

Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2022
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We Have One Job

You would think I would have noticed it before, but my guess is that I have always been too busy doing, going, rushing, worrying, and preparing to see it. It's right there in the angels' song:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!¹

As a colleague points out, there is no *doing* here. Yes, the angels sing, but that's it. There are no verbs in their song. The lyrics are simple: "Glory. God. Heaven. Peace. Goodwill."² These are strong words, exclamations, but no verbs, no doing words at all. There is no insistence that my tree look just so, no demand that I cook the perfect thing for supper, no command to buy the ideal gift for everyone on my list, no requirement that I feel a certain way, no proclamation that I even believe a certain way or at all. There is not even a list of who exactly it is that God favors. One could argue that God's standards are not terribly strict since the astounding news of Jesus' birth comes first to shepherds, dodgy characters of little to no interest to the empire, grazing sheep under the cover of darkness on borrowed land. On that night so long ago, there is no expectation that anyone do anything other than hear the news, no expectation that anyone do anything other than receive the gift.

After the buzzing and churning and bustling in the weeks leading up to Christmas, Christmas Eve often feels a bit strange. Stores are closed. Streets are quiet. Little ones are—or

¹ Luke 2: 14, New Revised Standard Version, updated edition

² Mary Ann McKibben Dana citing *The New Interpreters Bible* in her paper for the Well 2015.

hopefully soon will be—tucked in their beds. Travelers will stop for the night. Wrapping, baking, assembling is done—or fingers crossed—will be soon. All is calm. All is bright. The world—or at least the world as I know it—comes to an abrupt halt. And if I’m honest, it feels strange.

An unexpected, uninvited full-stop came our way in March 2020, and it was scary and maddening and hard for most of us. This stop is different, of course; this pause is shorter, and the cause is one of joy and hope. And yet, we still—or I still—do not quite know what to do with not doing. But if I do not pause, if I do not stop my anxious scurrying, I risk missing the point of Christmas, because I risk not hearing the angels’ song.

I do not expect angels to show up in the same way as they did all those years ago, but when I stop and listen, I know that the Christmas angels still sing. On Thursday evening, I heard the angels’ song through different voices reading scripture as we lit candles on the Longest Night, and through one in particular as she read this passage from Luke, her voice overflowing with almost 92 years of fervent faith, hope, joy, wisdom, and wonder. Later that evening I heard the angels’ song in a video from a member named James in front of his Christmas tree in his wheelchair. He had been working and planning for weeks to figure out how to share a message of joy and hope with us and with the waiting world. The angels’ song came through the voice of elders late in the week who wanted to find a way to make space for our unhoused neighbors here on our campus as the temperatures plummeted. I have heard the angels’ song through others, too. In phone calls, visits, hugs, prayers, jokes, tears, notes, and whispers I have heard the angels’ song through people in down vests and Christmas sweaters with no wings that I could see. They share and show up, they go out of their way to make room for strangers and check in on neighbors, they laugh and cry and pray and doubt and love and hold hands, and in the midst of this discombobulated world through them I hear the angels’ song.

Before the angels appear on that first Christmas night, the shepherds are always moving, constantly busy protecting their flock, finding grass for grazing, keeping themselves warm, and dodging those who would hurry them away. On that one night, for that one moment, they have only one job: to stop, listen, and receive the Good News, the very best news, the news of our Savior's birth.

In this moment, right now, angels are singing: "Glory. God. Heaven. Peace. Goodwill." Soon there will be a call to go and tell, shortly followed by an invitation to come and follow. Tonight however, we have one job. Tonight, our one job is to pause and listen, to bask in the light of the star, to linger and wonder, to receive the gift, and to rest in the promise. To us is born a Savior, not because we did anything to make it happen, not because we somehow earned it, but because God so loved—and so loves—the world, this world. We have one job tonight, dear ones, one job, to "rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing."

Thanks be to God. Amen.