



## SESSION 4: The Angel Proclaims

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

LUKE 1:28

### SETTING THE SCENE

Clarence Odbody, Angel 2nd Class, is no ordinary angel. Or maybe that's the problem: he's too ordinary. No wings, no flowing robes, no dazzling light. Clarence doesn't fit in with the images of angels we see all around us this time of year.

Shortly after George and Clarence leave the tollhouse at the bridge, into the alternate reality of a world without George Bailey, they find themselves thrown out of Martini's restaurant, now a dive bar called Nick's.

George is beginning to sense something is dreadfully wrong.

"Why am I seeing all these strange things?" he asks Clarence.

He frantically searches his pockets for his wallet, for identification, for the insurance policy that certifies he is worth more dead than alive. Until he comes to the little watch pocket of his trousers. "They're not there either," says Clarence. "What?" says George. "Zuzu's petals." And then the angel Clarence proclaims what becomes the turning point of the whole story:

"You've been given a great gift, George. A chance to see what the world would be like without you."

1. Have you ever watched the movie and wondered what the world would look like if you were in George Bailey's shoes? Or put the shoe on the other foot: who will you be missing during this holiday season—a family member or friend—who will be absent? How will things be different?

**Answers may vary. Certainly loneliness, loss, a twinge of sadness damping the holiday happiness,**

2. The fourth candle on the Advent wreath is often called the "angel's candle." Read Luke 1:26-38. We've encountered several instances of angels in this study already. How is the fictional depiction of Clarence similar to Gabriel and other biblical angels? How is he different?



**For starters: Similarities: He carries a message of hope and love**

**Differences: Obviously angels don't "earn" their wings. Clarence is kind of a bumbler.**

3. Look again at vv. 28-30. How is Mary's reaction different from the shepherds'? What does that tell you about Mary? **Mary immediately believed. The angels believed but ran to see what they were told. Mary was humble and a willing servant.**

4. Look again at v. 38. The Gospel of Luke seems to give the impression that Mary could have said "no" to the angel Gabriel. What if she had? What if Jesus Christ had never been born? How would life change if the Christ Child had never come into the world? List some things you know would change:

There are many differences: The most important is that we would still be in our sin and doomed for eternity. But also many discoveries, hospitals and schools would not exist.

At the end of George's nightmare journey through Pottersville, he discovers the tombstone of his little brother Harry, then runs to find Mary, who is now an old maid closing up the library. No longer recognizing him, she fights him off, and he runs away, back to the bridge. And here, at the climax of the movie, just as at the beginning, we come to a moment of prayer. But this time, it is George himself with his hands folded, desperately pleading. "I want to live again. Please, God, let me live again." Something changes, and the snow begins to fall again.

5. Read John 3:3-8, John 12:24, and Romans 6:3-10. In a very real sense, our spiritual life is like George Bailey's life, and George's prayer is our prayer. Or, as the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "Whenever Christ calls us, he bids us to come and die." What does it mean to die to self? How does it happen?

We are to die to ourself-that is to our own desires, and goals of the flesh. We are to live God's way and for His purpose. This is the ongoing work of sanctification which the Holy Spirit works in us

6. In what ways is God calling you to die to self in your present circumstances?

Answers will vary. But ask yourself if you are putting your self before others. How would your life be different if you put others before yourself?

7. Fortunately, our story doesn't end in death. The death and resurrection of Christ propels us into a wholly new kind of life. Read Galatians 2: 19-20. Martin Luther liked to refer to this dying-and-rising as a "happy exchange," in which Christ takes on our life of sin and death to give us his more abundant life of resurrection and peace. How do you see Christ living in you today? How does that change things?

Answers will vary. For starters you are a Christian motivated by the spirit doing things the unbeliever wouldn't do (ie. Church, this Bible study, etc)

8. How do you see Christ living in others around you and in your Christian community? How does that change things?

Answers will vary. We live in fellowship with each other, pray for each other, help each other and work together to advance God's kingdom,

When George Bailey realizes that he has been "resurrected," he finds a sense of peace he has never known before. And it leads him to run back through Bedford Falls in a giddy joy until he reaches home and the happy ending awaiting him there. Along the way, we catch one last glimpse of Mr. Potter, perhaps Hollywood's worst villain to never get his comeuppance, and George gleefully exclaims, "Hey! Merry Christmas, Mr. Potter!" This joy knows no bounds.

9. Read Colossians 3:12-17. Notice how "the peace of Christ" is at the literal center of Paul's encouragement here. But peace in the biblical sense isn't simply the absence of conflict. It is the full presence of wholeness, well-being, and flourishing that is ours through God's gift of grace. When have you felt this peace in your life? How might you experience it this Christmas season?

Answers will vary.

10. How might you share this presence of peace with others this Christmas season?

Answers will vary. For starters tell people who are frightened during this pandemic why you have peace. Reach out to friends, family and neighbors who are struggling.

#### CLOSING PRAYER

We praise you for the angels who announced your saving message of a Savior, O Lord. Let us be imitators of them in our lives as we announce to others that salvation has come to us in the baby Jesus. Help us to see that you have assisted us in making a difference in the world and in the lives of others the gifts of kindness and love you have empowered us to share. In you our lives are made complete. Amen.