

Study Guide
Series: Christmas Through Joseph's Eyes
"Entertaining Angels"

Matthew 1:18-24 will be the Scripture focus for each day this week.

Monday – This is the third weekend of Advent. This weekend is traditionally referred to as Joy Sunday—the candle on the Advent wreath is pink. The emphasis is on joy. But the season leading up to Christmas is often anything but joyful. It's not the chaos of preparation for Christmas. It is the fact that, in our minds, we have an idealized picture of Christmas and our real life experience is anything but joyful. In fact, depending upon what's happening in our lives Christmas can be really depressing. But here's one of the keys to finding joy in Christmas. It's found in being the angel for someone else—in offering encouragement, kindness, help, and blessings to the other. How is your Christmas shaping up? Do you expect it to be "Norman Rockwell" perfect? If not, what factors, big or little, may play a part in making your Christmas "imperfect"? In what ways can you, your family be an "angel" for others, finding more joy in your Christmas by increasing theirs?

Tuesday – Matthew tells us that the angel came to Joseph in a dream. The Greek word ANGELOS means messenger. We often think of angels as winged creatures, but the Bible typically portrays them as looking simply like people. The writer of Hebrews wrote to first century Christians: "Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it." In the book of Daniel, Daniel speaks to the angel Gabriel and refers to him as "the man". In Luke when Mary speaks to Gabriel, again he appears simply as a stranger with no wings. Most often the angels God sends today have names like yours. These angels come to offer encouragement, or guidance, or a bit of tangible help. Sometimes, like Joseph's angel, they help us to know God's will and find the courage to do it. Have you ever met one of these angels? Have you ever been one of these angels? Consider how you might be an Angel this Christmas for someone else.

Wednesday – In his dream, Joseph sees a messenger of God who says, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid." "Don't be afraid" is one of the most often recorded statements of God or Jesus in the Bible. Why does the angel tell Joseph not to be afraid? It wasn't that he might be afraid of the angel—he just looked like a guy. The word was, "Don't be afraid of this mission to take Mary as your wife, and to raise this child as your own." The idea of doing so must have made this humble carpenter very anxious or afraid. When God calls you to do something and the opening words are, "Don't be afraid," you should be afraid! Whatever follows is sure to be filled with challenge and risk." When (if ever) have you sensed a call from God that brought challenge and risk with it? How did you respond? Have you ever felt God calling you to do something outside of your comfort zone or that scared you just a little bit? If not, you've not been paying attention! Maybe you are sensing God calling you to do something that has you afraid. What can you learn from Joseph's story to help you to be not afraid?

Thursday – Mary sees Gabriel, the angel, in broad daylight with her own eyes, but Joseph has a dream during his restless sleep at night. If Joseph had been your friend, and had told you that he

was going to proceed with his marriage because of what an angel told him in a dream, how do you think you would have responded? How do you experience God speaking to you today? Is it possible for God to communicate with you through a dream? If so, how could you tell if it was God, or just the cold medicine or pizza you ingested before bed time? In what other ways can God communicate with you? Are you “listening” for all (or any) of them?

Friday – The messenger of God told Joseph that the child Mary is carrying is to be very important and Joseph was assuming responsibility for this child. The mission the angel of the Lord gave Joseph was to raise this boy as though he were his own. It was to love him, to mentor him, to teach him, to guide him, and protect him. It was to model for this child what it means to be a man of God. The child was not his by birth, but the boy would need him to love him as his own. Have you ever chosen, either temporarily or permanently, to play a parenting role for a child who was not your own? If so, what led to you taking on that role? How did you feel about the experience and the results? Joseph models for us something important. We’re all called by God to care for and help raise children that are not our own. James writes these well-known words in his epistle: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress.” Our church offers many ways to help raise and invest in children that are not your own. In what ways is God calling you to do this?