

The Angels Announced

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[0 : 00] Do you need something supernatural in your life? A supernatural intervention, if you like. Some of you might know Francis Schaeffer.

He was a great Christian thinker of the 20th century, a great evangelist. He was often invited to speak on university campuses around the world to present the Christian message. And I heard once from a friend of mine that whenever he would speak, if he had a week of talks or something like that, he would always try to mention angels in the very first talk. He would always try to mention angels. Which at first might sound a little bit strange. I remember my friend saying that at first he thought it was a little bit weird. And it sounded like it might turn off our kind of educated scientific age. But then he discovered that that's exactly what Schaeffer was kind of trying to do.

[1 : 04] Trying to provoke or reveal something. He wanted people to know that Christianity is supernatural. Biology, chemistry, physics.

These are the natural sciences. But when it comes to Christianity, we are talking about something above and beyond nature. We are talking about spiritual things.

The supernatural realm. Of course, we are talking about some very natural observable things too, like history and geography and archaeology. We have got eyewitness testimonies which are very important to us.

Christianity is grounded in certain historical facts and events. And it's good to confirm that these things really happened. That they're not just fairy tales. And Christianity intersects with philosophy and ethics as well.

There are a bunch of ideas inherent in the Christian faith that will make a huge difference to how you think and how you live and how we construct a society. And this is, of course, a subject of great contention at the moment in the West.

[2 : 08] As we grapple with our Christian history, many people are asking the question, have Christian ideas shaped the West for good or for ill? Is Christianity an oppressive, colonial sort of philosophy designed to keep old, white, male, heterosexual people in power?

Or has it been a force for good? A force for liberation, compassion, prosperity, etc. Schools, hospitals, charities. You know, it's really a question about is Christianity full of good ideas or bad ideas or perhaps a mix of both?

And that's an important question as well. And it's helpful to have some answers to our detractors, isn't it? But again, what Schaeffer is saying, or, you know, I don't want to put words in his mouth, but what he would say to this, I suppose, is that fundamentally Christianity claims to be much more than just ideas.

Whether good or bad. Up for evaluation. Much more than just human ideas. You know, what we have in the Bible is God's ideas. We have something here in this book that has come from outside of our world altogether.

The Bible is a book of revelation from God to us. Not merely a book of our own reflections or guesses or speculations. And of course, this is why angels is such a helpful thing to bring up, do you see?

[3 : 34] Because the very mention of angels immediately takes us to the heart of the matter. It forces us to reckon with the fact that what we're dealing with here is something transcendent.

Something supernatural. Is this a message that is broken into our world from God? Or is it something we can cast aside? And there's really nothing that I think gets to the heart of that issue better than the talk of angels.

We're not merely talking about good or bad ideas here. Interesting philosophies. We're not just talking about morality. You know, a better way of living your life. Try the Christian way. You know, we've got some really wise and good suggestions. We're not just talking about the normal events of human history. We do, you know, sometimes have to study the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians together, don't we?

But we're not just talking about the normal events of human history. Who conquered who or how this movement started and spread and so on. Now, as soon as we mention angels, hopefully everyone starts to see that we're talking at an entirely different level here.

[4 : 44] So, the whole idea of angels fundamentally clashes with a kind of narrow-minded scientism, materialism, that is so prevalent in our age.

Which, of course, brings us to the Bible reading from Luke's Gospel. Because in Luke chapter 1, verse 26, Luke tells us that in the sixth month, that is in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, and she was one of Mary's relatives, pregnant with John the Baptist, in the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. In other words, what Luke wants us to know, first of all here, is that Mary was visited by a messenger from God.

That Mary was visited by a supernatural being. And immediately, you see, that tells us something about the character of what's happening here. About the claims being made, and about the fundamental nature of the claims at the heart of the Christian faith.

Luke is not just telling us here, you know, a story about an eminent philosopher, who came up with some extraordinary ideas about loving your neighbor, or human dignity, or freedom of speech, or who came up with a certain view of sexual ethics that we now think is sort of outdated and outmoded.

[6 : 16] No, we're not reading Plato here, or Aristotle writing about Plato. This is something far more profound than that. Luke is writing from eyewitness evidence, of course, and he goes to great lengths to press that home throughout the book, but Luke is writing about the intervention of God into our world, and about how on one particular day, God sent an angel.

When the angel came to Mary, we're in verse 28, when the angel came to her, he said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. The key word is favour. Did you notice that? It's repeated twice here in this little section.

And the original Greek word behind that has to do with the word grace. Grace. It's a word about God's kindness, about his generosity, his love, his favour. And Gabriel says, The Lord is with you. Again, in other words, he's not against you, Mary. He hasn't forgotten about you. He's not far away. He's here. He's with you. He's for you. You have found favour in his sight.

[7 : 37] Mary is greatly troubled in verse 29, in spite of this. And the angel says to her in verse 30, Do not be afraid. I wonder if you can understand that kind of reaction, though, to meeting a messenger from God.

It's a fairly common response in the Bible whenever angels do show up, which of course is very rare. But whenever they do show up, often the first thing they have to say before they're allowed to get to their message is, Do not be afraid.

Like aliens, I come in peace. I mean, I take it, it's a bit like the experience of getting caught. And our family has been reading an Advent devotional book at the dinner table over the last few weeks.

It's been really good. This is not an advert for it, but it's a really nice book. It's by Chase Kuhn. It's called Waiting for Christ. If you missed it this year, I'd get it next year. This is turning into an advert for it, isn't it?

Anyway. And Chase is talking about a similar incident. He's not talking about this passage. But he uses this illustration, which I just thought was really helpful, and applies to our passage as well.

[8 : 42] I think it's up here. Perhaps the closest thing... So it's difficult to come up with a modern analogy, he says, to this sort of encounter. Perhaps the closest thing is an encounter with a police officer.

Something stirs in the conscience any time a police officer is nearby. I thought that was just me. Imagine being stopped by an officer in your car. Your heart races, and you consider all the things

you could have been doing wrong.

Slightly speeding, failing to indicate, not coming to a complete stop. As the officer approaches your window, your adrenaline is rushing, guilt is setting in, and there is genuine fear.

But then the officer speaks. I saw your tire was low on your left side, and wanted to tell you so you could stay safe. The officer's message was not, in fact, one of condemnation, but in a sense of salvation.

Of course, this is nowhere near the weightiness of the presence of the Lord, or the significance of the message of peace, proclaimed by the angel. But it helps us to imagine the sense of fear and relief. I think that's a good illustration.

[9 : 50] And funnily enough, that exact thing almost exactly happened to me. I just think it was my tail light that the police officer was trying to help me with. Anyway, that's why it rings true.

And I really appreciate the illustration, and I really think the book is wonderful. But let me just mention one thing, one caveat or slight correction, or let's just go with this illustration for a while. If I could just build on it. Because, of course, what if, as the officer approaches, we have been doing the wrong thing? See, there are times in my life, I'm sure there are times in yours, when I'd hate to get caught doing what I'm doing.

I'm not talking about the silly things either. You know, when my wife walks in and catches me eating more ice cream out of the freezer, or I just seem to have got into the habit of scooping Nutella out of the jar again. Anyway, I do that rather brazenly.

You know, I'm not talking about those silly things. I'm talking about all the genuinely ugly things that I think and say and do in the moments in my life that I'm really ashamed of. Not to mention the moments when I know I ought to be doing something and I'm not doing anything.

[11 : 00] I wouldn't want a visit from the Lord. Or from an angel in the middle of one of our fights. Or when I've been giving my wife the cold shoulder for most of the day.

Or complaining and whinging. You know, I'd want a visit from an angel just straight after my quiet time perhaps. You know, when I'm feeling very self-righteous or something.

Like I'm a very pious person. But I wouldn't want a visit from an angel in the middle of some of those movies I allow myself to watch. It would be more than startling.

I think it would be terrifying. You know, is this an Ananias and Sapphira moment? Is this a Herod moment? And of course, I'm not suggesting that Mary was really caught in the act of doing something particularly heinous.

We don't know what she was doing. The point is though that she was a sinner. Just like you and me. And a visit from an angel would have been very frightening.

[12 : 00] How the sense of uncleanness would cut you to the heart. Like Isaiah famously when he gets that vision of a holy, holy, holy God. Do you remember? He immediately cries out in horror.

Woe is me. For I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Or again in Luke chapter 5.

Just a few chapters on from here. After Jesus performs one of his great miracles. And Peter captures a glimpse of his glory as it were. Well, Luke tells us Peter fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me.

For I am a sinful man, O Lord. And Jesus had to say to him, Do not be afraid. Well, likewise here, Mary is afraid.

It is actually the right and good natural response to the holiness of God. Sin always blinds us to our sinfulness. Sin always blinds us to our sinfulness. But here, Mary's fear at least shows that she has been given some sense of self-awareness.

[13 : 08] This is not a safe situation. But thankfully God, And if you can imagine the police officer again, Kind of pulling you over.

And you are guilty. You know you are. But even then, God did not Send his angel, His messenger, With a message of terror.

Or to bring a message of judgment To her. I saw that you were speeding. Did you see that red light? You know, how dare you On my planet. No, here the angel Doesn't berate her.

He reiterates Twice That God's message is essentially One of favour, Grace. Do not be afraid. Don't be afraid. It's okay.

I know what you've been doing. But don't be afraid. Here is going to be good news of great joy. That is the surprising message of Christmas, isn't it?

[14 : 08] Do not be afraid. When God comes to visit. It's a message that perhaps some of us are too familiar with. Or too deluded about our own self-righteousness.

Think that all our religiosity has somehow earned us God's favour. But we mustn't let ourselves forget this surprising, Wonderful message at Christmas. Wow. How is it that God would come Showing us grace And favour.

And all we deserve is condemnation. So thirdly, this message of favour Is about a son of Mary Who will also be The son of God.

Mary's son will be God's Son. I mentioned last week Always look out for that word Behold. It's like a drum roll. It's only there to capture our attention. So in verse 31 The angel said And behold You will conceive in your womb And bear a son And you shall call his name Jesus He will be great And will be called The son of the most high And the Lord God Will give to him The throne of his father David And he will reign Over the house of Jacob Forever And of his kingdom There will be no end So here is the real heart Of the angel's announcement Jesus is coming And this of course Is what we're celebrating Tomorrow The arrival of our Lord Jesus The name Jesus Is obviously pretty important Mary is not given a choice About what she is To name her baby You shall call his name Jesus Jesus means God saves Or Yahweh is salvation Or he is our saviour Because as Matthew's gospel Puts it In his grace

God sent Jesus To save his people From their sins But you'll notice In this passage Jesus will be called By other names as well Most importantly He will be called The son of the most high Or in verse 35 Which we'll come to in a moment He will be called The son of God Now the angel is not saying That Jesus is God Here Or that Mary's son Will be God Just to be clear That's true of course And the New Testament Is very clear on that elsewhere In fact we'll see One prime example of that Tomorrow If you come again But here I really think We'll miss the point Of this passage If we kind of Read that in To these verses Now at this point What the angel means Basically Is that Jesus Will be God's Anointed King Jesus will be God's delegate On earth His representative ruler He will be [16 : 54] God's heir Right And because God Owns the whole universe Jesus will be The heir of the whole universe The heir of the whole world God will give All creation To Jesus To his son That's what Sonship language Is about And it's often used In the Bible With reference To just normal Humans It's sort of The definition Of what a human is That we're in the image Of God Unlike all the other creatures We are God's sons God's heirs Made to rule over His world So it's used With reference To Adam In the beginning Or the whole nation Of Israel At various times But most importantly I think for our purposes This morning This is what King David Was promised In 2 Samuel chapter 7 So about a thousand years Before Christ King David Was ruling Over the nation Of Israel And God said to him When your days Are fulfilled And you lie down With your fathers I will raise up

Your offspring After you Who shall come From your body And I will establish His kingdom He shall build A house for my name And I will establish The throne of his kingdom Forever I will be to him A father And he shall be To me A son Right now Again in the context God was talking about Not just Jesus But all the sons of David Who would ascend The throne of Israel He was talking about Solomon And Hezekiah And Josiah And so on But ultimately All these sons of God Failed to live up To their title Because of their sinfulness And their weaknesses All of those kings failed Even the best of them And David knew That one day A king would come From his line Who would reign forever He wrote about this king In Psalm 2 Which was our Old Testament Bible reading this morning So you might like

To turn back to it If you've still Got a Bible open there But I'm not Going to read through It all in detail I just want to give you A quick summary There are basically Four parts to it Four stanzas Four movements In part one The people of the earth Are all in rebellion Against God And his anointed king They don't want to live Under the rule of God Or his chosen king And that's basically The Bible's definition Of sin That attitude Of rebellion against God That is in all of us Then in part two How does God Respond to our rebellion?

Well initially He laughs In derision Because it's So puny That the cockroaches Have got together To wage war Against him Then in verse five His laughter Turns to wrath Righteous wrath And despite the clamor And rejection Of the nations God decides anyway To establish His king On Zion Right That is Jerusalem God's king Will not be established By popular vote Of course But by his choice Alone It's his world He will have it Ruled His way So then in part three We turn to hear From the king himself And let me read This bit for you The king says I will tell Of the decree The lord said to

me You are my son Today I have begotten You Ask of me And I will make The nations Your heritage And the ends Of the earth

Your possession You shall break Them with a rod Of iron And dash them In pieces Like a potter's Vessel So here of course Is where the Sonship language Comes to the fore Doesn't it You see the king God has said to him You are my son And not Just again Crucially to get Your doctrine right Or not To avoid reading It in here And not Eternally begotten We are not talking About the eternally Begotten son Are we Today You have begotten me Is what the son He is That is David is looking Forward to a certain Day On which His son Will become God's son Right One of his sons Will be installed As king As the representative Ruler He will be crowned And authorised As God's ruler It is not that One of his sons Will become divine That is not possible It is that One of his sons Will become

[21 : 31] God's delegate On earth His representative Ruler This king Will be God's heir That is the heir Of the whole world And so On the day God installs His king Again in Psalm 2 Notice that it will be A day of judgment That will be The day of judgment All the other kings And kingdoms of the earth Who have been living In rebellion against the Lord And against his anointed All the puny Palotters Of verses 1 to 3 Will be put in their place Smashed and broken As soon as the son Wants it to happen Ask of me So finally In verses 10 to 12 In the last part of the psalm The psalmist talks to us Through Sorry Talks us through The right response To the king What are we to do?

Repent Of course Turn away From your rebellion Honor the king And seek mercy From him And take refuge in him And you will find blessing Instead of judgment Now back to Luke's gospel then You see this is what The angel is announcing That after a thousand years Of waiting Mary's son Will be this man In the line of David The son of David But more importantly The son of the most high See verse 32 And the Lord God Will give to him The throne of his father David And he will reign Over the house of Jacob Forever And of his kingdom There will be no end So God will give All creation To Jesus No more squabbling Over Palestine No more squabbling Over any part Of this world Any portion This is the good news The news of great joy The news of God's Ultimate intervention Into our messed up world

One day he will come And save us From ourselves And from all that plagues us One day there will be One world order And it will not be Thankfully the Illuminati Or the Americans Or the Chinese Or the Russians It will not be established By the UN Or the EU No it will be established By God himself His king will reign Unrivaled The days of rebellion And God's patience And mercy With the rebellious Will be over Jesus will establish The everlasting days Of righteousness And love And joy And peace For all God's people In God's kingdom And of course As we saw last week It's not just For Jewish people For the sons of Jacob People like Mary But for Anyone From any nation Who lays down arms

And turns back To the Lord To take refuge In him So we're up to Point four Verse 34 Mary said to the angel How will this be Since I'm a virgin So we've seen God's messenger Bring news of God's Favor About the arrival Of God's son Now Mary is wondering About God's power How could anything Like this Possibly happen I am a virgin She says And the angel Answered her The Holy Spirit Will come upon you And the power Of the most high Will overshadow you Therefore the child To be born Will be called holy The son of God And behold Drum roll please Your relative Elizabeth In her old age Has also conceived A son And this is the Sixth month With her Who was called Barren For nothing Will be impossible With God Of course with man Lots of things Are impossible Not least The kinds of things That we read about In this chapter An old barren woman Granted a baby boy A virgin Conceiving a child Impossible Impossible Impossible With man But not With God Moreover It might seem Impossible That one day God will establish His king And end all the chaos But as I say That's what this chapter Is about It's about Supernatural Intervention Not something You could predict As it were There is something Happening here Something at the heart Of the Christian faith That is about God doing things We can't do It's about God coming down To rescue us It's about God granting Life and bringing Hope Into seemingly Hopeless and Lifeless situations And it's about God establishing His king Once and for all To do what All the politicians And committees

[26 : 19] And inspirational Leaders have Never been able To do Establish a kingdom Of lasting peace And joy Forever And Mary said Behold I am The servant Of the Lord Let it be to me According to your word And the angel Departed from her So in the end Mary is the perfect Example of a woman Of faith Humble She calls herself The Lord's servant She trusts his word Nothing is

impossible With God She knows that's true And the God Who flung stars Into space And caused the earth To bring forth All manner of fruit And living creatures Why wouldn't Mary Believe that he can Bring life Into her womb And she has the evidence Of her cousin Elizabeth If God can bring life To a barren old woman Surely he can do so For a virgin So Mary believes It's the only Sensible conclusion I would think To the meeting Of an angel But it's time

To wrap up So let me close By returning to that Question we began with This Christmas Do you need A supernatural Intervention In your life Do you need Something supernatural And I'm not just Talking about A once off Exciting experience To break up The drudgery You know like Everyone gets a visit From an angel This Christmas No that's not Really what God Is offering But what God Is offering us Is something Far better than that During the time Of Advent Dave's already Mentioned this Or alluded to it Christians traditionally Celebrate not one Not two But three Interventions of God Into our world And into our lives Three comings Of Jesus This morning We have been reading About Jesus' first coming That's the first one Announced by the angel Gabriel The message of Christmas Is a message of God's Gracious intervention

It's a message Of God's favour It's a message About God's son The king and heir Of the whole universe And it's a message About God's power God's power To do the impossible And tomorrow We're going to focus In particular On Jesus Or what's usually called Jesus' second coming Another great moment Of supernatural intervention When the whole story Will be complete As it were God will fully And finally establish The new world The new kingdom In place of the old And corrupt one But this morning I just want to Briefly talk to you About the third coming Of Jesus That Christians often Celebrate at Advent And that is the coming Of Jesus Into our lives Between his first And what's often called His second coming Perhaps you've noticed It in some of our carols This Christmas season I think as soon as I finish We're going to sing This one together Am I right about that?

A little town Of Bethlehem We sang it last week And I was struck By this third verse How silently How silently The wondrous gift Is given So God imparts To human hearts The blessings Of his heaven No ear May hear His coming But in this world Of sin Where meek souls Will receive him still The dear Christ Enters in Right this is what Becoming a Christian is And I don't Want to make it sound Too cliched And sentimental I know there's something Lovely about that At Christmas The language is a bit Cliched and sentimental But the substance Is real and important Christmas is an opportunity For meek souls That is it's an opportunity To humble yourself For meek souls To invite Jesus

Into their hearts My friends If you're not yet A Christian Let me encourage you To do this Jesus has come And he is coming again But even now You can invite him Into your heart You can ask him To supernaturally Intervene in your life No matter where You're at To save you From your sins To give you New birth I remember When the Lord Did this for me I'm not a very I was brought up In England I try not to be Very expressive If ever I show emotion I just try to Bottle it That's my problem But as I was Writing this I'll have you know I was just Weeping and weeping In my study And I love What Jesus did For me here I remember it

[31 : 24] You know Like it was yesterday When I first started To realise That my life Was a mess That there were So many hideous Aspects to my character And my behaviour That I wanted To be free from I'm just Too humiliated To mention them all You know But I was such A deceptive Deplicitous Lustful Angry Young man And then In God's grace He opened my eyes And he showed me That I needed him And I didn't want To be me anymore And he showed me That he could Take hold of my life In fact Kill off my old life And give me A whole new life And still I'm not yet What I ought to be The Lord hasn't Finished his work In me yet But I'm so thankful That he saved me From what I was That he's taking me Towards this glorious Eternal future And he can intervene

In your life too If you ask him Whether that be For the first time You've never put Your trust in Jesus Before You can do it Today Silently Silently He can enter in Or if your love For him Has grown cold And you know That you need him To turn around Your Christian walk You can ask him Again Today To intervene To make you More like Him Let's pray Let's pray Almighty God Thank you for your Grace and mercy To us Thank you for Sending the Lord Jesus to save us And we are so Excited that he is Coming back again To reign over us Forever And we do pray Father That in the meantime By the power Of Jesus Death and resurrection

That you might Supernaturally Intervene in our Lives We desperately Pray Father For those who Don't yet know you Especially for those Among us here That you might Mercifully reveal Yourself to

them Open up their eyes Show them their Need for Jesus And the forgiveness And the new life He brings And for those of us Who do know you Father We still pray That you would Change us From who we are Into the likeness Of Christ Give us a holy Discontent with the Sin in our lives That still lingers Free us From its vicious Grip By your truth We cannot rid Ourselves of it We need your Power and might For our flesh Is weak Have mercy upon us For we ask These things In Jesus name Amen