael, Uriel and Raphael.

In the Christmas stories of the Gospels, angels bring major announcements to Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth and father of John the Baptist, to Mary, and to Joseph. One comes to the shepherds with the news of the birth at Bethlehem, and then is joined by the famous "multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased'" before "going away from them into heaven."

So what about angels in our world today? Personally, I have yet to see any of the winged and white robed beings that seem to be our traditional image of them, but verses in Matthew and Acts do suggest that "each human being has his or her own protecting angel" (the OCB again) – very comforting and reassuring!

But Hebrews 13:1-2 may be the best of all for us: *Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* Angels among us, appearing to us as strangers? Awesome, challenging thought! The original Christmas was full of angels! Maybe they are still with us here right now, waiting for us to be angelic ourselves! If we all looked at the strangers we meet as possible angels in disguise – without the wings – it could be quite a different world!



## 12-1-15 – Mary Jane Tripp

When Jane called and asked me to write an article for the Advent book I automatically said no, I am not very good with that type of thing I told her.

But I got to thinking about all the people who sent cards, called, said prayers and visited at the hospital when Denny was there almost 5 years ago. I consider all who did Angels (you just don't know it). And after all the kind and thoughtful things everyone did, neighbors, friends and also church members.

I went with Sandy Cheney, (my daughter) who is a Deacon, to visit a person in a nursing home. That visit just made her day, so Deacons...you are Angels also.



## December 25, 2015 – Jane Repp

Several of our “advent authors” have written how their lives have been touched by angels. Here on Christmas day let us think how we can be angels to others. Former late night television host David Letterman used to share his “top ten” list on various subjects.

Here is a list of only ten of the many ways we can be seen as angels to others:

10. Mend a broken relationship - Matthew 5:23-24
9. Give of yourself – not just your money – Proverbs 22:1
8. Determine to give the word “peace” new meaning in your life. – Psalm 34:14
7. Offer to help/and or visit an elderly neighbor, friend or family member – Isaiah 41:6
6. Spend some time thinking about the blessings of your life – Psalm 103:2-5
5. Keep Christ in your heart – don’t leave him in the manger – Proverbs 23:26
4. Renew your commitment to Christ – Romans 12:2
3. Share a smile to everyone you meet – 1 John 4:7
2. Take time to dwell on God’s gift to us in the form of Jesus – 2 Corinthians 9:15
1. Resolve to continue the Christ of Christmas alive in your heart all year long – Philippians 2:5



## 12-24-15 - George Wilkening

Love: It pushes out loneliness and darkness  
and moves us to the light!

As you know, this has been an exciting year for Shirley and me. After years of loneliness we have found love, again. We neither one realized the loneliness we were experiencing, being too busy with the daily routines of life. We both have remarked about that loneliness and how wonderful life seems now, compared to the past years. I know, you may think this is the musings of a love-sick teenager, but love does amazing things in our lives.

So too, does the love of God in Jesus give new light and meaning to life, when we allow ourselves to experience that love. Jesus loves us unconditionally, like a mother loves her child. Jesus provides the shoulder to lean on in times of crises, like that of a loving partner. Jesus sees us as we really are, loves us unconditionally in spite of our faults, and sees us to a better place. That does not mean that love will keep bad things from happening to us in the future, but it does mean that we are no longer alone to bear the burdens and tragedies of life. There is someone else to hear our distress and comfort our fears. That someone is Jesus, the Christ.

May the love of God surround you and your loved one this Advent and Christmas season!



## 12-1-15 - Shirley Stevens

How Things Have Changed!

When Jesus was born, it was in a manger with animals and he was wrapped in a cloth. There were loving parents, but no doctor or midwife.

Today, babies are born in cardboard boxes, cars, on streets, in homes and in hospitals. If you are lucky, there might be a midwife or doctor, Most of the time, the baby is wrapped in a cloth or a blanket,...most of the time, to loving parents.

Years have passed since Jesus was born, but not all babies are born into a loving home and family. We can be thankful for "Safe Haven" laws because more babies live and can be adopted to a loving family.

With all the problems in the world today, we still have to work hard and keep praying for our young people.



Keep our  
Children in Prayer!

## 12-2-15 Barbara Taylor

My angel came to me unexpectedly. But I think that is how they usually come. And I also believe that they come in disguise. Mine came to me while I was walking.

A few years ago, I was pondering what to do with my mother as she was becoming more demented. She said for many years that she didn't want anything to do with a nursing home. She felt that there would be no reason that she would need one. But she neglected to understand that her family has a history of dementia and that she might just be a candidate. She also had a negative attitude about the use of government assistance and refused to live in such a facility. (There is no assisted living facility that is federally financed in her town). That left us with few choices for her care.

Her first encounter with memory came when she denied that the pharmacy reported that she had not been taking her medication regularly. She insisted that her friend had taken her favorite letter opener but it was found in a buffet drawer. She reported that the police neglected to return her driver's license after a fender bender but it was found in her purse. It became a conundrum for me, the only child, about what to do with her. We did investigate Medicaid but found she wouldn't qualify with too many assets.

On my daily walk, I passed by a house where the owner came out to go to work. I stopped to let her by and we began to talk. My story came out in the discussion. She responded that she had also pondered this situation with her mother. She comforted me with this common problem. She added that I was not to continue to fuss as the solution would come to me. She reported that she resolved her problem with prayer and patience. It worked!! My angel had given me the help I needed. We were able to find day care and then in-home 24 hour care as the needs increased. My anxiety was relieved, she was safe, and had her wishes to stay at home.



Back to my feelings about angelic people. Could it be that on occasion there is Heavenly influence? Could a guardian angel or other Heavenly being see the need and cause a person to do something so "good". Is that why some human deeds seem so angelic? Or since we were created in the image of God, do the nearly angelic reside in all of us, ready to be called forth.

I once heard a child pray, "I need Jesus. If he is too busy could you please send an angel, God"? He obviously saw angels as God's helpers and felt at that moment that he needed help from heaven. I personally believe that heavenly help is always around and available to us. If we look quietly and listen openly we will recognize it. My friend's mother died this morning and my friend was very sad and couldn't stop crying. She was on the phone with her daughter who said, "in just a moment check your phone for something". My friend immediately got a message she opened and it was her grandson, 10 months old, running through the house behind his walker toy and having a fit when he was denied something he wanted". She cracked up and at least laughter came with her tears.

One morning after my father died I got up depressed and had to go out to feed the horses. I took a cup of coffee and stepped out into a sunny, frosty winter morning sparkling everywhere. When I got to the barn one of the stallions demanded some of my coffee and the air steamed around his muzzle and my hands as I shared coffee with a horse. I felt lighter and though I was still sad, I could see that there was beauty and whimsical funniness in the world. I shared coffee with a horse on a frosty morning. Maybe some caring angel told the horse to demand some coffee that morning and maybe made the whole world sparkle just for me.

When I hear beautiful music or see red leaves in the fall or fresh green sprouting in the spring and feel clean air in my lungs in my first breath as I awaken in the morning, I believe in goodness and angels and love and everything delightful. When a sick child recovers and sometimes when a frail old friend dies, I believe in goodness and angels and love and everything delightful.

May you look quietly and listen openly and see heavenly help and angels around you. It doesn't matter if you see them with gender, male or female. Just say "Thanks I needed that".

## 12-23-15 Karen Quinn

What do you think about angels? The Bible names only two: Gabriel and Michael. There are a couple of passages about hosts of angels; Satan was an angel it is told, but wanted to be as powerful as God, and thus was kicked out of Heaven.

Archangels are kind of Angel Chiefs. Michael was a warrior Archangel. Texts other than the Bible name Ariel, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael as Archangels. What gender are angels? Technically, angels have never been living people so are not biological and do not have gender. Most pictures created by men of angels are female. Interesting huh?

But what do you think of angels or about angels? Do you believe in guardian angels? Many people do. Many times we call real live people, or people who were alive, angels. Theologically this is not possible. Angels have never been live people. However, real people sometimes do very “good” things, sometimes quite by accident and without knowing even that they are doing so. My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Wendell, was one for me. One day when I was upset, she comforted me, putting her arms around me and holding me for just a minute. I felt so safe and warm. I wanted to move in with her and be her child in that moment, and I knew there was a different way to be in the world than I knew. Adults could be loving and warm and connected to others in a way I had never known. I was hungry for it. And in that moment I knew it was possible. That knowledge stayed with me and guided me throughout my childhood and adolescence.

This brings me to another question about the gender of angels. Do men who portray angels see them as female because they are nurturing and loving and kind? Gabriel was a messenger in the Bible and Michael was a warrior. Maybe we need to have a Heavenly being who is nurturing and loving and kind. Individuals who see angels describe them as light, very bright and white. No gender. And since gender is biological and angels have never been living people, no gender seems likely.



## 12-3-2015 – Linda Kirchhoff

One of my favorite Christmas books for children is *The Mysterious Star* by Joanne Marxhausen (copyright 1974). The illustrator, Susan Stoehr Morris, drew enchanting pictures of a multi-cultural community of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A small boy, Jamie decides he wants to see the mysterious star just as the Wise Men had. Jamie’s father tells him that “If you keep looking, you’ll find the star, but not in the sky.” Pulling his wagon filled with his teddy bear, a thermos of water, and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Jamie sets off. Finding a little girl crying because she says she has no friends, Jamie explains that he likes her and so does Jesus. Continuing on his quest, the small boy meets a lonely elderly man and tells him about his search and shares his sandwich. Jamie walks further, singing a song about the beauty in God’s world, cheering up a little girl. He comes upon a poor paperboy who is too tired to finish his delivery, so Jamie offers him some water. Journeying on, Jamie finds a crying child who has fallen down. Remembering how his mother’s kisses always comforted him. Jamie kisses the child’s knee and tells him about the star. Discovering a blind woman who has been knocked down by bullying children, causing her to lose her cane, Jamie retrieves the cane and tells her that he “can’t see so good either” because he can’t find the star. Dejectedly, he walks to his house, not realizing that in all his travels he has been followed.



(continued)

His father then queries him about the friends who have come with him. Surprised, Jamie turns to see all those people he has met that day. They excitedly tell Jamie that they have seen the star. Jamie wants to see it too.

*The sad little girl spoke first. "I saw it, Jamie, in the tear that glistened on your cheek when you felt sorry for me."*

*"And I saw it," said the old man, "when you listened to me."*

*"I saw it in your voice when you were singing," said the lass.*

*"I saw it in your hands when you gave me a drink of water," said the paperboy.*

*"When you kissed my knee, I saw it by your mouth, "said the other lad.*

*The blind lady spoke up. "I saw it too, Jamie. I saw it brightest of all; I saw it in your heart. "*

Thank you, God, for all the angels among us. May we be angels for others. In the name of the Babe of Bethlehem, Amen.



Best friends of my own children, who watch over them and love them and help them, often when no one else realizes there is a problem.

Are any of my everyday situations any less of a miracle because they were not of direct "divine" contact? Or are they maybe even *more* special and divine because God manifested them in a manner in which I might be more willing to embrace and understand?

God created mankind. I think He knows sometimes people fight acceptance. I think maybe God realizes sometimes people need "divine" miracles, even if they might be delivered by earth-based angles. God realizes sometimes the very food we need, the manna, needs to come from the "angels among us." I know the acts of grace and love I've received in my life have made me more willing to help others. Maybe that is the real miracle of angels among us. Maybe that is what God wants us to consider. It isn't necessarily what God always does FOR us, but what He needs for us to do for OTHERS.

Have a blessed holiday season and be sure to keep your eyes open for those "angels among us" moments.



His question about people's need to question the divineness of the gift, or the original purpose of the substances is valid. Why should this negate the power of the gift?

Does it have to be "magical" to be from God? Is the everyday type of miracle any less of a message, any less of a gift from God? I began thinking. What if we are too busy looking for those "bigger than life" miracles that we pass up the more basic, the more real lessons we encounter on a daily basis?

As I left church, I began to think back over moments in my life. God has not blessed me with direct contact with a heavenly angel, but I HAVE had a multitude of contacts with "angels among us."

A group of First Presbyterian middle school aged boys who show up on a hot summer day to help me and my family move.

That same day, a HUGE number of adults- many of them from this church- also show up to help me move.

My parents- they move to Newton to provide emotional and physical support to me and my children.

My minister and friend, Tiare, who tells me she will hold my faith for me until I am ready to re-claim it. She does this knowing I am just hurt and upset; she realizes I need her support and not her condemnation.

Friends who always seem to "magically" appear- numerous times- in moments of need, often when I haven't even reached out to them yet.

An abundance of "freak" coincidences- coincidences that somehow provide an answer to a problem, or money when I need it, or an introduction to a special person who now blesses my life

Kind-hearted strangers who stop to help my mother after a car accident, staying with her until help arrives.

Family and friends who rally and support my parents following my dad's injury.

## 12-4-2015 – Mickey Van Baale

When I learned the title of this year's Advent Booklet, I was excited. What a great title. What a wonderful thought. The Bible is full of stories of angels coming to Moses, Mary, Joseph, and many others, bringing tides of goodwill and predictions of future events.

But, this title is about the "Angels Among Us". Several years ago, the Country Western group, Alabama, recorded a song with that very same title. The refrain of their song is:

Oh I believe there are, angels among us  
Sent down to us, from somewhere up above  
They come to you and me, in our darkest hours  
To show us how to live, to teach us how to give  
To guide us with the light of love.

I have always loved this song, as it talks to my heart and I do believe in angels. Angels among us in many different ways. When I see a monarch butterfly, I know it is my Mom stopping by to let me know she is still watching over me. For a friend, seeing a cardinal assures her that her deceased husband is just stopping by to check up on her.

Just this morning I read that an acquaintance of mine on Facebook has been seeing a young father and his son going to school each day. Having not seen a mom, she is assuming it is a single dad. It appears that they are trying to do the best they can, but have few resources, so my friend has decided to leave a bag of groceries on their doorstep to help out. Surely an "Angel Among Us".

How about that stranger that walks into our life, with a story to share that is just what we needed to hear, or pays for our cup of coffee. Random acts of kindness - sure, "Angels Among Us" – absolutely!



## 12-5-2015 – Gary and Kay Parsons

According to Wikipedia, an angel is a supernatural being or spirit found in various religions and mythologies. They are often depicted as benevolent celestial beings who act as intermediaries between God or heaven and earth or as guardian spirits. Other roles may include protecting and guiding human beings and carrying out God's tasks. The word angel literally means "messenger". Other descriptions include that they are lower on the list of supernatural beings, which puts them nearer humans. Think of our common usage of the term angel—which is almost always complimentary. We may say, "Be an angel. Please bring me another piece of cake". During France's involvement in the Indochina War in 1954 a nurse was called "the angel of Dien Bien Phu". We even name sports teams after them. The Bible has many accounts of angels interacting with (and helping ) humans. Of course some of the most notable and cherished involves the helpful appearance of angels to Joseph, Mary, the shepherds and wise men. What blessings these appearances were! Does that happen today? Many people think it does. Are angels doing good deeds in lives today? That is a point for discussion. We all have times when we feel we have received inexplicable guidance in some way. I guess I like to think that God's angels are here on earth gently guiding us at times. A number of biblical descriptions does not specifically state that they were visualized -so even if we don't see them it is possible they are present and helping guide us. Let go and believe that God's angels are among us.



## 12-22-15 – Kathy Ventling

Bright heavenly beings. Mystery and wonder. Power and majesty cloaked in purity, radiance, and a supernatural quality. This is what I think of when I conjure up images of angels. For most of us, the definition of an angel is the sum of what we've read in the Bible, heard in hymns, or listened to in stories, songs, and poems. After all, who of us can say they have had a one-on-one encounter with one of these emissaries of God?

Based upon what I've read or heard, angels are not of this world—or are they?

There I was. It was November 1, and I was late with my article for the Advent booklet. I had just run into Jane and promised her the article would be done ASAP. I sat in the narthex listening to the guest minister deliver his sermon. I admit, my mind wasn't 100% focused on what he was saying; I was too busy thinking about what I could write about. Then, some of what the minister was saying began to permeate my brain. He was talking about manna- God's divine gift to the Israelites. Pretty magical stuff, that manna. It appeared suddenly- out of nowhere- when people were in desperate need of food; it rotted when people were greedy and took more than what was needed for a day's supply of food, and it allowed people the grace to focus on other parts of survival, now that basic food needs were met.

Manna was/is the embodiment of God magically taking care of all of us. Today's world, with its ever-expanding knowledge bases, has called into question the "magic" of this gift. People are now questioning whether manna, and all its magical properties, maybe didn't come magically from God, for this one situation, for just the Israelite's special needs. People don't want to think about the possibility that manna is simply bug juice, that it was created for a more basic purpose, even though it ended up meeting the needs of the Israelites just the same.

*(continued)*

They wear so many faces,  
Show up in the strangest places  
And grace us with their mercies in our time of need.  
Oh, I believe there are Angels Among Us,  
Sent down to us from somewhere up above.  
They come to you and me in our darkest hours  
To show us how to live  
To teach us how to give  
To guide us with a light of love.  
To guide us with a light of love.



## 12-6-20-15 Linda Curtis-Stolper

**Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?** (Heb. 1:14)

The Hebrew word for “angel” means “messenger”. This shouldn't come as a surprise as we read stories of angelic activities throughout the Bible. Angels announced pregnancies and gave reassurance to parents-to-be Hagar, Sarah, Mary, and Joseph. Jacob wrestled with an angel and found faith and confidence in the presence of the LORD as he faced Esau and returned to the promised homeland given his family by Jahweh. An angel rescued Daniel from the lions' den, leading the Persian King Darius to proclaim the power and glory of Daniel's God.

This is all well and good and we believe, to varying extents and with allowances for literary and faith-based interpretations, that angels filled a variety of important roles throughout the Bible. But - “angels among us” - now? Are there really messengers from God appearing in our midst in 2015 in our contemporary lives? What messages are angels bringing to people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

I believe the answer to the first question is an emphatic “Yes!” I don't believe angels appear in long white robes with wings on their backs and harps in their hands, but I believe they can be in our presence. By ministering to “those who will inherit salvation” - God's beloved children all around us - for brief periods we can become angels. Our words and actions are capable of delivering messages to meet the needs of our day.

The celebration of 20 years of life shared with El Salvador allowed us to remember and recognize the angels who have been sent to serve members of God's family in that place. Work week groups are composed of people who become angels delivering messages of love and hope and affirmation as they interact with each other and with persons they meet in their travels. When we give someone a hug along with a cup of coffee, when we take time to truly listen to another's words, when we affirm God's love through our actions – we are walking with the angels at that moment, serving as God's messengers to God's beloved children in our company.

*(continued)*

What a blessing - thank you to all who have been an angel to me, meeting my needs along the way! What a privilege – in my life, I have opportunities to serve others as an angel if I will do so! What a promise from our loving God – we are not left alone; we receive special attention from angels, ministering spirits sent to serve us while we await our salvation!

Thank you, God, for the present of your presence in our lives. We feel it in the love revealed in the birth of Jesus; we see it in the spirit of love shining in the lives around us; we offer it to all of your creation in grateful response. Use us as angels, ministering to all your children until we are all at home with you.



## 12-21-15 Carol Camp

**Angels Among Us** (Lyrics) by Alabama

I was walkin' home from school  
On a cold winter day,  
Took a short cut through the woods  
And I lost my way.  
It was gettin' late, and I was scared and alone.  
Then a kind old man took my hand, and led me home.  
Mama couldn't see him,  
But he was standing there,  
And I knew in my heart  
He was the answer to my prayer.

Oh, I believe there are Angels Among Us,  
Sent down to us from somewhere up above.  
They come to you and me in our darkest hours  
To show us how to live  
To teach us how to give  
To guide us with a light of love.

When life held troubled times  
And had me down on my knees  
There's always been someone  
To come along and comfort me  
A kind word from a stranger  
To lend a helping hand  
A phone call from a friend  
Just to say I understand  
Now ain't it kind of funny  
At the dark end of the road  
Someone light the way with just a single ray of hope.

*(continued)*

## 12-7-15 Marilyn McCallister

Most of us can't solve the big problems of the world, like ending world hunger or ending homelessness. But oftentimes we face moments in which a seemingly small act, like pointing someone in the right direction or sharing leftovers with those truly in need, is actually a big act. These are "angel moments". Angels can show up out of nowhere to lend us a helping hand, and sometimes we are called upon to be an angel to someone else in need. It's simply up to us to be open to receiving, and giving, in those moments, whether receiving help from an angel among us or accepting the call to become an angel to another in need.

*Dear God, In this time of Advent and at all other times, remind us to be open to the angels among us who help us in our times of need, and give us the courage to accept becoming the angel who helps others in their times of need. Amen*



### **Luke 2: 13-14**

*Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven!*

*And peace on earth to men with whom He is pleased!"*

As I reflect on "angels among us" the pictures that come to mind are the choirs of voices that come together all focused on praising God; both the organized singing groups like Celtic Woman, the Hallelujah Chorus, or Tabernacle Choir, and the unstructured singing groups like at a Women of Faith Conference or at the Kansas City tree lighting ceremony.

Both scenarios lift, sooth and calm my spirit as it directs my eyes, my heart and my energy to God's love, greatness and omnipotence.

I love being a recipient of the heavenly music and I love joining my voice with the voices of others to sing praises to God.

"Angels among us" also conjures up in my mind those individuals who show care and concern to me in small ways . . . an encouraging word, a welcoming smile, a spontaneous hug. Those are precious to me and don't go unnoticed. I sense God's love each time.

Dear Lord, Let me join with the heavenly angels this season singing praises to you with a thankful and joyful heart. Help me also to be an encouraging word and a welcoming smile to others. Amen



## 12-8-20-15 Janet and Joel Shields

*And Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, fear not; 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 Savior which is Christ the Lord. St. Luke 2:9-11*

I was not raised in a churchgoing family, although my parents were probably better Christians than many that attend regularly. So, I didn't have any church pageants or Sunday school programs. I was fortunate as we were still able to have Christmas programs in school. My first angel memory is when in first grade our teacher wanted three girls to be angels for our part of the program. I remember my feelings being hurt as she only wanted BLONDE angels. Maybe that was when I first became rebellious. Another year we had to recite St. Luke 2: 9-11 and that verse stayed with me since.

The dictionary defines an angel as an immortal, spiritual being attendant upon God. A guardian spirit or guiding influence: a kind and loving person. The October 2015 issue of Reader's Digest features 24 inspirational accounts – "The Kindness of Strangers".

- 1.) A newly divorced mother who couldn't afford groceries and for months found boxes of food outside her door until she found work.
- 2.) A grandmother who wanted to put a dress at a consignment shop on layaway for her granddaughter and another customer bought it for her.
- 3.) A little girl who gave her birthday gifts to a boy whose house had been destroyed by fire.

Are these examples of angels among us?

The last Christmas gift I received from my mother four years ago, is an angel she had purchased with her winning bingo tickets at the bingo store at Nelson Manor Nursing Home and is now displayed with loving memories during the holidays. It is an angel made on a plastic form, stitched with yarn, has wings, a halo and BLONDE hair.

## 12-20-15 Steve Hopkins

On a recent trip to Oakland, California for a wedding, Sara and I were sitting in the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) train station in downtown Oakland, waiting for the right train to take us to the airport for our flight back to Iowa. After waiting for what seemed like an unusually long time, we started worrying if the right train would ever come, and we hoped we wouldn't miss our plane on a very busy travel day. As we started questioning each other whether we were at the right place in the train station, the BART ticket taker with whom we had spoken earlier when we entered the station—a large African-American man in a BART uniform—called down to us from the upper balcony of the train station: "Hey! Aren't you going to the Oakland airport? You should be down at the lower level to catch your train." We looked at each other and both said, "That's an angel speaking to us." We thanked him, headed down to the lower level of the station that we hadn't noticed before, and made it to the airport and caught our flight with plenty of time to spare.

On the same trip, we were invited to a large gathering of family and friends of the wedding party held on the night before the wedding. It was a very happy coming-together of people from all over the country, with plenty of food, drink, and laughter. Our stomachs and our hearts were filled to the brim at the party. At the end of the party, our host saw that there was an enormous amount of leftover pizza still in the pizza boxes. Since we were staying at the comfortable Marriott Hotel in downtown Oakland--ironically close to where a number of homeless people were--our host asked if we could take the leftover pizza (still in their boxes) and leave it on a street corner near our hotel for the homeless to find. We did exactly as our host requested and, by the next morning, the pizza we left on the street corner was gone. Our host was acting as an angel to the less fortunate, and we were happy to carry out the angel's request.

*(continued)*

Every time I would leave him at home, he would show me what he thought by doing his daily duty wherever. I was told this is quite common for dogs who have been beaten. The only way to overcome this is to work to develop a trust that when you leave, you will come back. To this day, we continue to work on this – he will never totally get over this.

Zeus has become a wonderful dog. The information shown on the computer describing this breed, a Chinese Shar Pei, is spot on for Zeus. They state that this breed is very calm tempered, loving, and loyal and devoted to its master. But, if the dog's owner is soft, mild or inconsistent, they are likely to assume their position as the dominant party which could cause issues. This breed is very independent and is very protective of their small circle of humans. They are a very intelligent breed.

I have had Zeus four years. We gave him the same birthday as my oldest grandson, Austin. Zeus' birthday is August 16<sup>th</sup>. Zeus is a constant companion of mine and travels well when we go on our trips from Phoenix, AZ, to Newton, IA. He loves being at our race shop located at Newton. My son, Bryan, is Zeus' second master. When we are together in the shop but working in different bays, I have found that Zeus will find an area where he can actually see both of us. This is his way of meeting one of his traits which is to protect the people he loves. When you walk into our race shop at Newton, IA, Zeus is our official greeter. Sometimes Bryan and I think that people stop by the shop to see Zeus and not he or I. Zeus is becoming a fixture at the sprint car races also. He accompanies us to all of the races, no matter where they are. He has overcome the noise the cars make so he is quite comfortable as long as he can have Bryan or I in his sight. I see to it that he is with us in Victory Circle and that he is part of the pictures being taken of our great team!

Yes, I consider Zeus an Angel Amongst Us for he came into my life during a time of transition I was going through. For that, I will always love Zeus, my best bud.



## 12-9-15 Kim DeGraff

In this current age of technology, the first thing I did was google "Angels Among Us" on the internet to see if anything peaked my interest or gave me some ideas on what to write about. I found a song on YouTube sung by the country group Alabama; I found 2 books on Amazon that I may now purchase- "Chicken Soup For the Soul; Angels Among Us" and "Angels Among Us-Separating Truth from Fiction", by Ron Rhodes; and I found a poem I really enjoyed, which I will share with you below. However when my actual thoughts turn to angels, I think of Bible stories with messages delivered by heavenly angels, and especially "be not afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-12).

And in my heart, I think of loved ones passed on, (specifically one I now call 'angel Jim') which I believe are existing amongst God's angels in heaven, but also still feel their presence in and around us. I also think of earthly angels, which we call the many people who do good works for others.

Thank You Lord for the many different angels among us!

### 'Angels Among Us'

The hands that give to those in need  
The heart that loves in faith and deed  
The voice that speaks the truth decrees  
These are angels among us.

The common cause to help all those  
Whether they be friends or foes  
The compassion for all so lovingly grows  
These are angels among us.

The forgetting of self to the service to others  
The knowledge we are all sisters and brothers  
The extra mile is the distance they cover  
These are angels among us.

The Christ-like spirit to demonstrate  
The limitless love from God so great  
The disciple who walks so humble and straight  
These are angels among us.



## 12-10-15 Linda Erickson

So...what should an angel look like? I've never seen one with wings and a halo but I have had many times when people walked into my life at just the right time and felt like angels to me. One of those times the angel appeared as a tall black man in a dashiki. Warren and I had come from a comedy club in Washington DC and were making our way to a subway station. It was late at night and we found ourselves walking a dark street, unable to spot the subway. We were across from a park where we could see groups of people gathered in the darkness. And I was "sore afraid"! The tall black man dressed from head to toe in African dress approached us. No, he didn't say, "Be not afraid". In fact, he said quite the opposite. He told us that we should not be there at this time of night and that it was not safe. He helped us to find the subway station nearby and sent us on our way. His words may not have been "be not afraid" but his actions comforted and reassured me. And I "went away rejoicing".

The angels in my life may not have wings and may not say the words "be not afraid" but their presence and reassurance bring me comfort and confidence when I need it. May we all be angels to one another.



pick a name. I made the decision his name would be "Zeus". Zeus and Dave – it had a certain ring to it!

For the first two or three days, Zeus ate well and drank well. I would take him for walks around the neighborhood daily. About the fifth day, I noticed that Zeus was getting weaker and could barely get up from his lying position. I called the vet and explained the situation and they told me to bring him in.

After running blood tests on Zeus, which really didn't show anything, the vet gave me the news. Dr. Jason Gold told me it's quite normal for animals to catch "stuff" at the shelter. His guess was Zeus had acquired a virus called Valley Fever, which usually is deadly for animals. Blood tests don't pick it up. He told me Zeus was a very, very sick dog. My options were – to let him leave this world or to spend approximately \$2000.00 in an attempt to save him. He said they would have to quarantine him and inject powerful medicines into his body. He also told me that even by doing all of this, Zeus' chances of living were 50 – 50. I told Dr. Gold to go for it – I remember how I felt when they carried Zeus through the doors to be put into quarantine. That night was pretty lonely and depressing for me. I decided again that I was going to give it 100%, no matter what the outcome was.

So for the next three days, you guessed it, I went to the hospital to see Zeus. Each day for approximately an hour, I would stand and talk to him. I remember telling him that if he fought for his life, that he would have a home for the rest of his life.

After day 3, Doc told me that Zeus had improved greatly from the medicine and that I could take him home the next day. I would have to continue giving him the medicine in his food and that it was going to take a long time for Zeus to get over whatever he had. I would have to bring him back weekly for checkups and we agreed that we'd take it a week at a time.

I was there the next day at 8:00 am to pick up my boy, Zeus. From there, the rest is history.

Zeus' health continued to improve weekly. Dr. Gold couldn't believe how well he did – he said most dogs would have never survived what Zeus' body had gone through. I found myself sitting and talking with Zeus when we were by ourselves. I honestly believe that the love shown to Zeus was instrumental in him pulling through this difficult time.

The first few weeks were difficult at home for I found that Zeus also had what they called, Separation Anxiety. *(continued)*

After viewing the internet about a Chinese Shar Pei, I knew that this was a special breed of dog. When I got to the Maricopa Animal Shelter located in Tempe, AZ, I told the lady that I would give them this dog but I wanted some security that he wouldn't be put down. She told me they'd try their best. I ended up signing the papers relinquishing this dog to the shelter. This meant that even if I wanted to, I could not get this dog back for 72 hours. I took the dog back to one of the helpers who put a leash on his neck. I told them again that I did not want that dog put down! I had tears as I walked back to my car and thinking, what did you just do? Before opening the car door, I noticed a dog toy I had bought for him lying in the back seat. I grabbed the toy and walked back to where I had dropped him off. I couldn't believe what I saw! The employee told me that as soon as I left, this dog had gotten angry and started growling and showed his teeth. He had placed a hard leash on him already. It immediately hit me what the outcome was going to be for this dog. I tried to get the employee to give me this dog back but remember, I had signed this paper stating I couldn't get him back for 72 hours. I was so UPSET at myself!

I remember driving home with tears flowing down my cheeks for I had started having feelings for him also. I made the decision driving home that I was going to save that dog, whatever it took.

For the next 3 days, I drove from north Phoenix to the shelter in Tempe each day and sat in front of this dog kennel and talked to and petted him. I took him treats but was again careful not to overdo it. I remember him and me just staring at each other when I was talking. Finally on the third day, a young lady employee came to me and said, "I have noticed how that dog responds to you and we'll allow you to adopt that dog." I remember being so happy!! Sidebar, if you have never been to an animal shelter in a large city, you cannot begin to imagine how many cats and dogs are housed there. The noise is so loud from dogs barking that you can barely take it. I have a much greater respect for people who work and volunteer at these shelters.

There were a few stipulations in adopting a dog from the shelter which I had to agree to. They would keep the dog until the next day at which time they would neuter him. I also asked them to put a chip into his head in case I ever lost him. The shelter workers felt that this dog was approximately 3 years old and had been badly beaten. Finally, after 2 more days, I was at the shelter at 8:00 am to pick up this dog. My problems were over! Now that this dog was mine, I had to

## 12-11-15 Val McKee

There are angels among us! Occasionally we catch a glimpse of them -- the one who's helping that young mom struggling to carry a small baby AND hold the hand of her toddler as she crosses the parking lot at the grocery store; the one who stops by to pick up the elderly person so that she can attend her group's monthly evening meeting; the recently-retired man who helps his still-working neighbor rake the leaves before the rain falls; the young man who plows the driveway of his neighbor who's working the night shift. Sometimes the angels' cheerful voices can be heard singing a song, or offering to do that volunteer job that needs doing; the little child who smiles at the store clerk and tells her to have a good day, or who sticks up for the bullied classmate; the friend who picks up the phone just to say "I'm thinking of you today". Often the angels are quiet, silently saying a prayer for those struggling with illness or addiction, buying extra groceries for the food bank basket, donating time or money to help those in need or suffering from natural disasters. The angels' faces look quite familiar -- in fact, I believe we see them every day as we go about our lives. I hope that we each may even see one of them in the mirror when we arise in the morning. We are God's hands; we are God's angels.



## 12-12-15 Doug and Ann Cutts

When most of us hear the word “angel” we picture a heavenly body dressed in white, complete with wings and a halo. Indeed this is the Biblical image that many of us are familiar with. However, we should also consider the fact that there are many types of angels’ right here on Earth. I think the group Alabama was right on track with their song “Angels Among Us”. The words to the chorus are as follows:

“Oh I believe there are angels among us  
Sent down to us from somewhere up above  
They come to you and me in our darkest hours  
To show us how to live  
To teach us how to give  
To guide us with a light of love”

While the lyrics are touching, it is the video that displays a powerful message. Throughout the entire song there are examples shown of everyday people along with a caption of how they have been an angel to another person. There is a man who has made it his mission to keep kids off drugs. A passerby who saved a woman from an attacker even at the expense of injury to himself. A couple who helped rescue people from a church after a tornado. Even a seven year old boy who saved a drowning child. None of these people possessed any super human

powers, just a gift to know how to do the right thing and the courage to do it. Some of the angels knew the people they were helping. Others helped perfect strangers. During this time of Advent it is easy to focus on giving to others and helping out when we can. Let us not forget that we can all be an angel to someone throughout the year. Some times even the smallest gesture can mean the most.



would run. In the meantime, we had two more individuals wanting to help us catch this dog. We had parents, who were driving their kids to school, stop and give us their kid’s lunch trying to lure him closer to us. We could tell that this dog had been terribly mistreated for he was so skinny that you could see every rib on him.

Finally after 4 hours, we were able to pin him against a fence where we were able to get the leash around his neck. He was totally exhausted from not having food or water and us chasing him. All of us were happy that we finally got a leash on this dog for safety reasons. But now the question was – now that we have caught him, what do we do with him? The other 3 guys who helped me already had at least one dog and weren’t able to take this dog. Finally I said that I’d take him home with me, get him some water and food and call an animal shelter.

There was no way I was looking to have a dog in my life based on my lifestyle. My job requires me to travel a lot to California and other states to work insurance claims.

I grabbed the leash and told him to come. We walked about 50 yards towards my house when suddenly, he quit walking. I tried everything I could think of to get him to walk but he wouldn’t budge. The more I pulled, the tighter the leash got around his neck. I thought I was going to choke him. Anyway, here came a couple who were walking their two female dogs. I asked them if they could walk ahead of me so that Zeus would follow the girls. They agreed and the next thing I knew, I had Zeus at the house.

The first thing I did was to get him water and some canned dog food. Needless to say, he ate and drank like there was no tomorrow. I limited his food so he wouldn’t eat until he got sick. I will never understand how he survived in the 100 degree heat and the lack of water and food. It is a miracle but God gives animals special abilities.

When I called the humane society, they informed me that they cannot take dogs in from private individuals. They get all of their dogs from the Maricopa Animal Shelter. Upon calling and talking to the people at the shelter, I found out that any lost dog or dogs that people want to give away must go through the shelter.

I found my feelings for this dog were similar to those I remember I had growing up on a farm. I always loved dogs when I was a kid but something would happen and I’d lose them. They would either get run over or get mean for some reason. I remember being hurt every time this happened. Anyway, I finally decided that I would take this dog to one of the two animal shelters for the city of Phoenix. *(continued)*

## 12-19-15 – Carl and Jane Repp and Dave Sundby

When we heard the title of this year's advent book we began to think of persons we know that have done something rather "angelic". Our first thoughts were of our friend Dave. He is a great guy whom we met thru sprint car racing. Dave's angelic act was to rescue a dog in Arizona. If this dog could talk we are sure he would tell us Dave is truly his guardian angel and that he is very grateful for all that his new owner has done for him. **Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, We are thankful for God's angels watching over us; guarding and caring for us when we are lost in the desert of our lives.

Here is Dave's story:

The story my Chinese Shar-Pei and I started the last week of April 2011.

One early morning when I was taking a friend to the airport for an early flight, I pulled out of the gated community onto the main road, only to see two eyes staring into my headlights. As we got closer, we noticed that it was a dog standing in the middle of the busy road. I remember telling my friend that if that dog didn't move off of this high traveled road, it would not be around very long for the odds were that someone would run into it.

After returning from the airport, I started my daily routine which consisted of having a cup of coffee while working on the pool or pulling weeds from my backyard. I also enjoyed watching the kids and their moms and dads standing across the road from my backyard waiting for the school bus. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a dog moving towards the kids. I realized that is the same dog as I saw this morning. I was scared that this stray dog could have rabies or whatever and it could attack the kids.

I jumped into my car and drove out of the gated community again and was able to scare the dog away from where the kids were. Shortly after, another guy came and told me his wife had seen what I had done and that he would help me with the dog. We decided to call the police to report a dog running loose in our area. They told us they didn't have time to address this right now but to call animal service. This other guy had brought a leash so we decided to try to get a leash around his neck. We ran after this dog and the more we approached him, the more he

## 12-13-15 Reverend Meghan Davis

*Let mutual love continue.*

*Do not neglect to show hospitality  
to strangers, for by doing so some have  
entertained angels without knowing it.*

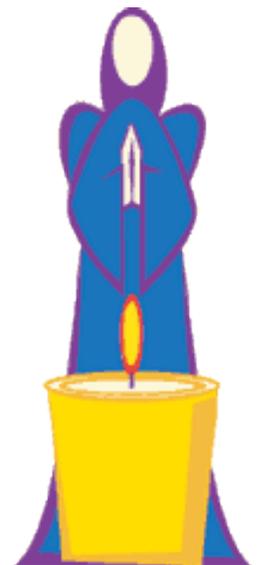
~Hebrews 13: 1-2

As I sit down to write this, I imagine our Advent devotional booklet will be full of wonderful stories of anonymous strangers in our lives or in others' lives who have, without any thought of gratitude or glory have performed life-changing acts of kindness whether heroic or simple. These stories will enhance our Advent and inspire our sense of faith and hope in an age hungry for both.

While scanning my own life history for examples to share, this scripture passage came to mind from Hebrews: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.* It occurs to me that this particular scripture isn't about miracles and kindnesses performed for us by angels but just the opposite. It's about our performing miracles of kindness for others. It's about our being the angels in our midst.

Imagine a world where we all treated one another—friends, family, strangers, everyone—as an angel. Imagine a world where we all behaved as if we ourselves were angels in disguise. Because that is the world God calls us to. That is the world Christ was made flesh to usher in.

In doing so we are sure to entertain angels without knowing it. In doing so we will seize the opportunity to **be** the angels in our midst.



Facebook friends might recall this image I re-posted on our church page back in October:



In this Advent season, and in the Christmas season that will follow, I invite you and me and all of us to keep the Christ in Christmas by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, forgiving the guilty, welcoming the stranger and the unwanted child and adult, to care for the ill and love our enemies. In doing so we are sure to entertain angels without knowing it. In doing so we will seize the opportunity to *be* the angels in our midst.

## 12-18-15 Megan Ritter

ADVENT  
ANGELS  
APPEAR  
APPROACH  
BEHOLD  
BETHLEHEM  
CHRISTMAS

GUARDIAN  
HEAVENLY  
JESUS  
JOSEPH  
MARY  
SHEPHERDS  
WINGS



### “Angels Among Us” Word Search By Megan Ritter

I	A	Q	Y	R	E	S	E	B	Q	A	V	F	Q	S
S	A	H	F	E	G	B	E	M	Q	X	C	Y	R	H
P	D	O	P	N	C	T	X	B	D	P	B	N	F	C
A	F	R	I	E	H	C	L	L	P	C	A	I	I	A
O	D	W	E	L	S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C	O
M	O	V	E	H	P	O	O	G	D	Q	S	A	X	R
H	P	H	E	P	P	Z	J	R	U	L	R	N	A	P
W	E	Y	E	N	H	E	A	H	X	N	U	G	G	P
M	W	A	G	W	T	U	H	D	L	O	H	E	B	A
M	R	L	H	Y	G	B	N	S	V	C	K	L	G	Q
H	E	A	V	E	N	L	Y	U	Z	D	B	S	L	C
H	B	X	I	W	U	R	R	S	J	Y	O	I	W	P
I	U	E	S	L	R	H	M	E	B	D	C	O	M	E
K	Y	S	P	Z	N	E	Y	J	F	Q	M	A	R	Y
X	U	O	Y	X	D	U	S	O	M	Y	A	R	J	X

### Luke 2:13-14

“And suddenly there appeared with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

## 12-17-15 Taylor Peska and Tara Zehr

### Angels Among Us

By Geraldine Henein

The hands that give to those in need  
The heart that loves in faith and deed  
The voice that speaks the truth decrees  
These are angels among us.  
The common cause to help all those  
Whether they be friends or foes  
The compassion for all so lovingly grows  
These are angels among us.  
The forgetting of self to the service to others  
The knowledge we are all sisters and brothers  
The extra mile is the distance they cover  
These are angels among us.  
The Christ-like spirit to demonstrate  
The limitless love from God so great  
The disciple who walks so humble and straight  
These are angels among us.



## 12-14-15 Norm Grimm

From 1987 through 2007 it was my privilege to sing with *His Light*, a Southern Gospel and Traditional men's trio. With my singing partners, Steve and Jim, I sang nearly four hundred concerts in churches, auditoriums and convention centers throughout the upper Midwest. One of our most requested songs, written and made popular by The Hemphills, was called *Angels All Around You*:

*In a world full of trouble, we travel along,  
God is our Father, we're on our way home.  
If forces of evil ever close in on you,  
Jesus has promised this is what he will do:  
Put angels all around you, to keep you from harm,  
To guide and direct you, till you're safe in His arms.  
With angels all around you, you're never alone;  
And you'll be protected until you make it home.*

Steve sang the first verse of the song alone, and enjoyed going out into the audience to choose someone, usually a child, to serenade. One Sunday evening, while singing in a church in South Dakota, Steve zeroed in on a little girl, perhaps eight or nine years old, who was in the second row with her mother. As we broke into the chorus, the little girl turned to her mother and began to whisper excitedly, while the mother smiled and dabbed at tears. This was certainly not the usual response to the personal attention, but we did our best to keep our composure.

At the end of the evening, the mother hurried to the front and blurted out, "How did you know?" At that point this story came out: The year before, the little girl had been struck by a car, and spent several long days in a coma in intensive care. When she awoke, her first question was "Where are the angels?" She was adamant. Her bed had been surrounded by angels as she slept.

Are there real angels among us here on earth? There are accounts in the Bible of encounters with these beings but we tend to be skeptical of their presence in our world today. Whether the little girl in this story was actually guarded by angels or was simply recalling the presence of parents and hospital staff hovering over her bed, was really not important. What was and is important is that we understand God's provision for us either through divine intervention or through the people He places in our lives. All we need to do is trust Him and allow ourselves to recognize these angels when they appear.

## 12-1515 Linda Campbell

I would like to tell you a story about an angel, or perhaps just a person, acting as an angel who brought a message one Christmas. Angels can be hard to see. Sometimes what seems to be a mischievous elf on the shelf is really an angel that may be sitting on top of the Christmas tree the next time you look. In the Bible, angels frequently brought good news and weren't immediately recognized as angels. It was the Angel Gabriel who appeared to Zechariah and told him that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son. Zechariah doubted the angel's word and was struck dumb until his son was born. The angel also appeared to Mary telling her she would bear the Son of God. An angel appeared to the shepherds and they were very afraid because they didn't immediately realize the blazing light they saw was an angel, and the angel told them to have no fear because a Savior was born in Bethlehem.

Gabriel Appears  
to Zechariah



Sometimes we don't recognize an angel right away. Sometimes what we think is an annoyance or intrusion is really an angel sent to tell us important information, or simply to bring us closer to God. But I best get on to my story.

Many many years ago, more than 100 years, there was a little girl whose father had died when she was very young. She was so young that she didn't even remember her father. Her mother had to work as a seamstress to provide for her. The little girl had many hours alone and she discovered she liked to climb trees and wade in the stream. She

For example: I was friends with our church custodian in Davenport. He was poor, uneducated, and looked grungy, but I know he and his wife were angels among us as they took in, fed and loved any friend or relative in need. Years later I bumped into him in a Quad Cities McDonalds and found he was now running a mission for down-and-outers on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. He hadn't spiffed up much but his eyes sparked with passion. What a guy!

Recently, another angel unaware gave me a wonderful, soul-lifting gift! As we "visited" we somehow got on the subject of how challenging relocating to a new town (not a retirement community or "the home"!!) can be, if one is no longer young. How tiring it can be to fit in and still be yourself! After all, your old contacts had had years and years to get used to you, and the net of friendships was spread wide and deep. Whom can you trust with your life, the good and bad of it? With no school age children, how do you open doors of common interest? How blessed I was to find someone who would really listen without judging, and could understand.

Angels are important, even a superficial version, such as "angels among us". They provide us with the precious conviction that our God is innately involved in human life, a lifeline to the Divine.

I challenge us to accept the opportunity to do good work for God Almighty. It may be as small a thing as giving someone a compliment, making someone smile, helping out a person in need, volunteering when you really don't feel you have the time or energy, or even just listening with quiet respect and a touch of the hand. As the old saying goes, "Go thou and do likewise".

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

## 12-16-15 Harriet Harmelink

They're everywhere, those angels! Be aware, feel their presence.

And surprise! You or I may be, or have been one. I doubt if we could recognize the "angels among us"; there are no tell-tale physical signs like wings, flowing robes, or cherubic grins. Use your spiritual mind. Think, and be aware of the divine in the everyday because that's where these angels operate.

For example, a young woman Walmart customer in line behind me felt it was important to talk. The words poured out. "See this soap, it is mild and allergen free. My husband has this merciless cancer that leaves him with, besides all the other pain, super tender skin. He weeps when I bathe him." The couple was in their early thirties! Maybe I was her angel that day because I listened and cared. But she was also mine. Our health problems faded into the distance...

Each of us, whatever the degree of faith or faithlessness is blessed by these unheralded, and probably unaware, heavenly workers who run around looking so average, or way out of our "comfort zone."



liked to play with the boys because there were no little girls near where she lived and her mother was too busy sewing for other people to teach her how to make doll clothes or bake cookies. She was a tomboy.

In time this little girl's mother met a nice man and they were married and had a new little brother much much younger than Millie. But, alas, when she was about 12 and her brother 2, her mother became very sick and after months and months, died, leaving her poor step father with a toddler and a teen-age tomboy sort of a girl. He knew that she needed someone to show her how to be a proper young lady and felt certain he was not up to the task. He sought the help of his brother, married a fine woman and had two daughters, one a year younger and another a year older than Millie. His brother and his wife agreed to raise her as a sister to their daughters. And so she travelled from Illinois to Winthrop, Minnesota to live with a family she had never met before and wasn't really related to, because it was her step father's brother's family.

Uncle John was a stern but kind man and Aunt Jenny an excellent cook and immaculate housekeeper, who took care that her new charge knew how to behave like a lady, most of the time. Helen and Jeanette were the sisters she never had and the three girls giggled and teased each other and Millie found a pond to skate on and joined the girls' basketball team and settled right in with her new family. It was actually the only "real family" she ever remembered as her father died when she was so very young.

As the winter came on, there were preparations for Christmas at school. Decorations were being made and put up and at Sunday School, carols were learned, and Bible verses memorized in preparation for the Christmas morning service. But, at home there was no mention of the coming season. Silently she wondered, because as sick and poor as she was, her mother always had some greens and red bows at Christmas and there was always excitement at the coming of The Christ Child. She never mentioned it at home, she was just grateful to Auntie and Uncle and her cousins for sharing their lovely home and being a family with her.

*(continued)*

However, on the twenty third of December something very exciting happened! As the 3 girls were setting the table and preparing for supper, they heard a loud thump on the front porch. The girls all rushed to see, and Auntie smiled knowingly. Uncle John had brought home a Christmas tree and was stamping the snow off of it on the porch! The girls were so beside themselves they could scarcely eat, but Aunt Jenny told them that any trimming would have to wait until the meal was eaten and the dishes washed and put away.

After all was back in place, Auntie went to the front hall closet and got down a big box full of paper bells, candles and candle holders that clipped on the tree, a few precious glass ornaments and garlands of tinsel, and they trimmed the Christmas tree. It was the most beautiful tree that Millie had ever seen. The next day was Christmas Eve and full of all sorts of preparations. Aunt Jenny spent most of the day in the kitchen with Jeanette while Millie and Helen dusted and tidied up the house. When evening came they sat down to a wonderful meal beginning with warm fruit soup which Millie had never eaten before and a bowl of lutefisk in creamy gravy more delicious than any she had ever tasted. There was no fishy taste and it was served with a rich gravy into which she dipped her flat bread. Dessert was a beautiful assortment of sugar cookies, ginger spice cakes and crisp cornucopias filled with whipped cream! They ate and ate and drank coffee and ate cookies, and when they had washed the dishes and put things away, they bundled up and the whole family headed to church. After the midnight service, the girls fell into bed and dreamed the grateful, happy and contented dreams one should dream on Christmas Eve.

As Christmas dawned, the girls were told to wait while Auntie and Uncle bustled around in the parlor. When they opened the doors to the room, the little pine tree was ablaze with candles, and Uncle stood close by with a bucket of water. There was a small gift for each, and after opening them and extinguishing the candles they headed out to church. As they were sitting in the pew, Auntie put her arm around Millie's shoulder and said "You're the Angel who brought Christmas back to us".

You see, Auntie and Uncle also had a son. And some years back he died on Christmas day, and from that time Uncle allowed no celebration or acknowledgement of Christmas. But, a mischievous child, who had lost so much at such a young age made him realize that it is more important to share the message of Christmas than for him to hold on to his grief.

So, look carefully at all the elves on the shelf and mysterious strangers you may see. If you look, you will find angels in the most amazing places.

This story was told to me many times by my mother-in-law who was Millie. I first heard it while helping dry dishes as a bride who was with a new family and away from her own for the first time at Christmas, and in other years I heard her tell it to my daughter as she was helping Grandma in the kitchen. She related it to Sunday School classes and Circle groups as well as other clubs. The story of the kindness of others never can be over told. Thanks for listening once again.

