

ENTERTAINING ANGELS
Fourth in an Advent Series: "Angels We Have Heard on High"/// Festival Sunday
December 22, 2013 Hebrews 13: 1-2
The Church of the Covenant

Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian author, in 1885 wrote a beautiful little short story entitled, "Where Love Is, God Is". It is about Martin the Cobbler. The story begins as Martin has lost everything –his wife has passed away and then in succession each of his children. Martin is grief-stricken and even denies God wondering how God could allow such a terrible thing to happen. A missionary comes and Martin has an encounter with the missionary and with God and begins reading his Bible. As he is reading he falls asleep and in his dream he thought he heard the voice of angels telling him that God would visit him the next day. So the next day he arose expectantly. And saw out his window a neighbor shoveling snow –he invited the neighbor inside for warmth and food and shared the story of his Bible reading and the voice of God. His neighbor is touched and thanks Martin for sharing with him and then leaves. Then, Martin saw a young woman with a baby, who was not dressed warmly enough for the cold. He invited her inside, gave her some warm baby clothing and money and also told her about Jesus. She left and still Martin had not been visited by God. Then he saw a young boy stealing from an older woman and Martin went outside and settled the argument and he was able to do so as he extended love and compassion to them both and told them of how Jesus had changed his life. That night Martin wondered aloud to the Almighty God why God had not visited him that day. In an instant three figures of the three people he had helped that day appeared to him, almost as angels, and he understood that as he had done these acts of kindness to strangers he had actually seen the face of God.

As our scripture from Hebrews notes: *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."* (Hebrews 13: 2) Martin the Cobbler had entertained angels, but had entertained them unawares. We are always surrounded by angels; God is forever attempting to break through; Jesus seeks to open our eyes that we may see Him and be ministered to by Him. In order actually to see an angel, our spiritual eyes must first be opened to this complete, alternative and parallel universe, the spiritual realm, where the Holy Spirit holds sway. It is the place of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of heaven surrounding us every moment of every day.

O beloved, may our spiritual eyes be opened this Christmas!

Our spiritual eyes may be closed by our busy-ness at Christmas. Too many things to do, too little time to have a perfect Christmas. Except for the fact that Christmas comes in the message of angels, not in all the "stuff" we do to try to pretend its Christmas. Like the story of Mary and Martha in the Bible, Martha is busy and distracted in the one room cooking and cleaning and making preparation for the coming of Jesus, but Mary is in the next room, actually sitting at the feet of Jesus, opting for the *"better portion"* and experiencing the *"one thing needful"* in life –being in the living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke 10: 42) Are you so busy with Christmas in one room that you miss the Christ Child's arrival in the next room?

Our spiritual eyes may be closed by our loss and grief at Christmas. We are haunted by memories of times past and by people now gone on to be with the Lord. We are like Mary at the tomb of Lazarus, her brother, "Lord, if you had only come my brother would not have died." But Jesus has come. And He was not only to raise Lazarus from the dead (*"I am the resurrection and the life"* saith the Lord –John 11: 25), but He was also to raise up Mary from her grief. Is Christmas about the grave or about eternal life? Are we so consumed with memories of the past we cannot see Jesus right in front of us in the present,

bringing new life and the promise of eternal life to us and to all we love? Jesus was born as the old carol states it, "that man no more might die" –do you believe this?

Our spiritual eyes may be closed by our materialism. We have made Christmas into an orgy of buying tangible, material stuff when it requires, not materialism, but the Spirit to dawn again into our hearts. Christmas isn't about material things; its about spiritual things. Its not about getting more; its about giving of the first fruits of our heart and life. Its about kindnesses done to strangers, not expensive gifts given to our own family. Why would we ever expect to see a spiritual God through an orgy of material things??????

(I originally had another illustration planned for here –but God provided a better one!) If you missed the Christmas choir concert last week because you were too busy, or too laden with sadness, or too distracted, or were Christmas shopping for more and more stuff that will never satisfy, you really missed something. For me, Christmas came on Tuesday night. At the very beginning the little girls in the Krystal Bells choir were ringing, and a couple of them raised their little bells high when ringing. This for whatever reason particularly touched me. And as they were playing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" I sang to myself, "How still we see thee lie". And I thought how "Un-still" I am this year; how cranked up I am this year. I had even come to this concert not expecting anything at all; no, God would not use it to melt my heart and draw me closer to the Baby Jesus. It was just one more thing to do. And in the ringing of those little bells by those little children, my eyes were opened, better yet my heart was opened, and I saw how I was missing Christmas, I was missing all the angels; I was missing what God was placing right in front of my face. I looked to my one side at one point and my Mother was crying during "I'll be Home for Christmas" because her parents' home is forever gone; and then she was singing along with another piece; and then she was dancing under the pews. She moved from sadness to joy –a gift from God! At one point I had to shush her, she was having too much fun! Sitting between my Mother and my Father in that pew, what a privilege I had. And how I could have missed it. I could have missed God coming to pay me a visit. To touch my heart and to remind me that a spiritual Christmas requires a spiritual Christ to be born and reborn spiritually within...how truly blessed I truly am...

May your heart be melted this Christmas. May your spiritual eyes be opened this Christmas. May you set aside your busyness, your material idols, your sadnesses and distractions of life, to hear in the ringing of bells and to see in the coming of angels, the heralding of the new birth of a new born king, into your heart this year.

By the way, why were there so many angels around Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus? To make absolutely certain that no one could possibly be so hard-hearted and spiritually blind to have missed the new birth of the One who makes Christmas, Christmas!

Open your spiritual eyes with wonder...and look all around you this Christmas...God is trying to get through to you...and, beloved, you might just entertain angels...be entertaining angels unawares...and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*