THE ANGELS SPEAK

by Galen R. Hackman

CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

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The Angels Speak

A Collection of Readings for the Advent Wreath

by Galen R. Hackman

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PRODUCTION NOTES

There is a significant amount of angel activity around the first advent of our Lord. This series takes each of the angelic appearances and uses them to lift up the themes of the Advent season. Here are some suggestions for the effective use of this series.

READERS

Select five readers, one for each of the Sundays and Christmas Eve. Additional readers may be included (i.e., two total for each Sunday) if you prefer. You might want to select persons new to the church during the past year, senior citizens, children, or newly married couples. The choice is yours, but it is best if you choose persons who will read clearly. Share the script with them far enough in advance so that they can review it and read it with confidence. On her given Sunday, each reader should be ready to take her place quickly.

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

This series assumes you are using an Advent wreath with five candles: four in the outer ring for each of the Sundays of Advent, and one in the center for Christmas Eve. You may want the readers to light the candle(s) before they begin reading or after they are finished with the reading. An alteration that works well if you have more than one reader for each week is to have one person reading and the other person lighting the candle(s) at the appropriate spot in the reading. Prior to the start of each Sunday's service, make sure there are matches beside the Advent wreath.

WORSHIP LEADER

The weekly scripts are designed so that the worship leader sets the stage for each reading by sharing a few lines by way of introduction. (The other option would be to have the readers say both the introduction and the reading for the day.) The introductions are important, for they tie the themes together.

PASTOR

The themes and corresponding biblical texts work well for sermon topics, if you are not following the lectionary. First, develop the persons to whom the angel appeared — who they

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were and what fears and struggles may have been in the situation they faced. Then consider the words spoken by the angel, words intended to speak to the specific need of the person to whom the angel was appearing. Ask yourself as you prepare, "What word of comfort, encouragement, or prophecy did this word bring, and what difference did it make in the person's life then, and on into the person's future?" Finally, apply the Word to our lives as Believers in this Advent season. How does God's promise through the angel come to us today? What difference does it make in our lives as we walk by faith?

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ANGELS
TRIVIA AND MINISTRY

These questions and answers may be reprinted in your bulletins. Put the first question in one week. The next week, reprint the first question and include the answer. Also include the second question. Reprint all the questions and answers in this way. Delaying the answers by a week will pique the curiosity of your congregation and may even prompt some to do a bit of angel research on their own. There is enough information for five Sundays.

Schedule for bulletin angel trivia:

Week 1: First question

Week 2: First question plus answer; second question

Week 3: Second question plus answer; third question

Week 4: Third question plus answer; fourth question

Week 5: Fourth question plus answer

Angel Trivia: How many angels are named in the Bible? Look for the answer in next week's bulletin.

Angel Trivia answer: Though there are thousands of angels mentioned in the Bible, only three of them are named. They are: Gabriel (Daniel 8:16, Luke 1:19, 26-38), Michael (Daniel 10:21, 12:1, Jude 9), and Abaddon (Revelation 9:11). Lucifer is named as a fallen angel (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Angel Trivia: If an angel appeared to you, what are the first words you would most likely hear the angel say?

Angel Trivia answer: In Scripture, angels are recorded as bringing many different messages to people. However, the most common words spoken by them, and often the first ones spoken, are the words "Do not fear." (Here are some of the references: Gen. 21:17; Jud. 6:23; 2 Kings 1:15; Matt. 1:20, 28:5; Luke 1:13, 30, 2:10; Acts 27: 24.)

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Angel Trivia: Do angels have wings and halos?

Angel Trivia answer: There are different kinds of angelic beings. The cherubim are winged and serve in roles of guarding and protecting (see Genesis 3:24, Exodus 25:10-22). The seraphim are also winged and serve before the throne of God, praising him continually (see Isaiah 6:1-6). However, neither of these beings are the ones that usually appear to men and women. The angels who make appearances to humans apparently are not winged, nor do they have halos. We know this, because frequently when an angel appears to a person, he is not recognized as an angel.

Angel Trivia: Is it ever recorded in the Bible that angels sing, and what gender are angels?

Angel Trivia answer: Sing? No, it is never recorded anywhere in the Bible that angels sing. The heavenly host on the hillside near Bethlehem spoke their blessing to the shepherds (Luke 2:13-14). The singing in heaven, as recorded in Revelation 14:3 and 15:3, is done by redeemed persons, not angels. (Here one must note that the NIV is in error in stating that angels sang in 5:9-12. The Greek word translated "sing" or "sang" is the normal word for speaking — *lego* — not the word for singing — *aido*.)

Gender? Well, angels are sexless, without any specific gender (Matthew 22:30). However, when an angel appears on earth and wants to remain "anonymous," the angel always, in Scripture at least, appears in the form of a man.

Some additional trivia and misconceptions:

We do not become angels. Angels are created beings, limited in number. We will go on to be redeemed saints, populating heaven in some supernatural form, but never angels.

There are no baby angels.

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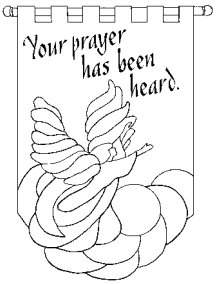

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THEME: Your prayer has been heard.
TEXT: Luke 1:5-25
CHARACTERS EMPHASIZED: Zechariah and Elizabeth

(The banner with the words "Your prayer has been heard" is hanging in place. The WORSHIP LEADER is behind the pulpit. The READER stands behind the Advent wreath.)

WORSHIP LEADER: *(Introduction)* **Today the world seems to have an increased interest in angels. As Christians, we know that angels are supernatural beings who are not confined to earth as we are. They are able to travel back and forth from God to earth for the purpose of being God's messengers.**

The Bible contains many accounts of angels. This is especially true in the events surrounding the Christmas story. This year during Advent, we will consider each of the times an angel appears in the Christmas story and will give attention to the message that angel brought, and the difference it made in people's lives.

READER: The Old Testament ends with the promise that before the Messiah would come, Elijah, the great prophet, would return and begin to turn people's hearts to God. This prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who was by earthly standards a relative of Jesus.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were godly people. Zechariah was a priest who served in the holy temple. In many ways, they had a long and good life. However, they had no children, and Zechariah and Elizabeth were still praying, as they had for many years, that God would graciously grant them a son.

One day, as Zechariah was doing his duties in the temple, an angel appeared to him, bringing a message

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from God. The angel said, "Your prayer has been heard." Sure enough, Elizabeth conceived and gave birth to a son, John the Baptist. John was just six months older than Jesus, and he was chosen by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

Today, we light this first Advent candle in memory of the angel's words to Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard." *(READER lights one candle.)* **May this candle also remind us that God is listening and that he hears our prayers, too.**

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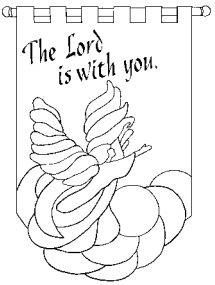

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THEME: The Lord is with you.
TEXT: Luke 1:26-38
CHARACTER EMPHASIZED: Mary

(The banner with the words "The Lord is with you" is hanging in place. The WORSHIP LEADER is behind the pulpit. The READER stands behind the Advent wreath.)

WORSHIP LEADER: *(Introduction)* **Angels are fascinating creatures. They capture our imagination and spark our interest in spiritual and supernatural things. Angels abound in Scripture and, we believe, are present with us every day, especially when we gather to worship, as we are this morning.**

Our Advent theme this year is "The Angels Speak." Last week we noticed the words spoken to Zechariah when the angel announced that his long-offered prayer for a son had been heard. Six months later, the angel Gabriel came to another person, also bringing news of an unexpected pregnancy.

READER: Mary was very young. Yet, as was the custom of the time, it was arranged that she should marry Joseph. He was a good man, though he was somewhat older than Mary. Both were godly persons and devout in their Jewish faith.

To Mary's great surprise, an angel appeared to her one day and said, "The Lord is with you." The angel went on to explain that Mary would conceive in a miraculous manner and that her Son would be the Messiah.

Naturally, Mary was shocked and concerned. How could this be? She was young, unmarried, and felt unworthy to bear the child who would one day sit on the throne of the great King David. As Mary pondered these things over the next nine months, and then through the

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years of Jesus' childhood and later his ministry, the angel's words, "The Lord is with you," must have continued to give her a deep sense of joy and peace.

Today we light two Advent candles — one remembering the words to Zechariah, *(READER lights a candle.)* **and another one recalling these words to Mary — "The Lord is with you."** *(READER lights another candle.)* **May this candle also remind us that the Lord is with us.**

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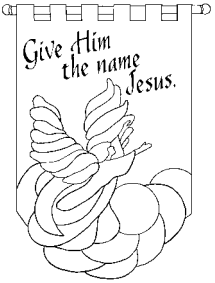

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THEME: Give him the name Jesus
TEXT: Matthew 1:18-25
CHARACTER EMPHASIZED: Joseph

(The banner with the words "Give him the name Jesus" is hanging in place. The WORSHIP LEADER is behind the pulpit. The READER stands behind the Advent wreath.)

WORSHIP LEADER: *(Introduction)* **Imagine standing in the presence of an angel. What an awesome experience! No wonder the most frequent words from an angel's mouth to a human are, "Do not be afraid."**

Our Advent theme this year is "The Angels Speak." During the past two weeks we considered the messages given by angels to Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard," and to Mary, "The Lord is with you." Today we turn our attention to Joseph, Mary's soon-to-be husband.

READER: It was while Joseph was sleeping that an angel appeared to him. Joseph must have been deeply stressed. He had just discovered that Mary, his fiance, was pregnant, and he knew that he had nothing to do with it.

While he was asleep, an angel came to Joseph to reassure him. The angel explained Mary's unique situation and told Joseph to go through with his plans to marry her.

Furthermore, the angel told Joseph the same thing he had told Mary, "Give him the name Jesus." The angel went on to explain that Jesus' birth would be the direct fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah had said, "The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

When Joseph awoke from his dream, he did exactly as the angel had instructed. He married Mary and when the baby was born, he gave him the name Jesus. Since then, the name — Jesus — has brought deliverance to all who

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call upon the Lord.

Today we light three Advent candles representing three appearances of angels preceding the birth of Jesus. *(READER lights three candles.)* **And we remember the words to Joseph, "Give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21)**.**

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THEME: Good news of great joy
TEXT: Luke 2:1-12
CHARACTERS EMPHASIZED: Shepherds
(Appearance by a lone angel)

(The banner with the words "Good news of great joy" is hanging in place. The WORSHIP LEADER is behind the pulpit. The READER stands behind the Advent wreath.)

WORSHIP LEADER: *(Introduction)* **Our Advent theme this year is "The Angels Speak." During the four Sundays of Advent, we are considering the various times angels appear in the Christmas story. Today we consider an appearance to an unlikely group of persons — the shepherds. Shepherds were often thought of as the lower class of society. Because angels appeared to them, we know that Jesus was born for all persons, regardless of their status.**

READER: It was a very common sight — shepherds on the hillside watching over their flocks of sheep and goats as the evening stars grew bright. The outline of Bethlehem could be seen to the east, silhouetted against the indigo sky. It may have been somewhat chilly in the evening breeze — quiet except for the occasional bleating of the sheep. All in all, a very normal night.

Suddenly, all appearance of normality vanished. The night air became electrified as an angel stood on the hillside in the midst of the shepherds. Naturally, they were scared to death.

When the angel spoke, he made the most awesome announcement. He said, "I bring you good news of great joy." He went on to explain that the long-awaited Messiah had come. He came as a newborn baby, in the nearby town of Bethlehem. The angels encouraged the

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shepherds to go and greet the newborn King. To ensure that they would find the right baby, they were given a sign, "You will fing the baby lying in a manger."

The shepherds went, found the baby, and praised God. This certainly was good news of great joy. Good news because Jesus brought the gospel of salvation, and great joy because he invites all of us to participate in this salvation.

Today, we light four Advent candles remembering the appearance of angels to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. *(READER lights four candles.)* **We light these candles also in thanksgiving for the good news of great joy.**

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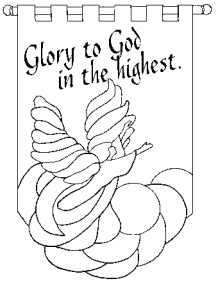

CHRISTMAS EVE

THEME: Glory to God in the highest
TEXT: Luke 2:13-20
CHARACTERS EMPHASIZED: Shepherds
(Appearance by a multitude of angels)

(The banner with the words "Glory to God in the highest" is hanging in place. The WORSHIP LEADER is behind the pulpit. The READER stands behind the Advent wreath.)

WORSHIP LEADER: *(Introduction)* **Our Advent theme this year is "The Angels Speak." There are more appearances of angels during the events surrounding the birth of Jesus than during the remainder of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. Surely this suggests the importance of this event.**

Every week we noticed what each of the angels said and considered the difference their words made in the lives of those hearing them. Tonight we look again to the shepherds on the hillside east of Bethlehem.

READER: When the lone, solitary angel finished speaking to the shepherds, there appeared in the sky a host of angels. These angels shouted in unison, "Glory to God in the highest."

Tonight we gather to praise and thank God for the wonderful gift of his Son, Jesus. We acknowledge that we did not deserve this wonderful gift of love and forgiveness. God gave Jesus to us out of the deep love he has for each of us. No matter how far we have strayed from God, he offers us forgiveness and hope, if we but turn from ourselves and seek his face.

As we light the Advent wreath tonight, we begin by lighting each of the candles we lit during the four Sundays of Advent. *(READER lights one candle.)* **One candle reminds us of the words spoken to Zechariah,**

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"Your prayer has been heard." *(READER lights another candle.)* **The second candle calls to our minds the angel's encouragement to Mary, "The Lord is with you."** *(READER lights another candle.)* **The third candle suggests to us the appearance of the angel to Joseph with the instruction, "Give him the name Jesus."** *(READER lights another candle.)* **The fourth candle represents the announcement to the shepherds of "Good news of great joy."**

Finally tonight we light the center candle *(READER lights center candle.)* **This is the Christ Child candle, and it represents the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It is a candle of praise and celebration. Tonight we join the angelic chorus as we say with them, "Glory to God in the highest."**

NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin of each page of dialogue are for the convenience of the director. With these, he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.

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BANNER INSTRUCTIONS

Although five banners may be used for this presentation (one for each of the four weeks of Advent and Christmas Eve), the easiest solution is to make just one banner. Velcro-backed letters may be changed each week to carry out the new theme.

SUPPLY LIST:

1. Craft glue for affixing felt pieces to banner.

2. Popsicle sticks for smoothing and spreading the glue.

3. A roll of butcher or craft paper and masking tape.

4. Five copier transparencies (or a print shop or office supply store can copy the transparencies for you).

5. Copy machine, overhead projector, and sewing machine (optional)

6. Pencils, straight pins, and scissors for pattern cutting and placement.

7. One roll of Velcro hooks and Velcro glue (available at fabric stores).

8. Felt. The suggested colors are navy blue, dark blue, medium blue, light blue, pink, light pink, purple, white, gold or yellow gold (metallic material is nice), brown, and peach, with exact amounts dependent on how you size the pattern. It may be helpful to take the pattern pieces to the fabric store so you can accurately gauge how much fabric you will need.

9. A drapery rod or dowel for hanging, with the length dependent on the size of the banner (but probably no longer than 36").

HOW TO MAKE THE BANNER PATTERN:

1. Use the construction diagrams on pages 15-19 and make copies onto transparencies.

2. Tape a length of butcher or craft paper to a wall.

3. Using an overhead projector, beam the banner image onto

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