

# "A Life-Saving Visit"

December 31, 2023  
King City United Church  
Rev. Padre Andrew K. Lee

## Prayer for Illumination

As you led Simeon to embrace the infant Jesus, guide us, Holy Spirit, by your gracious light that we may welcome your saving Word. **Amen.**

## Scripture Readings:

### Psalm 126

### VU 871

*Refrain:* **Let the whole cre-a-tion cry, Glo-ry be to God on high.**

Praise God from the heavens; give praise in the heights!  
Give praise, all you angels; praise God, all you hosts!

**Praise God, sun and moon; give praise, stars and lights!  
Praise God, farthest heavens, and all waters beyond heaven! R**

Let all things praise the Holy One at whose command they were created,  
who established them for all time, setting bounds, which cannot be passed.

**Praise God from the earth, great sea creatures and ocean depths,  
lightning and hail, snow and frost, gales that obey God's decree,  
all mountains and hills, all fruit trees and cedars,  
wild animals and cattle, creatures winged and earth-bound,  
sovereigns who rule earth and its people,  
all who govern and judge this world,  
young men and women alike, old people and children together! R**

Let all things praise the name of God,  
the name above every other,  
whose splendour covers heaven and earth.

**You give strength to your people, songs of praise to your faithful,  
to Israel, the people dear to your heart. R**

## Matthew 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was

frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the Word of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

### <Children's Time>

(Watch Charlie Brown's "Christmas" video clip: 1'59"  
~ 4'39")

Merry late Christmas, everyone! When it comes to Christmas, we easily imagine the image of **Santa Claus**, who may be a white-bearded man who wears an unrealistically tight red costume with a big fat belly and who visits you with a Christmas present. This big fat man with the red costume didn't live in Jesus' time. So

he didn't visit baby Jesus. Instead, in Jesus' time, somebody visited baby Jesus. In the Bible, we can read about angels who visit the children of God. The angels were messengers of God, and they delivered not Christmas presents but an important message from God. What do the angels wear? A red hood, a long white robe? Can you imagine the posture of angels? According to the Bible, some angels have six wings. In Isaiah chapter 6, they are called **Seraph and Seraphs or Seraphim** in plural.<sup>1</sup> In 1 Kings Chapter 6, they are called **Cherub in singular and Cherubim** in plural.<sup>2</sup>

Their six wings have their own purposes: The upper two are for hiding their faces, the middle two are for flying, and the lower two are for hiding their feet. On the other hand, other types of angels look the same as humans.

While Seraph or Cherub are general nouns, some angels have their own names, like Andrew and Sean;

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 6:27.

**Gabriel, Michael, Raphael<sup>3</sup>, Uriel<sup>4</sup>, and Lucifer<sup>5</sup>,** known as the fallen angel. They don't have wings and even look like humans, having their own names. Isn't it cool? Some angels have their own unique names. And now, I'm about to talk about one of those angels, Gabriel. He probably looks like a man, and the role of the angel Gabriel in the Bible is that of the messenger of God. He always delivers good messages and blessings from God to God's people.

He has done many good things and also contributed to the First Christmas. Did you know? This angel Gabriel visited Jesus' future mother, Mary. She wasn't married then, so Jesus had not been born yet. He said to her, "Greetings, Mary! You will have a baby; he is the son of God!" Isn't it amazing? She met an angel in person and conversed with the heavenly angel. I can't imagine the scene: a conversation with an angel! Later, baby Jesus came to the world through her humble obedience to the angel's message.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Book of Tobit.

<sup>4</sup> In the Book of Enoch.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 14:12.

My friends, we passed Christmas last Sunday but we are always celebrating the coming of Jesus to the world. That is great if you enjoyed Santa Clause or his present. And yet, wouldn't it be greater if we also wait for the angel Gabriel someday? Let's hope to meet an angel whom God sends. God be with you, my friends! Amen.

### <Reflection>

<The dowry for the three virgins>



by Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1425, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome)

Celebrating the end season of the year, I'm going to introduce three characters in my sermon. The first one is Santa Claus. The Santa Clause story originates from the life

story of Saint Nicholas in AD 270. Under the Roman persecution of Christians, a baby was born in Asia Minor, Turkey today. This baby's name was Ἅγιος Νικόλαος. Despite the Roman persecution, he became a Christian. When his parents passed away at Nikolaos' young age, he decided to donate most of his inheritance to help

people experiencing poverty. He became a priest in the era of persecution. And he humbly served a church in Myra, Roman Greece, now Turkey. He always helped the poor and the vulnerable by offering food and presents. His beneficence became well-known to everyone in the town. Due to his generous alms, the church's finances had always been in surplus. One day, Nicholas heard the news about a low-income family. It was about a poor man with three daughters who could not afford a proper dowry. And the poor man had decided to sell his daughters as prostitutes. Hearing of the girls' difficulty, Nicholas decided to help them, but being too modest to help the family in public, he went to the house under cover of night and threw three purses (one for each daughter) filled with gold coins through the window opening into the house. That money helped the daughters and the poor man a lot. Look at this picture: this is a picture titled "The Dowry for the Three Virgins" by Gentile da Fabriano in 1425. You can see Nicholas is secretly throwing three bags of gold coins through the window opening into the house. He was generous and humble, so he wanted to do a good deed. As Jesus says,

"When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you!"<sup>6</sup> his serving and helping hands had been made secretly, but he did so frequently that people in the town recognized what he did. His visit became a life-saving visit for the families, and particularly for the daughters; it became a life-giving visit.

The second character is the angel Gabriel. In the Bible, the angel Gabriel appears two times. One is in the Old Testament, and the other is in the New Testament. In the Book of Daniel Chapter 8, the angel Gabriel delivers God's message to Daniel, who tries to interpret a "Vision of a Ram and a Goat." The angel Gabriel passes along the message from God: "Listen, and I will tell you what will take place later in the period of wrath, for it refers to the appointed time of the end. **20** As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. **21** The male goat is the king of Greece, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:3-4.

great horn between its eyes is the first king."<sup>7</sup> I will find another time to explain this word; instead, I'd like to touch on the role of Gabriel as God's messenger in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the name of the angel Gabriel appears in Luke. God sends him to the Virgin Mary, and the angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."<sup>8</sup>

The angel Gabriel is indeed God's messenger, and his messages throughout his visits bear secrets and hopes. Particularly for Mary, it was a life-*giving* message from God.

Now, the last characters are the Magi, who visited and worshipped baby Jesus. They were led to the house in Bethlehem where Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus stayed. As we read, they were very influential people because they were able to visit King Herod, and the King had a conversation with them. When you travel to England, can you visit King Charles the Third? Most likely not. But the

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel 8:19-21.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:30-31.



magi did, and King Herod asked them a favour, meaning the three magi were noble. After visiting and worshipping baby Jesus, they each dreamt the same dream of an angel who told them to go back the other way and not revisit King Herod. Although they were noble and influential, they humbly listened to the divine message and followed what they were told. Can you sense their personalities and humble hearts? God made a divine plan through their humble and dedicated hearts. The very next morning, they discussed with each other and confirmed that the dream was a real message. They may have hinted this to Joseph and Mary when they left. And Joseph had the same dream of fleeing to Egypt. Later, King Herod noticed the three magi left without seeing him again, so he angrily ordered to kill all babies under three years old. Genocide of that generation was executed in Bethlehem, but fortunately, Joseph and Mary saved baby Jesus. The magi's visit, therefore, became a life-saving one.

What are the three visits I mentioned? St. Nicholas's visit to the poor family, the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, and

the three magi's visit to baby Jesus and his parents. All are related to Christmas and are life-giving visits. Indeed, the meaning of Christmas is all about life-giving and life-saving because our Christ messiah was born. Our ministry, our activities, and our prayers could not be more life-giving and life-saving in the most wonderful time of the year. Their visits are not casual visits but visits with special purposes. Our ministry, our activities, and our prayers also have purposes, and they cannot be different from the life-giving and life-saving visits.

Today is the last day of the year, and it is a perfect day to look back at our lives and look forward to our lives and ministries at King City United. When we reflect on the days that have passed and those to come, we must bear in mind the life-giving and life-saving purposes. I believe God is working with our purposeful and intentional dedication in our church.

We witness that this Christmas is one of the most painful Christmas days in that Jesus' hometown, Bethlehem, experienced genocide in Jesus' time and is experiencing massacre by vandalistic violence in modern

days. We can't agree more that evil power is about life-taking power, while goodwill power is about life-saving and life-giving. As we see, divine peace makes the way of life-saving and life-giving works. Therefore, brothers, sisters, and friends! Let's promote God's peace on earth. Let's be anxious to meet the angel Gabriel, who sends God's message. Let's be passionate and dedicate ourselves to being God's messenger like St. Nicholas. Let's be humble like the magi who followed God's direction without fear to execute God's life-giving and life-saving works. Indeed, Jesus is coming to those who are waiting for and preparing and proclaiming the way of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen. Reflecting on our days and days to come, let us pray silently.