



Christmas Presents-Part 2

Serving Like the Angels

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I hope this Christmas you find yourself pondering the profound importance of this event that we celebrate every December 25th. I hope that you see beyond all the trappings to the deep and very important theological truths that this whole event is about. Right? I mean, namely that Jesus, that life, that one life, was the only life that could really qualify for God's approval. That means that that's the only hope for us, identifying with him, that we would ever have our lives have any kind of prospect of good beyond the grave. That there is a hope for us that God is going to see us in Christ and somehow attribute his righteousness to us. That we can think with confidence about our future because Christ has taken the penalty of our sin and lived our lives for us. I mean, those are some of the deep theological and unseen realities that stand behind this biblical narrative that we celebrate every December.

While that's important and I hope that you spend time this Christmas doing that, there's also something about pondering the historical events that took place that everyone could see. I mean, the events that everyone watched and as it unfolds in both Luke and Matthew we get a good picture of that scene in the first-century and there's a lot to learn from that. I mean, it's more on the surface. But there's something interesting that I want to do this morning and see those two worlds collide, the invisible world and the visible world. The facts historically of Christ's birth and then the deep theological meaning and how kind of those two go together and they conflate in a way in one singular text that deals with angelic beings. And that's a weird thing just to say that out loud in the 21st century. You're not thinking about angelic beings, I don't think, as you're driving down the I-5. I mean, there is a sense that that seems so detached and yet every nativity scene, I assume, that's represented in the room, in someone's front room or their table or their, you know, their coffee table or on Christmas cards. I mean, you're going to have that scene and one of the groups of characters are the angelic beings.

I want to think about that this morning by looking at Luke Chapter 2. I'm going to jump in the middle of that beginning in verse 8 and I want to think through who these people are. Right? I say the word "people" because they seem to have all the characteristics of personhood, they're interacting, they're talking, they think, they respond to the commands of God, these beings that we know of as angels. And it may seem so fringe as you go through your modern life and shop for presents and do your Christmas gatherings, but I want you to think about how ubiquitous they are in Scripture. I mean, there are over 400 references to angelic beings in the Bible. 400. That's huge. There are 214 in the Old Testament, 186 in the New Testament. 17 books of the Old Testament reference them, 17 books in the New Testament, amazingly enough, reference them. 34 out of the 66 books then, if you just do the math there real quick, over half of the books in the New Testament are going to talk in some way and reference angelic beings and angelic beings are not us. And yet in the story, I don't even have to read it yet, to get you thinking, yeah, that's a class of beings that, I mean, we should know something about. The Bible has a lot to say about it.

See, the Bible claims to be the revelation from God to man. Revelation, just that word, to uncover, to reveal, to expose things that would not otherwise be known. When it comes to this class of beings we wouldn't know anything about them. We could guess, we could think, we could imagine, maybe there are 18 different kinds of beings out there. But the Bible speaks of this one other group of beings. That's what I want to talk about from this particular text. And I think even before we get there, now this is unusual that I'm going to do this, particularly because you're thinking it's going to

be a real long sermon if you do what you're about to say, but let me give you seven quick things about angels before we even look at this text. Maybe ten.

Number one, before we ever get to this text, let me tell you what the Bible has to say about angels. Number one, they're a direct creation of God. They are a direct creation of God. By that I mean they're in the same category that we are. They're not parallel to God. It's not like God is one of them. No. God is in a class all by himself and he creates directly these spiritual beings. And I guess that's the second one, see they're going really quickly. Number two, they're spirit. They're spirit and I guess you want to put next to that, like us, but not ghosts. Let's put it that way. Right? Some people think ghosts are... they think of ghosts as, "Well, they're formerly living human beings who have been bifurcated from their bodies and now they're disembodied spirits and then they come back to haunt us and they're ghosts and those are angels and demons. That's not what the Bible teaches. Completely independent class of beings.

So you've got God directly creating them. So just like us they're created. Two categories, creator and created. They're created, directly created. If you want a verse on that? Psalm 148 talks about the angels and says he spoke the word, "He commanded and they were created." So they're created beings. They are spirit, and by that I mean they're invisible. Right? You can't see them. "Well, you can talk about a passage where people saw them." I know, we'll get to that in a second. But you cannot see them in their "native habitat," which is certainly a phrase that probably shouldn't be used in this context, but as they relate in their ontological existence (see, that's why I said natural habitat), they're not seen. You can't see them. They are "software," just like you are software but you happen to be enmeshed and encased in "hardware," in a body. The parts of you that we don't see are the parts of you that are "you." I mean that is the real you. Right? The "you" that thinks, the "you" that feels, the "you" that decides and is rational and makes decisions, volitional. All of that is what angels are, they just don't have the material aspect to them.

Number three, and I guess this should go without saying, they were created to glorify God, glorify God. That's a Bible word, but think about what that means - to glorify God. They were made so that they might make God look good, they might bring some kind of credit to God, that God may be seen as great, just like you, by the way, were created for that purpose. Created to make God seem great, to look great, to give credit to the greatness of God, to reflect the greatness of God. And they were created for that purpose as it says in Colossians Chapter 1, "All things are created by him and for him, including visible and invisible beings." Right? And so these angels are not seen, and glorify God.

Number four, they were created before the physical world. Job 38. They were created before the physical world. Job 38 says before God starts to throw together photons and says, "Let there be light," and creates the fabric of the universe, space and time, there were these beings, made like us - intellect, emotion and will - that existed before that scene when God created the world. They were there, it says in Job 38, and they were celebrating, they were giving credit to God and the greatness of God when God made the physical fabric of the universe, including everything we read in Genesis 1 and 2.

Number 5, is that where we're at? He created them all holy, and by that I mean morally good. Good, holy, pure, righteous just like he did in the pattern of Genesis 1 in the material world. He creates things, he stands back and says that's good. That's what God does. He creates things that are good. So all these angelic beings who don't exist in material form, they exist as software, they were, before the physical world was created, to glorify God. They didn't all do that because of the nature

of angelic beings. Right? As angelic beings they were able to make some decisions, as you know, as Ezekiel 38 and Isaiah 14 say, to rebel against the good and the righteousness.

So they are into two classes now, the whole angelic class, I guess you could say two categories, that class of beings. We both got the good angels, as the New Testament calls them, elect angels, and then we got the evil angels, as Jesus said in Matthew. So, you've got elect and evil or another way to say it, the common use of our phrase when we talk about angels and we mean good ones, and then we think about demons or talk about demons and we mean bad ones, and the chief of the bad ones we call Satan. But all of that is one class, two categories, good and bad. Why? Because they are created initially holy but they chose, many of them, to rebel.

Here's the good news, number 6, they're accountable for their decisions just like you are. They will be held accountable for their decisions. Another word for that is they will be judged. There is a pending evaluation or a judgment coming, according to Matthew 25, when all the angelic beings will have to give an account. The demonic beings, as we call them, are these evil angels who have chosen to rebel, they will be judged and that judgment is coming. Just like we, dignified, being made in the image of God, will give an account for our lives and so all of them will as well.

Number seven. They are way more powerful than you. I mean that in the biggest possible way I can say the word "you," "me," all of us. To put it into words, and I know this is the passage about exalting how great it is that we're human beings and God made us in his image, Psalm 8, it is clear, it says he's made us, human beings, a little lower than the angels. Now I know we like to think about it's just a little, but it's lower. OK. So you're there. You're lower than angels. They are in every way in terms of who they are in their angelic personhood better than you, bigger than you, greater than you, to use words of space but they're not spatial. They are greater, they are just better than you, in terms of their power.

But let's talk about not just about power. Let's limit that in three ways. That's why I said 7 might turn into 10. Ready? Number 1, here's one thing that they share with you and that is that, and I got to be careful with this word because it's a mixing of metaphors, but here it comes. They're limited in space and of course they're not... Let me call it spatial, spatial limitations. That's what I wrote down. I had to peek at it. Spatial limitations. And that means simply this, let's do an experiment here, which doesn't work and it won't work, but if you're an angel it would work. You know anybody who lives on the East Coast? Do you know someone? Think about them. Ready? Close your eyes. Now go be with them and check in with them and see how they're doing. Right? Now you can grab your phone real quick and you can text them but you can't do that. Right? But if you could, if you were an angelic being, you could have a focalized, spatial presence, a focus and attentiveness, a perception, somewhere, but not everywhere at once. It was everywhere at once you would be omnipresent, you'd be omnipresent, and you're not omnipresent. There's only one who is omnipresent.

We can sit here and we could all break into groups or just individually pray, God could pay attention to all of you at one time. The angelic class is not that way. They have to choose to be able to be focalized in their perception. So they are spatially limited in that sense. They're not like God. In that sense they're like us only they are much better than us. Why? Because they can be whatever they want to be in terms of perception of whatever is going on, and we can only be in one place at one time. We've got to move ourselves there because we're entrapped and encased in physical limitations. So they have limitations but our limitations are much more than theirs in terms of perception. I call it spatial limitation, which is probably not a good way to put it but that's where I

ended up. Examples of that, by the way, Daniel 9 and 10, if you were taking notes and you care to take notes on this sermon-turned-lecture. Daniel 9 and 10. A good example of them having a spatial sense of focalized presence.

Number two as it relates to number 7. Letter "B" would be a better way to put it. If I were a logical preacher. Ready? Their authority is limited, their authority is limited. So they're limited in terms of their spatial perception but they're limited in terms of authority. Even the chief of the fallen angels, we see in Job Chapter 1, has to go and ask permission of the omnipotent one, "Can I cause havoc here in Job's life, in his health, in his family, in his income?" He has to subject himself to the king, the ultimate king, God. So they're limited in their authority. And then you look at what the Bible says in continuing to put them into categories and classifications. You know, powers and principalities and all of those kind of things. So we know that we don't have something, we can't look it up on Wikipedia, we don't know, you know, that a Private First Class ranks here and a gunnery sergeant ranks there. We can't do that but there are words enough in the Bible to say they are even limited and differentiated in terms of authority among themselves. So they have limited authority.

Thirdly under number seven, Letter "C" I guess if you're taking notes that way, they have limited knowledge. They learn. God doesn't learn. If they didn't learn and they knew everything at once they would be then omniscient, they're not omniscient nor are they omnipresent. They are limited in the fact, as created beings, God did not give them any of that power, they are limited in their knowledge. Matter of fact, the Bible says, here's an interesting thing, that they are fascinated with one thing that I know for sure, according to First Peter Chapter 1, and that is your redemption and my redemption. They're fascinated about that. They were even fascinated about when God the Father would send Christ, God the Son, to earth. They were longing to look into those things, they wanted to learn about them. Now, you've been learning for a long time. Hopefully you're a lifetime learner. They're lifetime learners and they don't get tired and they have more power, they have more energy, they have more everything, they're better than you. OK? So, get over it. And when you think about their learning, they've been learning for a real long time so there are a lot smarter than you for absolute certainty. Their theology is better, you know, even the demons had better theology than you. The point is we know that when it comes to their knowledge we're standing in awe of that, they're more powerful than us and yet they are limited in their knowledge.

Interesting that they have an interest in Christ's birth it says in First Peter 1. They're certainly a part of it. What a joy it must have been for them in terms of them seeing God's plan working out for the redemption of mankind to then be dispatched in the scene that I'm finally going to get to after the world's longest introduction. Let's get to the passage now Luke Chapter 2 verses 8 through 14. Can you look at that with me? Let's read this very familiar Christmas story and I want you to zero in, get your focus and your focalized perception on the angelic characters in this passage. Verse 8. We'll jump into the middle of it. "In the same region they were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night."

Oh, I want a sidebar right now really bad. I don't have time but let's do it anyway. You're going to have the know-it-all at your Christmas party who is going to say, "You know, Jesus wasn't even born in December. You know, we don't even know when he's born." They're going to say that. Maybe you've said that, maybe you're the one who is going to say that tomorrow. I just want to let you know you don't know what you're talking about. I'm not here to be emphatic about when Christ was born. But because they're watching their sheep out in the fields at night does not mean, "Oh, it was clearly in the summer because you know that's when they take their flocks out."

Not true. There are all kinds of Jewish history, as well as even rabbinic writings and historical evidence that that's not the case at all. Keeping your flocks out in the field at night certainly was something that took place throughout the winter, certainly in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem. All of this in terms of latitude is about the same as Southern California, about as far from the Mediterranean as the Inland Empire here to the Pacific Ocean. I'm just telling you, I went to Balboa to the boat parade this week and guess what? A lot of people had their little dogs out, keeping their dogs by night, walking through the streets. No one was like shivering saying, "I can't take my dog out tonight. It's freezing out here." OK? So having your... just to have your, what is it? "Watching over your flocks by night," and it says, "out in the fields," does not mean that Jesus wasn't born in December.

As a matter of fact, December 25th has been the date from the earliest times. And I mean this. Hippolytus is the first extant, existing record we have from an early church father in the 2nd century, which means there was a lot before that that we don't have, where they zeroed in this date and said, and I think they would probably remember, it was a big, big deal, that it was December 25th as we reckon it now. And by the time Chrysostom comes around in the 3rd and 4th century, in the 4th century, he, a great scholar, is clearly a great orator of the early Church, did his research, said, "Yes, they're right. The early church writers were right. This was December 25th when Jesus was born."

Now, I'm not going to be emphatic because that's all extra-biblical, after the biblical record. But I'm saying for you to say, "Well, you know, they're out in the field by night so clearly it wasn't December 25th. We don't know when he was born." You don't know what you're talking about, you really don't. I'm just saying it has been the evidence of the early Church. Well, the eastern church, you know, they put it in January. Well, they do, you know why? Because they had a dispute over the Gregorian calendar. This is not about them debating the day, it's about how we reckon the days in the calendar.

So I'm just telling you, and it does make it a little bit exciting, particularly because if you were the know-it-all who used to say that, that it could exactly be at this point on the calendar, at least as we reckon it in the Gregorian calendar, that Christ was actually born on December 25th. In your Christmas carols that you snarkily say, "Oh, that's not true saying he was born on Christmas Day. He wasn't born on Christmas Day." He might have been. He really might have been. I don't know if that's going to change your Christmas celebration but I wanted a sidebar there about keeping watch over your flocks by night out in the field. That's not what the sermon is about. But I gave it to you anyway.

Verse 9. "And an angel of the Lord," there it is, that's the focus of this sermon, an angel of the Lord, an angel of the Lord. Now they are angels that are not of the Lord anymore because they've rebelled but here we've got a good-guy angel. "He appeared to them," the shepherds, "and," here's a weird word, again a Bible word, "the glory of the Lord shone around them." How did that work out? What's that like? Well I know this, bottom of verse 9, it scared them and it "filled them with great fear." Now, that's a kind of an archaic way to put it, but they were really scared. It freaked them out.

Now in the Bible when angelic beings, who ontologically exist invisibly as spirit beings and software, are sent by God to somehow interface with the material world for us, spirit beings who are entrapped and encased in physical matter, guess what? They put on some kind of form. God somehow makes them appear. This is usually with the kind of appearance that makes them seem

very important. We see them appear, as described this way in the Bible, as men. Oh, and even as women, by the way, in... oh, where's the passage when they show up at... Zachariah 5. That's it. And young men in Mark 16. They're described in different ways but usually you have something more than just, "Hey, a couple of guys showed up and talked to me." There is stuff like this. There was something that God does to show their great authority. Right? Like if you go to certain places and someone's going to show that they're important. Right? You go on the base for instance. Right? They're going to have the regalia or the stripes or, you know, outfits or in some places in the ancient world you have jewels and crowns and scepters. I don't know what God is doing but he wants to somehow append on the vision of these guys saying these are important beings. So somehow he does that, so much so, gives enough of a physical human manifestation of something in terms of the importance and the authority of angels that they go, "Wow, this is a freaky thing." They're freaked out. They're filled with great fear.

And the angel said don't freak out about our uniform or whatever it is that's freaking them out. "Fear not, for behold, I bring you," here's the word in Greek, we get the word evangelical or even evangelism from, "We bring you good news, good news of great joy that would be for all the people." That's an interesting phrase because these are shepherds, they aren't the scribes, the Pharisees, the kings, the Roman officials, just for all kinds of people including you, the people, the commoner, the blue color, the white color, for everybody. "For unto you this day in the city of David, which is the terminology we use for the city of Bethlehem because David was born there and David lived there. When Samuel came to find him and anoint him as the next king of Israel after Saul, that was the city, Bethlehem, that's where they are. "Who is," the Messiah, "Christ," the boss, "the Lord," the King, the one in charge.

Hey guys, "this is going to be a sign for you," verse 12, "you're going to find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger," a feeding trough. "And suddenly," someone got to get the assignment to tell them that and then, "suddenly a multitude," a lot of them, "of the heavenly host..." Host is the word that's used of an army, a big gigantic battalion, a lot of them, probably in all of their regalia and some kind of something that God let them manifest to show their authority and their power and their importance and how much better they are than human beings, they start "praising God and they said glory to God in the highest." You ought to be crediting the greatness of God in the most maximum extreme way, and on earth now, as we break into the time and space of your lives on planet Earth with human beings, the angelic beings are saying we're excited, this is great, praise God, "And on earth among those with whom he's pleased there's going to be peace." What kind of peace? Peace with God and men. To who? "To the people with whom God is pleased."

Let's sort this out in the little time we have left after all that. Versus 8 and 9. I just want to remind you, as I've already said, the angels are better than you (smile). And to say that, I just want to show you something about the greatness of what it is to have the angelic class come, not only to human beings, not to the chief priest and the scribes, but to the shepherds. That is an amazingly, seemingly at least, a humbling thing to do to be sent from some kind of weird, other dimensional presence of God, and to break into time and space and now have to tell the people, and in this case, the low class, blue-collar, minimum wage, you know, herdsmen, "Hey, here's the good news. The Messiah has been born."

And I'm telling you that is an amazing thing when you consider the greatness of angels. I don't have time to look at this but jot down... oh, let's turn there, Revelation Chapter 4. I just want to show you this. Can I show you this real quick? "You got the microphone." OK. Before we write the first point

down, Revelation Chapter 4. The natural habitat of angelic beings, if you're trying to depict it in some kind of symbolic way, not appearing and then describing what I saw in some human manifestation, at least human-looking manifestation, it has to be something like this, look something like this, just again, to emphasize the greatness of angelic beings, and now doing such a lowly task as coming and telling shepherds.

Verse 5. Let's jump in there. Revelation Chapter 4 verse 5. "From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings in peals of thunder." This is all symbolic language of something going on as John is perceiving it, as I often say, in a multimedia presentation. That's kind of the undergirding description of apocalyptic literature. The genre of apocalyptic literature is these prophets and occasionally in the Old and New Testaments, New Testament is the book of Revelation, them seeing something that God says I'm going to give you some symbolic image of Truth and I want to give you these in some kind of a multimedia way, symbolic way.

So, we got the throne, the focal point of God's leadership. We got from that "flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder." You've heard peals of thunder and lightning? Think about the time you've heard it as close to you as you've ever heard it. That's a little different. And now on the throne you've got all of that, the loudness, the light, the flashing in your eyes. Wow! "And before the throne," you saw seven, it says, "burning seven torches of fire" Wow! OK. So I'm picturing tiki torches before this throne where there's lightning. No, no. These are not tiki torches, "which are the seven spirits of God." And if that confuses you because you thought there was one spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. You had the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one spirit. We're not talking about the Holy Spirit. There is only one Holy Spirit, but here there are seven spirits of God, seven spirits OF God. They relate to God, they relate to the authority of God, and there are seven of them and you think burning torches, spirits of God, what are we talking about? We're talking about angels.

Matter of fact, here's a word for you that I know you know. It's the word seraphim. Seraphim. We see the seraphim in Isaiah 6. Guess what seraphim means? It means "burning ones," like burning torches. So you have these images, these people described, these angelic persons described as seven burning fires. So it's a special class, the ultimate top, top, top of the ranking class of angelic beings. "And before the throne there were as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne," we could comment on that another time, "each side of the throne..." Now we get another set, a weird set, of other angelic beings, "the four living creatures." OK?

This is going to mess up your nativity set for sure. Because if you want to craft, at least the biblical sense of what these angelic beings are, they're not, you know, if you've got a Precious Moments nativity set, just get rid of it. Would you? There's no use having that at all. They're not fat babies, you know, partially clad. You want to pinch their bellies. That is not it. If you want to do that, you can start from scratch, you can go home and whittle this yourself. But here's what you want. You want some help. Here are the angelic beings up on the screen. OK? They're full of eyes in front and behind. Already it's not going to sell at the stationery store or Target. You're not going to buy that. That's just gross, it's weird. What are eyes for by the way? Perception, perceiving things, gaining information and knowledge and data. It's like BAM, talk about smart. I mean they've got eyes everywhere, they perceive so much. They've got them in front and behind. Nothing sneaks up behind them.

"And the first living creature," which we see the same description in Ezekiel of these four living creatures, we have one "like a lion." A lion is not to be tamed. They probably shouldn't use one in a Vegas show. It might end up killing you one day. Don't keep them as pets. Right? They're the king

of the jungle. They're fierce. Again, we're talking about software now, fear software. The boldness and courage and fierceness really does not come from your biology. Matter of fact, your biology, if it looks fierce, probably comes from a very fierce spirit and these spirits are fierce. "And the second living creature like an ox." We still use that phrase: "as strong as an ox." Strong. And even strength, though we may think of biology, we need to think of software, we need to think of personalities that are strong personalities, that are fierce personalities that are strong.

"Third living creature like the face of a man." Don't think of Gomer Pyle, think of like Einstein. Right? Think about man, at least in the image of very intelligent, ponders and the poets, the mathematicians, the physicists. The picture of man being an intelligent being, a creative being. "And the fourth like an eagle," not an eagle sitting perched in a nest but an eagle, look at the next two words, "in flight." Right? We may be able to get on a plane after an hour in line and TSA and all that, but we can't just sit there after church and say, "There's a super tall tree or a mountain, I'm just going to fly to it." So we've got fierceness - lion, strength - ox, intelligence - man, the eagle is fast, it's swift, it's responsive. And again, think of those not in terms of physical biology but think of those in terms of personality. Right? A fierce, strong personality, an intelligent, a responsive, fast, you know, kind of swift personality to do God's will in this case. Anyway, it goes on. Six wings, they start saying things, people freak out when they say things, 24 elders fall down, probably our representatives or, at least, I would think people that, you know, are human spirits, in this case, angelic spirits. They speak and everyone falls on their face.

As long as we're in Revelation and we're going to go long anyway in this sermon (smile), go to Revelation Chapter 10. We're not. I will quit at some point. Revelation Chapter 10. And again, just a picture of what the greatness of these angels are. Verse 1. Revelation 10:1, "And I saw another," here's the thing you always ought to think of when you think about an angelic being, "mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud," verse 1, "with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like," carve this for your nativity scene, "like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire."

Again we could go on. There are lots of examples of the greatness of God. And yet, let me give you one more verse. Ready? Here comes, to describe really what's being demonstrated in our passage in Luke 2. It's Hebrews Chapter 1 verse 14, just jot it down. Hebrews 1:14. It says this, speaking of angels. "Aren't they all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who'll inherit salvation." Guess what? There are some shepherds in the first-century who we're going to have their sins forgiven because the perfect life was about to be lived through this baby who looked like a normal baby, born in a feeding trough and that perfect life is going to be acceptable to God and that perfect life was going to be now credited to those shepherds and they would be saved. And here the angels are sent, "Go tell them about this." Those angels who are so great and so powerful going to some stinky herdsmen who smelled like you'd want them to shower before they sat at your table. And they were at the lowest class of an educated people in the first century society. Go give them some news that will be really good for them to hear.

That's a kind of humility from some very powerful beings that should remind you, number one, finally to the first point after two hours of preaching. Ready? Here it comes. "Never Be Too Big To Serve." Never be too important to serve. Never think yourself too significant to serve. When God says I want this done the angels go, "Yes sir. I'm on it." And they do it. They are ministering spirits, they are sent out to "serve" that word. We get the word deacon from that word. We get "diakonos" it's the word "diakonia." It means to do menial tasks. As a matter of fact, the first time we see that as applied to people, it's in Acts 6 when some tables needed to be set. "Hey, we need some tables set." And Stephen, a godly man who you would probably sit back and say, "Wow, I wish I could be like

Steven." He's like, "Okay, great. I'll do it." And the apostles said, "We pick you among these other folks. You're going to go now and just set tables up for these Hellenistic Jews who need their tables set and we don't have enough people to do it, and would you just serve?" And he serves, diakonos, it's just menial tasks, but he goes and does it.

I just want you to think how menial a task it must have been for an angelic being who has a face like a sun and feet like burnished bronze or fire or pillars of fire who now is going to go and talk to some common white collar, in our day, I don't know what, construction workers who just barely get jobs, day laborers, going to go and you're going to serve them. That is encouraging and it reminds me of the Apostle Paul telling us that we should never think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We ought to associate with the lowly. We ought to be willing to rejoice with those who rejoice and it has nothing to do with who they are, or weep with those who weep, doesn't matter who they are. We are willing to serve, particularly those who will inherit salvation. And I was going to say, I don't mean to prioritize. I mean to prioritize. The Bible is very clear in Galatians 6, you ought to do good to all people but especially to the household of faith. Just like angels you ought to say, "I want to serve the people of God. If there is a need, I want to meet it, and I'm never too important to do that."

When Disney built Disneyland up the street, he's known for a lot of things, obviously, an incredible great genius and all that. But one of the phrases he was known for, some people said it was the second most common thing he said. I don't know if that's true but he said this, let me get the quote right. "Everyone," he said, "picks up trash." You'd never think that, you know, the genius of Disney, that's one thing he's known for saying, "Everyone picks up trash." And of course, if you know anything about the history of Disney, they perfected trash processing and they figured out how far the trash cans should be from each other and even redesigned a trash can that now you see at all the theme parks and a lot of places, it's all about keeping the smell contained. But all of that concern about trash, he said, "I don't care who you are." You don't have to be a guy dressed in white with the little dustpan on a stick and the broom. Everyone, if they see trash, who works for Disney should bend over and pick it up. It doesn't matter who.

Disney himself walking through on opening day, if he saw trash and they had a lot of it because they handed out wrappers of candy that first day and that was a big mistake, but if anyone sees trash, then pick it up. Right? And I remember as a kid just, you know, throwing your gum to the ground, I'm not saying I did that, but if I theoretically had done that. Right? I mean, there they are. It bounces once and it's in somebody's, you know, dustpan. They're going to pick up the trash. But the great thing is, it's not just for the menial laborers, it's for everyone, and there's something inspiring about that. Right? When the big cheese is never, you know, beyond the tasks of serving.

And I just want to remind you, Christ is the ultimate example of this. We've studied this not long ago in Luke 22. He asks a simple question, "Who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves?" Everyone is going to say, "Well, the guy who's at the table." At Mastro's or Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, and you've got the servants all coming up, if you will, the waiters and the busboys trying to fill his water and take care of his stuff, "Can I get you anything else, sir?" One looks more important than the other and then Jesus flips it on its head. "Is it not the one who reclines at the table?" Yeah. "But I am the one among you who is serving. I'm the servant." Can you get this? I mean, the "benefactors" who lords over the Gentiles, they're always wanting people to serve them. But really greatness, at least in the Bible, even in the angelic class, the greatness is that they understand that God is so great, that no matter what, we're willing to serve, we're willing to meet a need.



"Pastor Mike, you're preaching about never being too big to serve," and I am saying that. You may be here and think, "Oh, I should never have to get my hands dirty in serving the people of God or serving in this church." You need to see, as we talk about giving gifts to Christ this Christmas, that it starts with an attitude adjustment about you being involved in somehow helping the people of God around you. You may say, "Well, I don't have that problem. I don't think I'm too big to serve or too important to serve, I think I'm too small to serve, I'm too insignificant to serve."

Let me just address that for two seconds, actually more than two seconds. Here it comes. No one in this room is so ignorant of theology, so incapable in terms of giftedness, so flatlined in personality, that you cannot serve in a massively important way. Jot this reference down, just as one that stung me and has stung me many times in my Christian life, First Samuel 12:23. First Samuel 12:23. Samuel, a great prophet, looks at a loser at this point in his ministry, Saul, and he says this: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you." That's an interesting statement. And I know this, the greatness of the man Samuel going to pray for Saul was condescension and humility. He never saw himself too big to serve. But look how he's serving here. He's serving in a way that anybody with any intelligence, you could be absolutely incapacitated, you could be a shut-in and you could still serve like that.

If you are going to give Christ a gift this Christmas, why don't you get very focused on how I can serve the people around me. And if you say, "I don't know if I can do anything. I don't feel gifted in anything, I don't feel any stewardship that God has invested in me to invest in others." If you can think straight for five seconds at a time you could come up to someone and you could say, "Give me three things I can pray for in your life. I just want to pray for you." Let me ask this. How many times in your life, if I were to take the tape recorder and play it back, have you said this more or this more. Have I said, "Pray for me" more or have I said, "How can I pray for you?" I just wonder which phrases come out of your mouth more times.

All I'm saying is do you want to be a servant, do you want to give Christ the gift of service? Let's just even start with the lowest bar of all and it's probably one of the most important things of all. That's let's just give Christ the gift of going to the people of God, just like angelic beings, and saying, how can I serve? Let's start with this. How can I pray? You want to serve me? Pray for me. Seriously, pray for me. You want to serve people in your small group? Pray for them. It goes from there. I mean there are a million other things we can do. Maybe some of you need to look through our bulletin and look through our website and say, "I need to get a ministry post, I that don't have one. I felt too big to serve, I'm too important, I'm too busy, I'm flying and jetting around the world." Get involved and serve. And it doesn't mean that it has to be some organized ministry, although that would be a good thing. All of us need to be serving. Start with a very simple thing of not sinning against the Lord by not praying for those around you.

Number two, verses 10 through 12. These great majestic angels and God gave them some physical manifestation that reflected their greatness, scared these guys and the angels had to say, "Fear not," verse 10, "for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you this day is born in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. It will be a sign for you, you're going to find this baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." So here's the message, we got it from God, we're giving it to you. Now here's the funny thing. Did God need the angels to bring that message? No. Can God just audibly somehow himself break through space and time and rattle the airwaves and make them intelligible to Hebrew speaking, first century herdsmen? Of course he could. But he's enlisting these angels and saying, "Hey angels, you want to

do something for me today? Here, look, I want you to say, 'Here am I, send me.' Now you go and you can do something for me by doing something for them."

That's exactly how it works in the Bible. Here's the passage to jot down, First John Chapter 3 verse 16. First John 3:16. You know John 3:16. Here's First John 3:16. The Bible says this: "This is how we know what love is. We know it because Christ laid down his life for us and so we ought to lay down our lives for Christ? No, that's not what it says. "He laid down his life for us, so we ought to..." That's a big word, I love that Greek word, it says we're obligated to, look at how he loved us. Now we love... him. No. He served us, he sacrificed, now we sacrifice for him. Well we do and we say it that way and that's shorthand but you're really not sacrificing for him because guess what? He doesn't need anything from you. Angels, really, could look at Christ and say, "You want me to go tell the shepherds? You could tell them yourself." Well, you're right, he could, he could. "But if you want to love me," God would say, "then go serve these people."

And you might want to say, I'd like to give Christ a gift this Christmas. We talked about sacrifice last week, we're talking now about service this week. All I'm saying is you can't serve him, he doesn't need anything. You can't buy him anything, you can't do anything for him. You're never going to improve the life of the triune Holy God. But, as the verse goes on to say in verse 17 of First John, "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart, how can the love of God abide in you? Little children, let's not love in word or talk, let's love in deed and in truth." Who? The people around you, the people who will inherit salvation. Serve them. "You want to love me? You want to give me a present? Give them a present. You want to serve me, you want to love me? You want to sacrifice? Serve them."

Number two, let's jot it down this way. You want to love Christ? And you should. You should "Love Christ," the most tangible and specific way "by Serving His People." That's how Christ is loved by us. He loved us so we love him. Well yeah, but he sacrificed for us so we sacrifice for him. Well yeah, but he served us so we serve him. Yeah, but that doesn't really work as it says in Psalm 50, if he needed anything he certainly wouldn't ask you. And yet he creates this need, if you will, and says I'm going to put people around you who have needs and I want you to sacrifice and serve them and lovingly meet those needs.

My dad when I was a kid he had a green GMC pickup truck that always seems to be breaking down and my dad, you know, kind of a man's man, he was always out there working on his car. I remember when I was a kid I just wanted to be with dad, go out there in the driveway, out in the garage and dad was working on the truck and he had all the tools and everything. He had everything he needed to do the work that he was doing. I was probably just a pestering little kid. But you know it was funny and my dad would graciously allow me to help him with the car. I remember one of my jobs was to take the work light and to hold the light for him. Of course, I thought I was like a surgeon with a laser. "Here I am, so important." At some point the older I got I realized that that little work light had a little hook on it that could have easily hooked right on. You know what, if I had to go to the bathroom, dad just hooked on the open hood of the truck and it was like, "Oh, I guess I wasn't needed anyway." And I really wasn't. When he asked for tools, I mean the tool just had wheels on it, he could have wheeled it right over within hand's reach but, you know, "hand me a 9/16 wrench." I would look for the thing and I would hand it to him. I slowed him down. Trust me. But he was gracious in allowing me to love him by helping him with something he was doing.

You know what, the angels really slowed Jesus down. Just like you're slowing him down right now. Think about it. He's sending you a sermon this morning through this passage to get you to start

meeting the needs of people around you. He could meet those needs immediately. He could snap his fingers and every single need would be met, every prayer request would be dealt with, every person that needed an open ear for you to talk and to spill their guts, they would have that. If they needed the world's goods or meals or some kind of work on their home, God could do all of that. But he's saying, "I want to allow you that privilege. Would you just love me by loving these people around you, serve me by serving them?"

By the way, when I talk about service I want to combine a little bit of what we talked about last week - sacrifice. Let's talk about serving as people and I'm talking about sacrificial service. I'm not going to say let me pray for you so I can get you to pray for me. I'm not going to come help you so I'm hoping you're going to help me. I'm not going to pick up lunch for you this time so you can pick it up for me next time. That's not how we should think. Matter of fact, let me blow your mind with this. Think through what's going on here in this passage. Look at verse 10 again. "Angel said, 'fear not.'" These are angels. Right? "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the angels and the people." Underline angels. Do you see that there, interactive 9:00 o'clock crowd?" Nope, it's not there. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the angels and all the people." No. It's only joyful for the angels because it's joyful for the people because God is loving the people.

Jot this reference down, Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 16. Hebrews 2:16, "For surely it is not angels that God helps, but the offspring of Abraham." Human beings. People who put their faith in Christ. Let me put it this way. It was great joy and good news for all the people, all kinds of people, all kinds of lost and fallen people. The redemption that Christ brought was helping the people. Guess who it wasn't helping? The angels. Do you think there's any angel in this heavenly host who didn't know a fallen angel? Absolutely they knew fallen angels. I mean, they existed for some undetermined period of time together, they knew them. And Fred the Fallen Angel, probably not one of their names, but let's just say that, "Fred the Fallen Angel, who I really liked and we hung out a lot and was cool and he was a great guy, now he's lost and condemned and there is a coming judgment for him. Wouldn't it be great if God would somehow provide redemption for Fred and bring him out of his muck of sin and coming judgment?" It doesn't help them.

Talk about the selfless sacrifice of going and getting excited about someone else's good. And saying, "I want to see your joy. I want to rejoice with those who rejoice, even though in my heart I will get nothing out of it." Jesus said that all the time. Do you really want to love and serve the way you ought to, do it without expecting, here are the words of Christ, anything in return? I know that's hard but I just want to tell you, there was nothing in return but vicarious joy for the angels, vicarious joy. Because they were not the beneficiaries of the birth of Christ in any direct way. They weren't being redeemed by the life of Christ and their lost "loved ones" were not being redeemed. It was other people.

Can you pray without expecting those people to pray back? Can you give without expecting? Can you do something for someone? Maybe you ask someone, "How can I pray for you?" And it's someone you think I don't even really like them. Now you're thinking biblically. Right? You are. Luke 6. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that? Even sinners love the people who love them. Luke 6:33, "You do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is there in that? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But would you learn to love your enemies?"

And I'm not even asking you to go there in this sermon. Just deal with people who you're not

expecting you're going to get anything back from, "do good, lend, expect nothing in return," sacrifice lovingly to serve them and the Bible says then God gets excited, "your reward will be great." Why? "You're going to be like sons of the Most High." You're just like God. God is that kind of person. He's giving all the time and getting very little back for it.

Matter of fact, I remember studying this not long ago in Luke 14. He told a story, he says listen, you really, really want to press the level of service? Do something where you're serving something and you can't get repaid. He said, "If you're going to have a banquet," Mr. Guy with a big house, "don't invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your neighbors, because they're going to invite you back in return." Why don't you do something for people who cannot repay you. "Give a feast for the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Then you'll be blessed because they cannot repay you? For then you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

I just think God is really blessed, and I mean that in terms of his responsiveness to his children seeing us give this Christmas season to other people expecting zero in return. Going out of our way, sacrificing our comfort, spending and being expended for the souls of other people around us. Want to give Christ something great this Christmas? Never think you're too big to serve, love Christ by serving his people.

And lastly, versus 13 and 14. You need to "See It the Way the Angels Saw It." "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace among those with whom he is pleased.'" They understood the good news that they brought is very specific, they're serving, they're obeying, but they saw this as something that was about God. They saw it through the lens of God. I'm doing this for God, I'm praising God, I'm saying glory to God in the highest.

Number three, let's jot it down, then let me take you to one last passage, maybe two. Verse 14 reminds me that we ought to "Serve as a Gift of Worship." Worship. I'm giving God credit. I'm trying to praise God by doing something very practical, by praying for someone, by serving them, by bringing them a meal, by giving them my ear, my time, by being inconvenienced and stopping this quest for some Norman Rockwell Christmas, so I can recreate my childhood and say I don't care about any of that. What I really care about is being a blessing to someone at Christmas time. I want to help. I want to serve. I want to be good. I want to somehow spend and be expended for the people around me. And not just at Christmas but how about through the rest of the year. Serving others is an expression and an extension of the worship of these angels.

Two passages real quick. Hebrews Chapter 1, I've quoted it, but I want you to see it because I want you to mark up your Bibles or even your electronic Bibles. Just highlight this and see the distinction between these two words. And again, if you got your Logos out or Olive Tree or whatever software you use, if you clicked on these you'll see what I'm trying to highlight for you. Now, the English Standard Version translates these two different Greek words with two different English words. The problem is both of these English words usually translate one of the Greek words. In other words..."That was clear as mud, Mike."

Let's go to verse 14. Let's just read it first and I'll have you underlined the two words. Speaking of angels here, you can look at the context, we're talking about angels, verse 14. "Are they not," rhetorical question, the answer is yes, "are they not all ministering," there's the first word I want you to highlight, "ministering spirits sent out to," here's the second word, "serve for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" Those two words: ministry, ministering, minister, serve, service. Those

two English words are often translating the word I already said earlier in this message when I quoted this passage, and that is the word diakonia. We get the word diakonos from it. We get the word deacon from it, serving. No matter what the menial task is, serving. You can see that word translated minister or ministry. That's not the word that I had you highlight here in verse 14, the first word. It's the second word. But the first word is not that word diakonos or diaconate. Right?

Are they not all, here's the word, and again, I don't know, this may confuse you because we use it in a different context, but it's the Greek word, if you've got your software out you can see this, it's the Greek word we transliterate into English "liturgy" "liturgical." That's how this Greek word sounds if you were to pronounce it. Liturgical. Now, liturgical, sometimes we see as bad, as people have liturgy and we think sometimes it's just brainless forms, they're just running through the motions. I'm not talking about that kind. If you go back to the original form and the usage of that, even in English, we're talking about something that's very special, the liturgy of a service. We're talking about something that just seems sacred and important and its church and it's very important.

I'll give you one of the six references. I think five or six times this word appears in the New Testament. One of them is all the way back to Zachariah in Luke 1. In Luke 1, Zachariah is chosen, it was his turn to go serve at the temple in Jerusalem. Now, he was a country priest and there were several of them but he was called, his number was picked, so to speak, to go and actually go and go into the temple. That was huge, that was like whoa! That was his liturgical service, that was his sacred duty. That was the thing he did that was like special, sacred work. What's interesting about this is the ministering spirit, the sacred work that these angelic beings do is to go out and do the menial stuff. I just want to show you the connection between the menial stuff and this liturgical sacred work. In other words, when you're willing, even today, to say I was going to do this and I was going to have this and I was going to spend time with these people and that would have been great, it would have served me and made me happy and pushed toward the Norman Rockwell thing. But I'm going to do this instead, I'm going to go be with these people and I'm going to be with that person and I'm going to go listen and council with that folk, that guy and that hard and draining personality, I'm going to deal with them. If you go do that, the Bible would equate that menial kind of hard, difficult work as sacred work. I mean that's the picture of the angels. They're very important, they do sacred, spiritual, holy work. But the work that they're doing is, "Hey, go tell the blue collar shepherds about the birth of Christ." That's the connection you need to make. That is when you do service, you are bringing the most sacred kind of worship and honor and praise to God. That's the picture here.

I said two passages, let me show you why. Let me wrap it up with this, Matthew 25. Turn to Matthew 25, call this passage up. Let me remind you why it is so worshipful, why it's so sacred, why it's so holy, for you even to ask someone, "How can I pray for you? What can I do to intercede before God for you? How can I do something to help you? Can I bring you a meal, can I fix this? Can I serve your kids in this Sunday school class?" Whatever it might be. Why is that so sacred?

Here's why. Matthew 25. The judgment of the nations at the end of the millennial kingdom, it's a principle that works, I mean clearly because it's how God thinks. But I mean, that's the historic context, prophetically historic context. Verse 34. "The King is going to say to those on his right," we won't talk about those on his left right now but those on his right, here's the good news, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father." Are you with me? Matthew 25:34? "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Yay! This is such a great verse. Right? It's so fantastic.

"For I was hungry..." Now, think about this, this is the king, the king on his throne. The king in a glorified situation saying, "Hey guys, I was hungry and you gave me food." Wait a minute, you just quoted Psalm 5 that said if God needed anything he wouldn't ask you. If you know that passage, God says, "If I were hungry I certainly would come to you for food." Number one, I'm never hungry. But in this case, "Hey, I was hungry," the king says, "and you gave me food, I was thirsty you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." You know, even visiting people, giving them stuff, helping them, serving them, all of these things, he says, "I watched you all do that and you did it to me." And the righteous go, "We didn't do that to you?". Verse 37. "I think I would know that, I would remember it."

"The righteous will answer saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you in, or naked and clothe of you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' I don't think we did that. "And the king will answer, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers...' Are you too big to serve the lowly? You're missing a great opportunity. Here's the sacred worship part, "You did it to me." The day Zachariah's number was called to go to Jerusalem and burn incense in the temple, that was huge. It was like God's focalized presence in the glory that the rabbis called the Shekinah Glory, the manifestation of God. I'm going to go into that sacred room. I mean, that was a big deal to him. But you know what is just as sacred in God's eyes? If Zachariah would have the day before gone out to one of his countrymen and just sat down and met a need and served him.

Sacred. Because the Bible says, it's like you're doing it to me, directly to me. God is not hungry. He's not thirsty. God is not a stranger. God is not sick. God is not in prison. He doesn't need a visit. But there are people around you and God has given you the opportunity and me the opportunity to serve them. Sacrifice, last week, service this week.

It made me think again, as I told you last week, of that play we had two weeks ago now, as the kids were concerned about giving gifts to the king. And that made me think about a song that I've always dismissed as trivial and stupid and silly and ridiculous, which sometimes I feel about certain things that way, and I felt that way about it. This week that song came back to me and I was kind of humbled by the fact that there is a biblical truth there. It still seems like a dumb song but, man, it really exemplifies what I'm trying to preach to my church this week.

It was based on a Czechoslovakian song, traditional song, it's been around for a long time but it was rewritten and made popular by Katherine Davis in 1941. It was released under the name Carol of the Drum and it was made even more popular, believe it or not, just in light of you watching the Sound of Music this week, it was made popular by a recording Decca Records put out by the Trapp Family Singers, the literal historic Trapp Family Singers. It was reintroduced not long ago, I guess, to a YouTube generation by those vocalists from Pentatonix, which is a great rendition of this song. Either way it's known today as The Little Drummer Boy, which even the name of the song is repulsive to me in many ways.

But as you know it's a song about doing what you can for the king. And much like our play and the lyrics of the play, it says between the rumper-pompoms, it says, "Our finest gifts we bring, To lay before the King, So to honor him when we come." Turn your attention to Christ this Christmas, you're going to come to him, you want to honor him, you want to bring him gifts. Of course, the whole point of that is he had nothing. That's the picture of that silly little carol. And yet that picture is, listen, I may not have anything great that's of tangible worth but I'm going to give what I can,



what I can do, what I am able to do.

The point of the song is I don't have monetary gifts like the Magi but I can use my hands, I can use my feet, I can serve and so can you. No, you can't like the "Little Drummer Boy" go to the biological family of Jesus in Bethlehem and as that song kind of sappily says make Mary smile about it. But you can serve the spiritual family and you can do that before the day is up. You can write a text, you can send a note, you can offer your services. You can sign up to do something in the body of Christ that will make a difference for the rest of the next new year. You can come up to someone and bless them by asking them how you can pray and then really giving yourselves to prayer this week. And when you do, as the song tries to depict, Christ will take it personally. Personally as an act of sacred worship to God. He will accept it as a Christmas gift, as though it were offered directly to him. Want to give Christ a present this Christmas? Let's serve like the angels.

Let's pray. God, help us please in this season of gift-giving when we're probably still scurrying around to buy a few gifts for the people we love, to recognize the best gift we could give you, beyond our willingness to sacrifice anything, any place, any time, is to look around at the people in our lives, particularly the household of faith and even having that spill over into our work relationships, and our neighborhoods, so that the people around us can see, you know what, I'm not interested in just pleasing myself, it's not just about me having the experience this season or through the rest of the year that makes me feel good, I'm ready to spend and be expended for the souls of people around me. To go the extra mile. To stay the extra hour. And if need be, to spend the extra dollar, whatever it takes to be a blessing to those around me. As Paul said in a situation that certainly is a paradigm that reflects what we're seeing when the angels come down and humbly serve the lowly shepherds, like moms and dads, Paul said I'm like a mother or a father and I'm serving and I'm giving and I'm staying up late and I'm changing dirty diapers, so to speak. I'm doing anything I can do to love the church at Thessalonica because I'm a servant of the church. I proved it, I toiled, I labored among you. God, let this church be filled with servants like that, toiling and laboring and caring and loving and, I even left out the word that I've quoted the passage a few times this morning, God, but you know the word that is right there, it's pivotal, it's strategic, and that is that Paul said I will most gladly spend and be expended. Let us find great joy in that, as you said, because even when we try to be selfless about it, the Bible is very clear, as Paul quoted in the book of Acts, that Jesus himself said it is more blessed to give than receive. So help us to be very giving with our time, our attention, our effort, our communications this Christmas and throughout the whole new year to give to those around us as an act of worship to you.

In Jesus name. Amen.