



A SERIES OF
SERMONS FOR
ADVENT

Conversations
with the *Angels*

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Week 1 Dialog Sermon	5-9
Week 1 Children's Sermon	10-11
Week 2 Dialog Sermon	12-18
Week 2 Children's Sermon	19-20
Week 3 Dialog Sermon	21-26
Week 3 Children's Sermon	27-28

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WEEK 1: PROMISES FULFILLED

DIALOG SERMON

- The **Dialog Sermon** is delivered responsively by the pastor and another reader, who is speaking the part of the angel:
 - Ⓟ During these Advent weeks, we are moving steadily toward Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Christ. The first time God’s people moved toward Christmas, over two thousand years ago, their way was made easier, on a number of occasions, by the presence of angels, those messengers of God whom he had sent to announce the Good News of Christ’s coming. We have heard about God’s angels already in our Scripture readings, beginning with “the angel of the Lord” who called to Abraham there on the mountain of sacrifice—a dramatic demonstration of the promise in our Psalmody, that “He will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.” When our Savior comes again, we know (and his coming again is one of the major themes of Advent), he will do so “in the presence of the angels,” sent like reapers to gather the fruitful. In the meantime, as we move toward another celebration of Christmas, we do so quite aware of the role God’s angels played in heralding that grand event and preparing his people for it. Would it be helpful for us, as we now move toward Christmas, if God’s people could speak with those angels who once spoke to our ancestors in the faith? To hear their words afresh?

Perhaps even to question them about their message as Zechariah and Mary once did? If we could hold conversations with the angels this Adventtide, what do you suppose they might say?

R Fear not!

P That seems like a good place to begin.

R That's where I had to begin almost every time I was sent to speak to a human being: "Fear not!" It had to be said to people like Zechariah in the temple, to the virgin Mary in Nazareth, to the shepherds at Bethlehem, to the women at the open tomb.

P Why did you always begin like that? Did you really find that FEAR was such a great problem among human beings?

R No, people generally got over that pretty quickly when they heard what we had to say. Actually, there was a more serious problem, one that I frankly don't understand.

P Oh, a problem more serious than FEAR?

R Yes, much more serious.

P And what might that be?

R Doubt.

P Doubt? Hmm. I find that hard to believe.

R See?

P Well, it's probably only human to doubt.

R Perhaps that's why I don't understand it. Abraham believed, after all.

P "And the Lord counted his faith as righteousness."

R Right.

P So what's the problem? Abraham believed.

R Yes. But when we got closer to the actual event, people doubted.

P For example?

R For example, Zechariah the priest.

P The man who was to be the father of John the Baptist.

R I certainly didn't understand HIS doubt.

P What do you mean?

R Well, look: the news I had been sent to tell him was exactly what he and his wife had been praying for, for years: "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."

P That certainly sounds like good news from God.

R Yes, but do you remember Zechariah's response to that good news?

P "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

R See?

P I guess it WAS doubt, wasn't it?

R But "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news."

P Impressive credentials!

R Right. And it seems to me that they should have been sufficient, even for an old man like Zechariah. An angel of the Lord had spoken!

P But it wasn't enough, apparently.

R It seldom is, apparently. That is why I went right on to give old Zechariah a SIGN. Human beings seem to need signs, although you would think the Word of God would be enough for them.

P A sign?

R "Behold," I said ...

P That seems to be an important word among you angels.

R It is. It means, "Pay attention!" I wish people would—pay attention, I mean—and believe the Word of God when they hear it.

P Especially, I guess, when it begins with an angelic "Behold!"

R "Behold, you shall be dumb and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

P Quite a sign.

R And quite a promise from the Lord—that’s the important thing. Zechariah should have believed it. Mary should have too.

P Mary? You mean the virgin Mary?

R Yes, the virgin Mary there in Nazareth, six months later.

P Your message to her began “Fear not” too, didn’t it?

R And then, “Behold!”

P Of course.

R “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”

P But Mary doubted?

R You know her reply: “How shall this be, since I have no husband?”

P Sounds like a reasonable question to me.

R But not to GOD! “With God nothing will be impossible.”

P But didn’t Mary finally say, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”?

R Yes, but only after I had given HER a sign as well.

P A sign?

R “And behold,” I said ...

P There’s that word again.

R “Behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.”

P “For with God nothing will be impossible.”

R Precisely! Why don’t you human beings believe it? Why DO you doubt?

P Maybe we just need someone to keep on saying, “Behold!”

R Did you notice that that is exactly the way our angelic Christmas message at Bethlehem began? “Fear not, for behold ... ”

P And did the shepherds doubt?

R **Well, by now it seems we have learned our lesson about human beings. We offered a SIGN even BEFORE they had a chance to ask for one.**

P Before they had a chance to doubt.

R **“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

P That’s the very sign WE will be looking for again this year as well.

R **And will you doubt? (pause) Or will you finally believe the Good News of great joy which God sent us to proclaim for all people? That in Jesus Christ, born in the city of David, crucified on Calvary, and risen from the dead to live and reign forevermore, God has provided THE sign, the sign of his own presence among his people—the sign of his concern for you, his love for you, his forgiveness in Jesus Christ for all your sins, and the eternal hope you have through faith in him.**

P We shouldn’t ever doubt, should we?

R **Never!**

P And that is the invitation of Advent, isn’t it? The invitation signaled by the angel’s oft-repeated word,

R **“Behold!”**

P “Come and BEHOLD him ... ”

R **“Born the King of angels.”**

P And the Savior of the human race.

R **Right.**

P And so we move toward Christmas, bringing among other things the burden of our doubt, to hear the message of God’s angels once again, a message that sounds strangely like the one they offered later at the open tomb:

R **“Come, see the place where he lay.”**

P Yes, come. Behold your Savior, Christ the Lord, the sign of God’s own faithfulness.

R **And have your doubts removed!**

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WEEK 1: PROMISES FULFILLED CHILDREN'S SERMON

- The **Children's Sermon** is delivered by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Hello, boys and girls, and welcome to Advent. Advent is a time when we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas. Long before Jesus was born, God promised his people that he would send a Savior from sin, death and the devil. Then when the time came close for Jesus to be born, he sent angels to tell special people that Jesus was that Savior.

He sent the angel Gabriel first to a man named Zechariah to tell him that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son named John who would prepare the way for Jesus. Then he sent Gabriel to a young girl named Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of Jesus.

God's promises were coming true in Jesus. He showed the world that he had come from God by living a sinless life, healing the sick, performing miracles, and preaching and teaching the Good News that he had come to save the whole world. Jesus did that by dying on the cross and rising to life again to forgive our sins and open the way to heaven for us.

So how can you be like the angel Gabriel this Advent season? (*Allow the children to respond.*) That's right! We can be like Gabriel by announcing the coming of Jesus to people and telling them that God keeps his promises to us.

Sometimes we make promises to people or to ourselves, but then we don't always keep them, do we? That doesn't happen with God. When God makes a promise, he will always keep it. Think of these promises he has made to us:

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and give you help, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you (Jeremiah 31:3).

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool (Isaiah 1:18).

God promises in these verses that he will always be by our side and love us and forgive our sins. All these promises were fulfilled when Jesus came to earth. Jesus shows us that we can trust in God no matter what. We never need to be afraid.

So go out and spread the word that Jesus is with us and he loves us and forgives us. That is the greatest news anyone can hear, I promise. Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to us as you promised and for never forgetting us. Help us to be honest and true with one another and to keep our faith in you strong. Amen.