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“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

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# Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

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“I bring you good news of a great joy” (Lk 2,11)

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## **Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!**

St. Gabriel returned from Nazareth back to God in heaven with the answer of Our Lady. In response, the Son of God came down from heaven and became man in His Mother’s womb. And the good angels joined St. Gabriel’s jubilation in heaven and then followed their King down to earth, into this depth, a mysterious “journey”, with their Lord as leader! Hence we find them also at Christ’s birth in Bethlehem – the next text in which St. Luke speaks to us about the angels.

### **1. “She gave birth to her first-born son”**

St. Luke relates very accurately the historical circumstances.

#### **a) The Son of God became Son of man**

St. Luke wrote that St. Joseph went to Bethlehem with Mary to be enrolled, “and while they were there, ... she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Lk 2:1,4-7)

So far, we see no reference to the angels, but an accurate description of the “Son of God” becoming “Son of man”. He was registered as a “son of David” (Mt 1:1; Lk 3:31) from the beginning and in this way somehow made public to “all the world”.

#### **b) The admiration of His silent adorers**

In all that, the angels are more than attentive. They followed their Lord immediately, first to Nazareth, then wherever His Mother went with their God, to Elizabeth and back to Nazareth and to Bethlehem. It is referred to them in the same way as they were present, namely silently. They assist a mystery, totally unimaginable for the heavenly spirits, to any logic, the Highest makes Himself the lowest. They are, so to speak, “without words”, silently admiring, humbly and yet lovingly adoring, totally, with all their mind and will, at His disposition, never stopping their song of praise: “Holy, holy, Holy Lord!”. The Little Flower said once: “Silence is the sweet language of the angels and all the elect” (*The*

*Poetry of Saint Therese of Liseux*, Supplementary Poem, P 7, Washington, DC 1996, 232).

The Fathers of the Vatican Council confess clearly that the Son of God upon “taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven” (SC 83), the “heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem” (SC 8) so that today, “with all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord... until he our life shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory” (SC 8). Therefore, we are not wrong, when we believe that all the angels, “all the warriors of the heavenly army,” were present at Jesus birth, the real High Priest with His liturgical Choir. For which of the angels was unaware of that central event in the history of the universe? Which holy angel did not choose to adore him in that lowly state? By their act of loving adoration they were present to the Christ Child in Bethlehem. Although the worldwide enrollment was a heavy cross for St. Joseph and Our Lady, still it was revealed to be an instrument of divine providence for the Son of God’s appearance in the flesh among men. And again, while the circumstances of His birth, the misery and extreme poverty in a stable and among animals, was rather pitiful, it indicated another aspect of divine providence, namely to recapitulate ALL THINGS (not only men and angels) in Christ (cf. Eph 1); in a way, we may say that the universe, all God’s creatures inorganic, organic and sensitive corporal creatures and the angels as pure spiritual creatures, ‘welcomed’ their Creator. The angels were there, silently before the crib as today before the Eucharistic crib, our tabernacles.

## **2. “I bring you good news of a great joy”**

Then, however, St. Luke tells us about the angels’ presence, a short distance away from the manger on Bethlehem’s plane, where the birth of Christ was proclaimed to mankind for the first time.

### **a) “The glory of the Lord shone around them”**

“An angel of the Lord appeared to ... shepherds out in the field,” who were “keeping watch over their flock by night.” (Lk 2:8-9) To the poor he went, to simple, receptive souls. He manifested to them his heavenly origin as “the glory of the Lord shone around them,” which causes always deep respect: “they were filled with fear.” Then he proclaimed the great message. But first, let us distinguish two moments in the manifestation of the Angel: His appearance and words, just as it is with us as well - and with the people we are to serve. They sense “from where” we are coming, much more than we think. A prayerful

priest is in peace and filled with joy, while one involved in the world ... irritates and is irritated by his parishioners. Respect is one thing, but repulsion another. The Lord thirsts for His sheep! How does it stand with His servant?

**b) “To you is born a Savior”**

The words confirm the positive impression the shepherds had: “The angel said to them,

‘Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’ Good news of great joy for all people, this sounds divine. God is good and the creator of all men! From Him comes forth only what edifies, what is constructive! And where something is missing, there He fills in, He completes and makes it perfect, He is “Savior”. These poor people care for simple animals, with a grateful spirit, because they receive from them milk and meat and cloth, all that they need to live. These shepherds know needs, they watch their sheep by night lest wolves attack them. They know suffering; they sacrifice themselves for their sheep. They are aware of their limitations and thus are open for help. This natural situation helps them to humility and also to supernatural openness. They understand the angel when he speaks of the “Savior”.

So, the angel also lets them know how to recognize Him: He has become really “one of them”: “This will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths.” He is not far away, not in the busy city, though, but at a nearby stable: He is “lying in a manger!” That is a place familiar to them. - We may observe, the angel did not say anything about the closed inns which the evangelist mentioned before. Because he sees and points out to the positive side of the cross: The Savior came to those who were waiting for Him, the Savior. Among these he found a home, he was received! While the shepherds might even have hesitated to enter the city, they felt at ease to set off in a hurry to one of their stables. And in fact, “they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:16)

**3. Our angelic call**

Before the shepherds set out, they still experienced “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” But we want to leave this for the next meditation.

**a) A silent and yet eloquent example** This Angel of the Lord has already given us, thus far, his silent and yet eloquent example. We see him silently present with His King and the Mother, and then sent to the poor, announcing to them the good news. The angels are not simply sent to men; they are first sent to adore and contemplate God-made-man. They love first and foremost God and

with all their being. In this they find their eternal bliss and joy. ”In heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father.” (Mt 18:10) ”Day and night they never cease to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty ...’.” (Ap 4:8) - From the presence of God they go forth; they are sent by God, and bring good news from God in their appearance and message. (Outside of the Book of Revelation, S. Scripture seldom mentions an angel who is sent to execute justice.)

#### **b) The angelic lesson**

The fact that the priestly ministry is an angelic ministry (cf. St. Lawrence of Brindisi, *Liturgy of the Hours*, July 21) obliges us to consider this example closely. It not only teaches us to love (first) God above all things, and – sharing in his love — our neighbors, even our enemies (cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, ## 16-18). Somehow deeper, the angels show us the primacy of *being* before *doing*, of praying before preaching, of the silence before speaking, and, we may add, of silent adoration before laborious intercession. St. Charles Borromeo teaches us priests: “You must realize that for us churchmen nothing is more necessary than meditation. We must meditate before, during and after everything we do” (*LoH*, Nov. 4). Just as we see here with the angel, there must be a hidden part of our life, private with the Lord, distinct from the “public” life; a daily rhythm of prayer and work.

#### **4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!**

We certainly heard already the saying: A holy, zealous priest and lukewarm people; a lukewarm priest and a cold people; and a cold priest - will it be a lost people? God forbid. Let us turn daily to the holy angels and, under their leadership and with their help, to the Lord and our Heavenly Mother. This will not be a time, taken away from the people. They will very much benefit from this.

Fr. Titus Kieninger ORC

Obs.: Would you like to register for the retreat in Holly, MI: November 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015?

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