

Have you noticed the icons on the back wall. They were painted by a woman from New England. They celebrate the four feasts of the Christmas Season: the Birth of Jesus which we celebrate today, the Feast of the Holy Family, Sunday's feast, the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God on New Year's day and the Feast of the Epiphany commonly known as the Feast of the Three Wise Men who visit Jesus in Bethlehem.

Notice that all four icons have angels in them. In scripture, angels are messengers of God. An angel is a perfect image of God since God is both very far from us (transcendent) and very near to us (immanent). And angels seem both very far and yet very close to us.

Tonight I want to tell you with my personal encounter with an angel. My angel's name is Parsimmons. Could you please welcome Parsimmons. (Show them the angel). He's kind of cute!

Parsimmons and I spend some time talking last night. Well really he did most of the talking. We talked about the story of Jesus' birth. Parsimmons wanted to speak to my heart about the shepherds ...you know... they ones he and some of his

other angel friends spoke to. He said these shepherds were kind of every day guys, hard workers, taking care of their sheep in the middle of the night. One of the shepherds was on night watch when the angel the messenger of the Lord, appeared.

Now Parsimmons told me that when angels visit people they tend to frighten us. Remember how Mary was frightened when the angel Gabriel came to her to tell her she was to be the mother of Jesus? And Joseph was frightened by angel in a dream telling him he was to take Mary, expectant wit child, into his home. We should not be surprised that the shepherds were frightened when the angel appeared in the middle of the night. That is what Parsimmons told me.

The angel's first words to Mary, to Joseph and to the shepherds were all the same: "Do not be frightened!" And that is what Parsimmons said to me. "Do not be frightened." See, I had gotten word that day that my classmate who is pastor of Shrine Parish had had a massive heart attack and was on life support. But Parsimmons told me, "Do not be afraid."

I don't know what is worrying you tonight, but I am sure Parsimmons would say the same thing to you. Do not be afraid.

And then we talked about the Good News the angels brought the shepherds: “ I bring you Good news of Great joy, that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is the Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you; you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”

Swaddling clothes: a sign of a loved child: for when a baby was born the child was immediately washed, rubbed in salt, and bound in cloth strips. This child was loved from the very beginning of his existence on earth. We know later that he was loved by his Father when, at his baptism by John in the Jordan, a voice from heaven was heard saying, “You are my beloved son; on you my favor rests.” And at his transfiguration, we hear again the words. This is my son, my beloved. Listen to him.

Lying in a manger: a feeding trough. This new savior from the very beginning of his life would not be readily accepted by this world. There simply was no room for him. And there still is not much room for him in our busy world ... and in our busy lives.

Parsimmons has not said much to me since last evening. In fact, it is almost as if he has disappeared. I am not sure if he has gone. I don't know about you, but I have been so busy the last number of hours that I haven't had much time for him, for a messenger from God to bring me Good News.

Well, that's my story about Parsimmons...except for one thing. It seems that every time an angel comes to us, we find our lives more complete. For instance, when the angel, Gabriel came to Mary, he filled Mary's womb and her whole life with the Christ child. And, you know, I feel much more at peace after my talk with Parsimmons.

I guess we are all like Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. Whether young or old, we all have angels just waiting to visit us. Maybe this Christmas season we can spend a few moments in quiet prayer and listen. An angel may just come into our busy lives and fill our souls with some Good News.

A son is born to us,

A son is given to us.

His name is Wonder-Counselor, God Hero,

Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.