

DID YOU KNOW?

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, December 14, 2014

I believe I've been visited by angels—several times. But never knowingly. I mean, I wasn't aware that they were angels at the time. They seemed like ordinary people—but the circumstances were too unusual, and the results were exceptional. I believe I have “entertained angels unawares.”

I have also read the descriptions of others' face-to-face encounters with angels who revealed themselves as such. I have yet to see anything like that. For instance...

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ “Don't be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

A promiscuous woman, who sleeps with the men she dates—or a prostitute, who has sex with men for money—may take whatever precautions she can, but when she ends up pregnant she does not think to herself, “How did this happen?” She knows it's a lifestyle hazard.

But a virgin? She's never been down that road! Such a case is inexplicable. There is no way to make sense of it.

When was the last time you had a mind-boggling experience? Where the pieces simply didn't add up? Where the result was so out of proportion to the elements involved that you were left with some measure of disbelief? Whether the end was good or bad, your brain cried out, “This makes no sense! How can this be?”

Have you ever had to deal with a situation like that—a situation for which you had no reasonable explanation, yet you could not avoid it, you *had to* go through it? Mary did.

Luke 2:4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were

there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

*¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Sometimes, all you can do is wonder...!

I once made an unplanned visit to a hospital in Redding. We lived ten minutes to the east in Palo Cedro. I had made the trip home dozens of times—exit Highway 5 near the Holiday Inn, then the ramp forks west and east. Only this time, after I took the fork toward the east and began the natural lean to the right, I found the car leaning to the left. Feeling completely disoriented, I wondered what was happening. Then, nothing looked familiar and I wondered where I was. Momentarily, I realized that somehow I had taken the fork to the east and was headed back to town. How could this happen?

My next thought was, “God, what are You up to? Where are you taking me?” I remembered that the unsaved relative of a neighbor was in the hospital, directly ahead of me. Deciding that this was what God was up to, I pulled into the hospital parking lot, found the room and spent 30 minutes sharing the Gospel with the dying man. He was not ready to receive Christ, so I prayed for him and left.

To this day, I am unsure of the result of that unplanned visit. A month or so later, the man died. Whether or not he was ready to meet the Lord, I do not know, but I do have hope, because the Lord derailed my trip home and took me to the hospital.

Luke 2:21 Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

The Prophecy of Simeon

²⁵ At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him

²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared for all people.

³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

May I affirm that "life doesn't always go as you have planned"?

Proverbs 16:9 We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

So, the key question to ask is not, "How can this be?" or even, "Why did this happen?" but, "What is God doing? What is He after?"

Don't expect an immediate explanation, because the wonder and confusion are usually necessary to the intended result. The struggle to understand is necessary to the outcome. If God just wanted a correct answer, He would have given it to you in advance. Instead, He wants you to wrestle in faith—even if you get the answer wrong!

Luke 1:34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

Surrender to the words of God. This is not defeat; it is the ultimate victory!

Billy Graham taught us to say, "God has a wonderful plan for your life." Perhaps, like me, you have imagined that to mean that "God's plan for me is to have and experience everything that I think is wonderful (and nothing that I think is unpleasant)."

Of course, we know better than that. The wonder that fills God's plans for you and I is mostly our wonder at how He uses us (when we feel so inadequate), and how He arranges our circumstances to get us where He wants us (even when we thought it better to go a different way), and how He provides all that we need to do what He wants us to do (even though we feel ill-equipped).

Surrender to the words of God, for God's words are wise, and creative, and powerful, and trustworthy.

The songwriter-king, David of Israel, wrote, "*I pondered the direction of my life, and I turned to follow your laws.*" (Psalms 119:59)

Don't parse and dissect God's words; simply receive them. Don't focus on one word to the exclusion of others; take them all together, as He brings them to you. Let yesterday's word anchor today's word, and let today's word expand yesterday's word. We need the whole counsel of God, or else we will follow our preferences.

Perhaps you're thinking of a particular word from God right now. Has God said to you something hard to believe?

Mary, Did You Know?

By Mark Lowry

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will someday walk on water?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will save our sons and daughters?*

*Did you know that your baby boy
has come to make you new?*

*This child that you've delivered,
will soon deliver you.*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will give sight to a blind man?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will calm a storm with his hand?*

*Did you know that your baby boy
has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby,
you have kissed the face of God.*

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear,
the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak,
the praises of the Lamb*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy
would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding
is the great I AM*

Has God asked you to do something that is beyond your comfort level?

Try Mary's response on for size: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as God has spoken."

You may have persistent questions. There may still be a lot of pondering to do. There will surely be a lot of wondering.

But let your voice declare: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as God has spoken."

Then, step forward in faith, and God will be with you.