

## **Christmas in a Nutshell p.2: God With Us - 12.20.09**

### **Part One - The Message and the Messengers**

We are obsessed with messages. Twenty years ago, some people (not all) had answering machines. Think about it.

Now we don't just have cell phones, we have SMART phones, communication devices that let you talk on the phone, write and read emails, write and read text messages, twitter, facebook! According to a recent Nielson Mobile survey, American teens send and receive 1742 messages a month! How do I know? I looked it up on my smart phone!

We're not the only ones obsessed with messages. God is too. Did you know that the word "angel" also means messenger in the Greek language? We tend to think of angels as mighty creatures with wings, even though they are never physically described to us.

I don't know if they are winged creatures or not, but one thing I do know: God uses his angels when he wants to make sure we get the message right!

For 500 hundred years there had been no mention of angels - not since the OT book of Zechariah was written. Not a single message. Heaven was quiet. Then all of a sudden, it seems, when we read the beginning of the New Testament, there are angels everywhere - Mary, Joseph, priest Zechariah, shepherds.

And what was this message that broke the 500 year silence, this message God wanted to make sure we got right?

Good news of Great joy

for ALL the people.

born this day Savior / Christ the Lord

baby wrapped in swaddling cloths

Two things we should note about this message:

1. Delivered to shepherds - no relation to Jesus. Not the people of position or status or leaders or wealthy, not the movers and shakers. Shepherds. Night shepherds. Sleeping outside with the sheep. Good news of great joy for ALL the people.
2. Message couldn't be contained by one messenger. "Suddenly" "A Great Company of Heavenly Host" joined the solitary angel How many? We don't know. The book of Hebrews tells us that the number of angels at God's disposal is "innumerable." These heavenly beings could not hold themselves back from praising God when they found out how generous God had been toward men. "Peace to men." "On whom his favor rests." Glory to God in the Highest. Gloria in excelsis Deo (Latin). Surely we should not let the angels give more glory to God than we, upon whom God's favor rests.

[Nate leads song, Angels We Have Heard on High.]

## **Part Two: The Message Became the Messenger**

The first message we read about from one of God's messengers is in Matthew chapter one. And Matthew makes a point about the Christ child, that he would fulfill the prophecy - they would call his name Immanuel. And just to make sure we get it right he tells us Immanuel means God with us.

You know it's possible that we make too big a deal out of the angels. Don't get me wrong - they are mighty creatures. Everyone who ever encountered one fell face down in fear and terror. But the big news about these mighty messengers was never about them, but about the message -

- God would no longer be distant
- We would no longer have to hear only from his messengers
- We could hear direct from God Himself.

And to make sure of that, God came in the form of a man - in the vulnerable, weak, humble position of a baby. That baby grew up and gave us God's message direct! Jesus said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father!"

The WORD became flesh. That means that The WORD - the second person of the Trinity - very God Himself - took on flesh and blood so that we could clearly understand God and His Message. No more need for messengers between us and God.

Today we have the privilege of reading the gospel accounts of how this God-man lived. We can read about who his friends were - and his enemies. We can read his teachings. We can find out how God the Son showed us the love of the Father, by his life and his death.

This message of Immanuel - God with us - was not only the story of the baby Jesus in a manger. It's also a story for us today. But once a year it's a good story for us to remember. We are no longer a faith located only in Bethlehem. But... Bethlehem was the beginning.

[Nate and band sing "Born in Bethlehem."]

### **Part Three: The Message WITH the Messengers**

We don't hear as much these days officially about angels. Popular with the media, stories, films. But I'm betting you could live a dozen lifetimes and never run into one - at least not that you know about. So what about the Message and messenger? Is God finished giving his message?

Far from it. The message of Immanuel - God WITH us is still alive and well today. God IS with us - through His Spirit. The Message lives inside of you and inside of me. Immanuel. God with us.

Here is a mind-blowing idea, but one I assure you is true: God now lives out His message in your life and in my life. Just like He did in Jesus - He now does through us. You are now the Messenger.

At one time the messengers of God were few and far between. A prophet here. An angel there. Then God sent untold messengers to tell us that God was coming Himself - The Message became the Messenger.

But now, wherever His Spirit resides is where His Message resides. If you are a Christ follower, you have the Spirit of God within you, which means you have the Message within you. Which makes you the messenger.

Which leads me to the question: How are you doing with the Message? Is the world you live in changed because of Immanuel - God with us - the Message that lives inside of you?

It is true that sin and corruption are maybe as bad as they ever have been. But this is why God has sent you into this dark world, that you might be the light - His light.

Uncertainty is rampant in the world. We don't know what will happen with the economy. We don't know what will have in Afghanistan. But WE who have Immanuel - God with us - have THE MESSAGE of faith, of certainty that God has not abandoned us.

Christmas for many people is a difficult time of year. A season when the best times are no longer the times of the future, but the times of the past.

For many the idea of gift giving is only a crass, selfish, business promotion - the December month that saves the year.

But we who have The Message living within us - Immanuel, God With Us - we know the greatest gift of all. And, it seems to me, God would not be content with us keeping this great gift only to ourselves...

So I ask again, How are you doing with the Message? Is the world you live in changed because of Immanuel - God with us?

OPPORTUNITY: Brighten A Christmas. As a church family we want to make our world different because of Immanuel. Money is already given. Presents already bought. Could you be the face that goes with the present that says "Immanuel - God is with us" to a family that really needs to hear it?