

# THE FIRST 15

Thursday, December 19, 2024

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Today is Thursday, December 19 and this is the third week of the Advent season. We are studying the song of the Angels recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke following the birth of Jesus.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Holy and loving God, in the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. As I journey through the season of Advent I find my heart growing in anticipation as the celebration of the birth of Your Son Jesus draws near. In this place of stillness, I quiet my mind and prepare my heart to reflect on a humble manger in Bethlehem surrounded by shepherds and angels. I listen attentively for Your message. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE

***Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” Luke 2:13-15***

## REFLECTION

The word angel comes from the Greek word for the heavenly being, *angelos*, which means “messenger.” Angels are messengers from God to the world. God has not abandoned His creation and left the scene. God is constantly trying to communicate with human beings. He has been doing so for centuries and God will use whatever means of communication necessary to get His message across.

Angels appear to many different people in the Old and New Testaments of scripture. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, Joseph and Mary. In today’s text we consider how the angels appeared to the shepherds the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem. What is interesting is that in all the other appearances of angels in the entire Bible there is usually one angel. Sometimes there might be two or three angels. But on the night Jesus was born, all the angels showed up. That says something. That indicates this was the most extraordinary event in the history of the entire world.

Luke reports that a “great company” or “multitude” of the heavenly host were there. A multitude implies a large number, numerous, even countless. The term heavenly “host” translated from Greek indicates an “army.” This multitude of angels is God’s spiritual army sent from heaven and their testimony reveals the divine meaning of this special birth.

The angels give two messages before they depart. First, glory to God in the highest, known in Latin as “Gloria in excelsis deo” the stuff of our favorite Christmas hymns. Second, peace and good will to the people of earth. That is the message of Christmas. We join the angels in

praising God and we believe in the blessing of peace and good will for all of humanity. The heavenly armies of God sing of the peace and wholeness of life God wants to give to you and me and all the world.

Who did the angels present themselves to in this amazing glorious display? Shepherds. The shepherds were the lowest, poorest and most forgotten members of early Middle Eastern society. The night shepherds were the lowest of all - they scattered among the hillsides and worked alone. They slept out in the open air and spent the night protecting the sheep from dangerous predators. Worried about getting through the night, concerned about the food they would eat tomorrow. Many were crippled, lame, mentally impaired or physically disabled. Unable to do other types of work.

The shepherds were the forgotten of the world, led a lonely life doing a difficult lowly job that others would not choose to do. Yet, they were the first to hear the Good News and the first to worship the Christ child. The shepherds were the first to *find* Christmas. In all of our decorating, shopping, planning and celebrating, perhaps it is the shepherds we should keep in mind this Christmas. We don't want to be too busy with the demands of the holiday season, the many parties to attend, the lengthy to-do lists and endless tasks, that we fail to hear the Good News of Christ, worship the Christ Child and find Christmas.

**Ask:** Where do I hear the promise of the Angel's song - sharing the good news of Jesus Christ? How can I stop today to worship the Christ Child and find Christmas?

**Pause and Pray**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Loving Lord God, in the busyness of the holiday season, when there is so much to be done and so much celebrating to enjoy, remind me to pause, take some time away and seek Your presence. Like the lonely shepherds on the hillside, let me find a quiet place alone, so I can hear the songs of the Angels, worship the baby Jesus, celebrate His miraculous birth and find the true meaning of Christmas. Lead and guide me to the side of the manger. I want to find You this Christmas. Amen.*