

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood House
351 E. 74th Street
New York, NY 10021-3701
(212) 288-6743; greetings@janhusorg
www.janhus.org

The Stories of Christmas (Sermon Notes)
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I went to the commentaries this morning, as I was finishing up thoughts for today. In talking about the Scripture reading from Matthew, the scholar began with the following:

Within the thematic structure of [of]...chapter 1 [Matthew] presents Jesus as the royal son of David and Son of God, whose advent immediately initiates the conflict of kingdoms developed in chapter 2. Even as a baby, the new king does not retaliate, but flees, finding safety among the Gentiles of Egypt. When he returns to the “land of Israel,” he can no longer live in his own city, but becomes an exile in his own land, making a new home in “Galilee of the Gentiles.”

Like all else in the Gospel narrative, every story is seen and interpreted from the narrator’s post-Easter perspective so that the “infancy story” is an expression of the meaning of the whole Christ-event.

Post-Easter. That means that these narratives, all of them, were written after the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, or Yeshua, as he was also called. It makes sense that would be so, right? There was no one there like some reality TV film crew, recording the supernova or comet or conjunction of the two. No one wrote down the words of the angel or interviewed Gabriel to find out what his thoughts were or weren’t at the time. Buechner makes us think, but he wasn’t there. Matthew makes us think, but he wasn’t there.

So where does that leave us? At best, we have a glimpse into the socio-economic conditions of the first century in Palestine. Think of how little we fully understand Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran today with all our advanced and sophisticated methods of communication, observation, and diplomacy. Imagine how difficult it is to look back to a time 2000 years ago, when all our eyes can see are shards of information, none of it first-hand, all of it before any standardized printing, and it was at the Muratorian Council in around 170 A.D. that the group of books of the bible that we read today “the canon” began to take form. Which books would be in the canon or not was a discussion that would continue for hundreds of years.

So, does that mean there were no angels?

It means that there is something else going on here. It means that we need a common denominator; we need something that transcends the millennia between us and those who raised Jesus, lived with him, grew with him...knew him, Joseph, Mary, his sisters and brothers – without video, photographs, or even extant sketches. But, what does this. What extends over time in such a way? How do we “touch” what happened so long ago, that we read this year for the 2000th plus time, since it happened?

Where are the angels to tell us that told them, in their times.

On many Wednesday evenings, I attend a prayer service at Ronald McDonald House, praying with parents, guardians, and their children who are afflicted with cancer. One of the chaplains' names is Rachel. Last week she told a story... Rachel's story....

In the end of the story, she said it was the Angel of God...

And you know, I believed her. I started thinking about the times I thought I had just been saved by my Guardian Angel – and believed it, and then it faded because I didn't know how to communicate with the angel, keep it going, you know.

But when Rachel said “the Angel of God” the other night, something stirred for me and it came together last night at the amazing concert that Christian, his partner in the Remarkable Theatre Brigade, and the performers gave the 40 or so of us gathered.

I had never seen Amahl and the Nigh Visitors, so I was captivated from start to finish. A simple and sublime story about love, faith, innocence of a child, fierce protection of a mother, and a love that the world longed for beyond wealth.

I was truly moved by the magnificent talent and beauty of the performance. And afterwards, we sang Christmas carols. Christian had them projected up in the chancel, and alongside me were his dad and young nephew. As we sand into the third or fourth carole on our way to Silent Night, I was suddenly overwhelmed – almost to tears, with a deep rising of all Jesus and Christmas and the stories, yes, the stories have meant to billions of people.

I tried to know what it was deep inside that suddenly was released. For me, as I write this and think about it, it was the presence of the Angel of God, of God, God...and it was the vastness of love which is God. Love for a world we so want to know, love for one another, we so wish we could express, love that we know is powerful beyond our imagination but sometimes just our of our reach...

For Rachel, she was touched by such Love, for Amahl and his mom, they were touched by such love, for Christian's dad, his nephew – and all of us gathered...it was here, still is. I needed the reminder.

For the last couple of weeks, I've been talking about Christmas as the 2000th time we've done this, why don't we have it right...

Today, still not sure of what happened all those years ago, still a little too suspicious, I am demanded again that looking for angels, looking for God, is and always will be a vision of the heart, fueled by Love, with the big "L."

Baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Angels, Wise Men (and Women) – let the stories flow over us, and let the love rise up for all.

Yes, to Angels and Merry Christmas to you all.