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**Angelic Protection**

**Series: The Angels' Advent**

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**The Village Church**

**January 5, 2025**

**Epiphany Sunday**

I. **The Angels' Advent: Epilogue**

- A. This is the final message in our Advent series: The Angels' Advent
  - 1. But wait! Hawkins, have you lost it?
  - 2. It's not Advent any more!
  - 3. Advent ended on Christmas Eve – that was the last Advent message!
  - 4. As far as the church calendar is concerned, we've finished with Advent
    - a. We've had Christmastide – that is, the twelve days of Christmas beginning on December 25
    - b. And now we enter Epiphany
- B. Meaning of the seasons of the church year
  - 1. We're not a strongly liturgical church that makes much of the seasons
    - a. The seasons are more a matter of tradition than of biblical mandate
    - b. Although the tradition is valuable for it keeps us in mind of the central events of God's work of redemption
    - c. So we're sort of soft-liturgical church, comprised of many different denominational backgrounds
  - 2. So Advent is the preparation and anticipation of the coming of the incarnate Son of God
    - a. And Christmas and it's ensuing days (Christmastide) celebrates the birth of the Messiah, His incarnation
    - b. And the next season is Epiphany
  - 3. Epiphany is an unveiling or a revealing
    - a. It is the season which celebrates the revealing of Jesus to the world
    - b. And the key event which is usually associated with Epiphany is the coming of the Magi, the three esteemed visitors from the east, to see the baby Jesus in Bethlehem
    - c. That event happened, not as the nativity scenes so often portray it, with the three "kings" visiting the holy family in the manger
    - d. No – it happened a bit later, and Mary and Joseph had managed to find themselves with their newborn in a house
    - e. So it happened a couple of weeks after the birth most likely
    - f. So on the church calendar, Epiphany is celebrated 12 days after Christmas – on January 6
    - g. And Epiphany Sunday is the first Sunday closest to January 6
    - h. So today is Epiphany Sunday!

- C. So why did you say this is the last message in the Advent series?
  - 1. Well, the Advent series centered around angelic visitations
    - a. It is called **The Angels' Advent**
  - 2. And here's the thing
    - a. Evidently, the angels didn't follow the church calendar
  - 3. We saw that the angels had a lot to do in Advent
    - a. They announced the birth of John the Baptist
    - b. They announced the conception of Jesus to Mary
    - c. They announced the pregnancy of Mary to Joseph
    - d. And they announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds
  - 4. So, when Jesus was born, they were done – right?
- D. Well, not so fast
  - 1. Evidently they worked overtime
    - a. Their job wasn't done during Advent
  - 2. And just like they were a dominating influence in Matthew 1, they show up, well, during Epiphany!
- E. And we'll learn something else about angels and their ministry as we explore their post-Christmas visitations
  - 1. Up till now we see angels as messengers
    - a. Which is what their name really means
  - 2. They are more than messengers
    - a. We'll see guide, direct, and protect God's people
  - 3. And just as we saw that angels were more prevalent and active in key moments of redemptive history – like the incarnation of Messiah and the death and resurrection of Jesus
    - a. We'll see other functions of angels in the stories of Chapter 2 of Matthew

## II. **The Magi's Visitation**

- A. **Matthew 2:1-2** (ESV) —
  - 1. 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,
  - 2. 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"
  - 3. For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."
- B. So here are some details which establish time and place for the event of Jesus' birth, confirming the historicity of these events
  - 1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea
    - a. Actually, that's important; there's another Bethlehem in Galilee, not far from Nazareth
  - 2. But this Bethlehem has significance as the homestead of the family of David
    - a. So it was in Bethlehem Ephrathah, the Bethlehem of Judea, that has such prophetic significance
  - 3. And then the text indicates that it was in the days of Herod

- a. This would be Herod the Great, known for his great building exploits
  - b. Including the remarkable port at Caesarea Maritima
  - c. And the expansion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple, a project that was only about half completed at his death in 4 BC
  - d. But this is also the Herod who is known for his ruthless and calculating thirst for power
  - e. The Herod who had his own children, indeed, his wife, murdered because of a threat to the kingdom he had cunningly developed for himself under the Roman footprint
- C. And then there are the wise men from the east who came to Jerusalem
1. “From the east” is not very specific
    - a. They may have been Persian in origin, for the word Magi has Persian roots
    - b. But they may have been Babylonian – Babylonians were known to have had their share of astrologers
    - c. But whoever they were, it took them some time to get there
    - d. And if those possible locations were true, it could have been as much as a 1,000 mile trip for them
  2. Now we don’t know how many of them there were
    - a. We sing “We three kings of orient are...”
    - b. But the text never says there were three
    - c. Three kinds of gifts were mentioned; but those gifts could have been brought by an entire entourage of astrologers
  3. They must have been men of some significance, for they attracted a lot of attention when they rode into town
    - a. And the very name Magi – which has always been identified with wisdom – was also a word used to identify greatness
    - b. That may be where the idea of being kings came from – though the Bible never says they were kings!
  4. They had seen some kind of astronomical phenomenon indicating the birth of a King of the Jews
  5. There has been a great deal of speculation about what kind of astronomical phenomenon it was
    - a. Some believe it was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter
    - b. How they came to believe there was some connection to being King of the Jews has been a matter of some conjecture as well
    - c. If they were from Persia or from Babylon, they may have been influenced by the Jewish population there as a result of the exile
    - d. They may have heard the prophetic story of Balaam, who in his oracle in Numbers, said this:
    - e. **Numbers 24:17** (ESV) — 17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...

6. How that astronomical phenomenon came not only to identify the birth of the King of the Jews, and also lead the Magi to the place of the birth, is difficult to explain
  - a. My sense is that whatever the stellar configuration, once they got in the vicinity, some other kind of phenomena led them
  - b. Something like the shekinah glory which settled over the holy family from the time of the birth
  - c. But the Bible is not particularly clear about these details
7. That's because the Bible likes to keep the main thing the main thing
  - a. The main thing is that these wise men were seeking the King of the Jews
  - b. They were wise to do so; why shouldn't we?
- D. The other thing that is significant about the Magi is that they were most certainly Gentiles
  1. This newborn King of the Jews was not just the King of the Jews
    - a. He would be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords
  2. And that's what makes Epiphany such a significant time for the church
    - a. God's redemptive plan was for all humankind!
  3. **Isaiah 49:6** (ESV) —
    - a. 6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
    - b. I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
  4. The coming of Jesus was, indeed, an Epiphany, an unveiling, of the Savior of the world, for all nations!
- E. **Matthew 2:3-6** (ESV) —
  1. 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;
  2. 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
  3. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:
  4. 6 " 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
  5. for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "
- F. So the Magi made such a ruckus in Jerusalem that word got around to Herod
  1. And Herod, always paranoid about losing his kingdom, was spooked by it
  2. So he got the Jewish leaders and questioned them about the prophecies of the birth of the King of the Jews
  3. Herod regarded himself, of course, as the King of the Jews – though he himself was not truly a Jew
    - a. But he brokered no pretender to his throne
  4. The Jewish leaders quoted from their Bible, from Micah's prophecy about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem of Judea

- G. Well, that prompted another meeting arranged by Herod, this time in secret
- H. **Matthew 2:7–8** (ESV) —
1. 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.
  2. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”
- I. Herod is his deceitful, conniving self
1. But he’s also too cute by half, as they say, and as we shall see in a moment
  2. He’s also lazy
    - a. He gets the Magi to meet with him and gets them to do his dirty work
    - b. He wants them to do the heavy lifting and find him this pretender
  3. Then he tells them he’ll come and worship him!
    - a. Sure he will...
- J. **Matthew 2:9–11** (ESV) —
1. 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way.
  2. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.
  3. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
  4. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.
- K. This is why I’m inclined to think that this was not really an astronomical phenomenon at all – but a vision of the shekinah glory
1. For it moves about, leading them to the particular location
    - a. It’s hard to see how a star could do that
    - b. But it’s easier to see how the shekinah glory could mimic a star
    - c. (Or maybe a drone...)
  2. So they follow the “star” (whatever it was) and found the child with Mary
  3. They were in a house – again, indicating that they arrived some days after the actual birth
  4. But the main thing – and remember Matthew wants us to remember the main thing – is that they were joyful in their finding of the baby King, and they fell down and worshiped him
  5. Remember, by the way, only God is to be worshiped!
    - a. And no one stopped the Magi from worshiping Jesus!
    - b. Remember John in Revelation – how we nearly worshiped an angel and was rebuked!
    - c. Or how some Greeks started to worship Paul on Malta when he was bitten by a poisonous snake and didn’t die; they thought he was a god and tried to worship him; Paul rebuked them
    - d. Only God could be worshiped
    - e. And the Magi did just that!
  6. And would we not worship this Jesus?

- L. And then, of course, there was the significance ascribed to the gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh
1. Gold was the kind of gift known to be given to kings
    - a. Kings in the ancient world were often buried with gold, as we discovered in King Tut's tomb
  2. Frankincense extremely valuable and was used in worship
    - a. It served a priestly function
  3. And then myrrh as a spice was used extensively in embalming and in preparation for burial
  4. Origen: Gold, as to a king; myrrh as to one who is mortal,; and incense, as to God.
  5. It's hard to tell how much of this the Magi actually understood, but their gifts certainly foreshadowed the saving significance of the God-man, the King of Kings
- M. What a glorious encounter that must have been!
1. And how Mary must have catalogued this with all the other things that she "pondered in her heart!"
  2. But we're not quite finished with the Magi
- N. **Matthew 2:12** (ESV) —
1. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.
  2. So the script calls for the angels to enter stage right
    - a. Actually, I don't know whether it was stage right or left; probably neither
    - b. But they do enter
    - c. Into their dreams!
  3. Now it doesn't actually say angels in this text – but who else would have shown up in a dream to the Magi to warn them not to return to Herod except an angel!
    - a. Joseph received messages through dreams; and they were said to be angels
    - b. I'm figuring the Magi had their angel moment too!
  4. Imagine who this might have gone down
    - a. Most of us have dreams from time to time
    - b. We don't put much stock in them
    - c. They seem to be confusing elements of memory, ways in which our brains sort out the mass of information that is up there in our central processing systems
    - d. But what if they awoke, and one said, "You know, I had this dream last night. And this guy – may have been an angel – showed up and told me not to go back to Herod. Strange, isn't it?"
    - e. They would have dismissed it outright!
    - f. But then another: "Wait, I had the same dream!"
    - g. And another: "Me too! He was very explicit: don't go back to Jerusalem!"

- h. And if there were more than three, the dream accounts may have multiplied even further
  - 5. So they got the message
    - a. They asked their GPS for an alternative route home
    - b. And off they went
    - c. Leaving Herod to his own devices
- O. So this was an angelic message
  - 1. But it was a message of protection
  - 2. Herod may have lied about his intention to the Magi
    - a. And as wise as the Magi may have been about worshipping Messiah, they could have easily been taken in by the King of Judea
  - 3. But God knew Herod's intention
    - a. And God's angels warned the Magi to kiss Herod goodbye
  - 4. So the angels are not only messengers
    - a. They are protectors
  - 5. And of course, their interest is not so much to protect the Magi – though they do that
    - a. Their interest is to protect this most vulnerable little Baby

### III. **Joseph's Second Visitation**

- A. Well, Joseph is now well acquainted with angels
  - 1. He's had his own visitation when the angel came to him a dream and told him that Mary's pregnancy was from the Lord
    - a. And he had instructed to him to take Mary as his wife
    - b. And Joseph responded by obeying the instruction
  - 2. And of course, he had certainly heard Mary's testimony of her own encounter with Gabriel
    - a. As Gabriel told Mary she would be with child – not from a man, but by the Holy Spirit
    - b. And the child would be the Savior
  - 3. Both Mary and Joseph were told to name the baby Jesus for he would save His people from their sins
- B. So, does lightning strike the same person twice?
  - 1. They say no – but as far as angels are concerned, Joseph gets a second visitation
- C. **Matthew 2:13** (ESV) —
  - 1. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
  - 2. "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."
- D. Once again, we an angelic message
  - 1. But the angelic purpose is all about protection
    - a. At all costs, the baby must be protected
    - b. And real danger exists; Herod's juices are flowing
    - c. And while Herod doesn't know it yet, his head is about to explode!

- E. Now Egypt as a plan of escape makes sense in a couple of ways
  - 1. Practically, it was not far from Bethlehem
    - a. It was actually closer to go to Egypt than to go to Galilee
  - 2. And there were significant Jewish communities in Egypt
    - a. They would be well received there
- F. **Matthew 2:14–15** (ESV) —
  - 1. 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt
  - 2. 15 and remained there until the death of Herod.
  - 3. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”
- G. The other reason why Egypt makes sense was to fulfill prophecy – something that Matthew is always concerned to connect
  - 1. The prophecy is from Hosea
    - a. Remember Hosea was instructed to take back his wayward wife who had prostituted herself
    - b. And the message of God through Hosea is that God is acting redemptively on behalf of His wayward people
    - c. It’s a message of great hope for the people of Israel who had spiritually prostituted herself to idolatrous, pagan nations
    - d. So, “Out of Egypt I called my son”
    - e. Echoing what God did to redeem the nation of Israel from their bondage to Egypt
  - 2. Now we see Christ as the embodiment of the people of God – their representative
    - a. The Son of the sons of God, as it were
- H. So in this encounter, you have both an angelic encounter and a prophetic encounter
  - 1. All for the protection of the newborn Son of God

#### IV. **Rachel Weeping**

- A. But they don’t live happily every after – at least not yet
  - 1. There is much sorrow to be had
- B. **Matthew 2:16–18** (ESV) —
  - 1. 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.
  - 2. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:
  - 3. 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”
- C. Herod, as we mentioned earlier, was too cute by half
  - 1. He, the deceiver, has been deceived
    - a. He thought he was pulling a fast one on the Magi



- b. But God pulled a fast one on Herod and sent the Magi packing by another way
  - c. And Herod discovered that they'd left town without so much as a wave goodbye
  - d. And he was furious
- D. But in Herod's mind, his kingdom was threatened
  - 1. There is a pretender to the throne
    - a. And he must be killed
    - b. But he doesn't know who to kill!
    - c. So he decides to kill any baby in Bethlehem and vicinity within whatever age margin he deemed effective
    - d. Like cutting out a cancer – make sure you cut it all out, even if you take out some healthy tissue in the process!
- E. Now this episode – the slaughter of the innocents as it is sometimes called – has been doubted
  - 1. It is not mentioned in Luke or the other gospel writers
    - a. And the great Jewish historian Josephus makes not mention of it
    - b. So critical scholars doubt that it happened
  - 2. But as awful as this episode is, it might have not made it onto Josephus' radar
  - 3. Remember, Bethlehem was a small town, about 6 miles south of Jerusalem
    - a. Probably not more than 1,000 people or less
    - b. If all the infants and toddlers in Bethlehem were killed it might have numbered, at most, in the 12-20 range
    - c. That's awful carnage, to be sure – but might not have gotten into the national press
- F. Whatever the amount of carnage – it is consistent with Herod, especially in his later years
  - 1. He killed his own two sons as pretenders to the throne
  - 2. He even had his wife executed
- G. More importantly, Matthew connects it with yet another prophecy
  - 1. He quotes from Jeremiah
  - 2. Signifying the death of the children of Israel and Judah
    - a. Israel in the north and Judah in the south
    - b. Ramah is on the border
    - c. Rachel, the mother of both Joseph and Benjamin
    - d. Joseph's son Ephraim came to be identified with the northern tribes; Benjamin was the second of the southern tribes along with Judah
  - 3. So Rachel weeping for her children refers to both sides of the divided kingdom
  - 4. But the Jeremiah passage is a passage about hope for all Israel – north and south
- H. Matthew quotes **Jeremiah 31.15**
  - 1. Listen to the verses that follow:

2. **Jeremiah 31:16–17** (ESV) —
  - a. 16 Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.
  - b. 17 There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.

- I. Yes, there is weeping
  1. And the mothers and fathers of Bethlehem shared in extraordinary grief
  2. But the end result is hope for Israel!
    - a. Messiah has been born
    - b. And has been protected!
  3. Herod may have had his day
  4. But God has a greater day!

#### V. **Joseph’s Third Visitation**

- A. Finally, this brings us to the final angelic encounter
- B. **Matthew 2:19–21** (ESV) —
  1. 19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
  2. 20 saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”
  3. 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.
- C. So Herod has died
  1. Finally! Good riddance, we say!
  2. He probably died within two years of the birth of Jesus, so the holy family was not long in Egypt
    - a. And Joseph was told to return to Israel
- D. **Matthew 2:22** (ESV) —
  1. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there,
  2. and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
- E. So Herod’s son Archelaus seemed to have inherited his father’s ruthless gene
  1. He was no better than his father, in the category of wickedness
  2. In one instance, he murdered several thousand people attending a festival in Jerusalem!
  3. So once again, the angel visits Joseph’s and directs him to go to Galilee
- F. Joseph’s first inclination would probably have been to go to Bethlehem, since it was the home of the Davidic family
  1. And since Jesus would be inheriting the Davidic covenant promises, that would seemed to have been the place to go
  2. But once again, God has other plans
    - a. And has prophesied about it as well
  3. Antipas, another son of Herod the Great, was appointed tetrarch of Galilee and he was of a much more moderate bent

4. So to Galilee they would go, back to their original home territory, to Nazareth
- G. So the, what about this prophecy?
1. **Matthew 2:23** (ESV) —
    - a. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.
  2. Here's where we run into a problem
    - a. We can find no prophecy that explicitly indicates that the Messiah would be "called a Nazarene"
  3. It's not that Jesus would be a Nazarene in the OT biblical sense of having taken the Nazirite vows
    - a. He never followed any of those protocols
    - b. What, then, is the meaning of this prophecy?
  4. Well, it appears to be a general fulfillment of the clear prophecies that Jesus would suffer the indignities of being an outcast and a reject
  5. **Isaiah 53:3** (ESV) —
    - a. 3 He was despised and rejected by men,
    - b. a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
    - c. and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
  6. Nazareth, you see, was a backwater, "other-side-of-the-tracks" kind of town
  7. Remember what Nathanael said about Jesus when Philip tried to introduce him
    - a. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"
  8. Certainly, that was how Jesus was known
    - a. "Really? This guy from Nazareth? You can't be serious!"
    - b. (The John McEnroe version of events)
- H. So the prophecy is fulfilled in general terms
1. Jesus was despised and rejected
    - a. And His hometown was a reflection of that rejection

## VI. Conclusion

- A. So here we have **The Angels' Advent: Epilogue**
  1. The angels continue to have their role
- B. But what is that role, exactly?
  1. It's one of protection
  2. They send the Magi on another way to avoid Herod and thus give Mary, Joseph and Jesus time to escape
  3. They send Joseph and Mary and Jesus to Egypt to stay out of harm's way and foil Herod's plot
  4. They send Joseph and Mary and Jesus back to Galilee, to Nazareth, to avoid the equally violent son of Herod, Archelaus
- C. So the life of Jesus, the Messiah

1. In His most vulnerable state – as a little newborn baby
  2. Was spared, protected
    - a. So that He might grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
    - b. Live the life of total righteousness that we could never live
    - c. Be oppressed, stricken, and crucified by the Jewish leaders and Romans, and take upon Himself the just penalty for the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him
    - d. (Can you say, “propitiation?”)
    - e. And be raised from the dead for our justification
    - f. And ascend into heaven where He sits interceding for you
  3. Giving you the same kind of protection that the angels gave to Him on the occasion of His birth
- D. Angels and us
1. We’ve often heard of guardian angels
    - a. Especially where children are concerned, the tradition is that each child has a guardian angel
  2. I don’t think there is biblical warrant for everyone to have his or her own guardian angel
  3. Matthew 18:10 (ESV) —
    - a. 10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones.
    - b. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”
  4. Implication is that children of the people of God have “their angels”
  5. But whether that’s true or not, one thing’s for sure
    - a. God’s angels are His resource often protecting His children from peril
    - b. He did it with His Son in His infancy
    - c. And He likely does it in one way or another for each one of us
    - d. Many times through encounters that we are not even aware of!
- E. Our sovereign, gracious God will use whatever resource necessary to completely fulfill His plan of redemption
1. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!