

Christmas Eve 5pm Service 2016

Southwick Community Episcopal Church
Rev. Taylor Albright

But wait, something's missing... Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus. Manger scene, sheep, cattle, shepherds, the start.

But something's missing. Did you notice?

The angels! The scene is not complete without the angels. That seems obvious enough.

We expect angels at the crèche, the manger scene. That's the story, right?

We even expect a baby, in this case, a very cute baby, and, because we have hung around church long enough, we know there is a meaning to this baby – Jesus, the one who will take away our sins and the sins of the world and make it possible to have salvation – which we also know is more than heaven, but, heck, we would settle for heaven.

And even the arrival of angels.

We have seen it before, we know the story. We accept it, we expect it. We even believe it.

The Christmas scene is a beautiful one. But is it strong enough to give us hope against the backdrop of reality? The backdrop, the scene of the reality of our world?

The story is one which is supposed to create the possibility of hope, the hope that God will set the world right, will set our lives and the lives of those we love, right.

But that seems to be asking a lot of a story, a story of a few shepherds, a manger scene and of wild and crazy angels.

Truth be told, we would love to hope. We want to hope and believe it is all possible.

But, when we look at the issues of the world, the ones we would prefer to skip on Christmas Eve, we see the same old power brokers at work. And it makes us wonder, how can we have a real hope for our world?

- There are empires fueled by the morality of self-preservation wielding the threat of military might.
- There are causes fueled by anger and hatred and religious fervor cause fear through acts of heartless terrorism.
- The ancient circle of the most wealthy who influence governments and finance terrorists when it works to their advantage, who share just enough to keep the rest of the world hoping for the crumbs that fall from their table.

They were all there just outside of that crèche scene, just as they are today.

And, at a personal level, we struggle to have hope for the issues we and those whom we love face.

- There are the illnesses that linger, and seem impervious to the advances in medical technology and pharmacology.
- Everyone of us has been touched by the life draining claws of addiction, and our struggle to find treatments .
- The relationships among families, friends and even churches that seem beyond mending.
- And hearts that have grown cool, some cold, and some so hardened over time that they become cynical when offered forgiveness, hope, faith, or talk of the power of love.

When hope grows thin, the outcomes we fear seem so, inevitable. We analyze the data, we review the numbers, we go over the tape, and we can't see how things can work out.

And it causes us to take the Christmas of God and make our own little, conservative Christmases. The ones where we can control some of the

outcomes with presents and parties and a little peace. But, the whole time, we know that the worst of winter is still ahead of us.

But suddenly, the room is filled with angels. When we least expected it, Angels. Angels Disturbing our peace. Disturbing the world's peace. Disturbing the billionaire's circle, and the General's meeting, and the planning meeting of the next terrorist act.

Angels.

Angels breaking into the hospital room, zooming around the relationship that seems hopeless.

Angels blow up our limited reality and our predicted outcomes. Not Angels, per se, but what the angels tell us: God is here. God has heard, God has been close and God is here. And God is at work.

God on God's terms, not ours. God not asking for any permission or cooperation or making deals. God coming in the world that God made and that God loves and that God has sworn to set right.

And look at how God has done it.

Not as the son of the wealthy King where we would expect leadership to come from, or as the warrior riding in a flaming chariot,

but as a baby in a small town of about 250, to a poor couple who are about to be immigrant refugees, born in a temporary barn.

Would you have every guessed that is how God would do it? Never in a million years.

Like an answer to a prayer that we had long forgotten, God came to us in Jesus.

And so, if God chooses to break into our world on his own, if the angels appear in certain fields where shepherds watch their flocks at night, where will God break into next?

Why not your life? Where will God break into our world?

God has come to rescue us perfectly. God will rescue this world – perfectly. And God will rescue each of us, perfectly.

At Christmas... With the help of Angels, under his command. Into a town beset by poverty, in a country under military occupation, where the only way to strike back was to be a terrorist.

At Christmas, God reminds us that our view of reality is still extremely limited. Not only has he noticed our struggle, and heard the anguished cry of our prayers, but that God has come down to save us.

And in ways that we might never imagine, God is present in our world to set things right from the inside out. God is present in Aleppo to set things right. God is present in Washington, and Moscow, and Beijing, God is present in Southwick and Suffield and Westfield and Feeding Hills and in every town and neighborhood.

God is present in the hospital room and at the hospice bed, and in the broken marriage and certainly in the midst of the addiction, the addiction to whatever runs your life. Angels and a miraculous baby are the evidence of God beyond our control, of a love that is powerful and faithful. Like watching a baby grow up, it may take time. But it's already here.

And that is a reason to build hope.

And from that hope to take courage.

And in that courage to go and do and be.

To love one another. To love our enemies and all that hate us.

To be a sign of Christmas every day and everywhere. Because we have seen the angels and followed their call and found God to be present right here, among us.

Let Christmas be more than your peaceful night. Let it be your starting point for hope. Let your Christmas be host to Angels.