

The Advent Series

By Gail Keffer

This series is written in first person of the character as he/she may have felt at that time. We will concentrate on Angels, Shepherds, the Inn Keeper, Mary, Joseph and the Wise Men.

These were first written for use on a church web site to offer a weekly devotional. The questions are given to help develop questioning in our minds and lead to a further understanding of the way that particular character(s) applies to our everyday life. It could also be printed out and passed out to the church members who do not have computer access or used in a group study with the questions leading to discussions. This could also be presented as a small skit to lead into a discussion of the part each one had in the Christmas story.

I feel that there is a place for almost everyone in the story of Christ's birth, so study of it helps us to find what is expected of us for the spreading of His Word today.

I have referred to THE MESSAGE several times. The Message is written by Eugene H. Peterson (Copyright 2002) from the original language and crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language of today for better understanding.

This set includes the shepherds, the angels, the innkeeper, Mary, Joseph and the Magi.

© Copyright by Gail Kennedy Keffer

THE SHEPHERDS

(A conversation among the shepherds)

“There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." Luke 2:8-12 THE MESSAGE

“Many have praised and preached about our actions on that eventful night so many years ago. Some say we represent the common folk, the ordinary person-in-the-street. We were of such low esteem that we were not allowed to be a witness in the courts. We know that we were chosen for a much higher task than mere city court.”

“I know that I was chosen, much more than any other young man at my time. I did not want to work that evening. I wanted to go into town with my friend, the tentmaker's son. We knew there would be a lot of activity with all the tourists. We wanted to be a part of it. But I never anticipated in my wildest dreams that I would be a part of something that night that would change the world as we know it forever.”

“Some say the sheep we watched were special and used for the holy sacrifices in the temple. Some say we were wrong to leave the sheep on that Holy Night after they had been terrorized by the angels' singing.”

“Some have said we were outcasts, disreputable scoundrels, maybe, even crooks. Yes, we were sinners, not as adverse as some want to think”

“We were common citizens, part of God's creation. But, we were selected by God to see this magnificent sight, and we were chosen by God to hear the angels sing. What a wonderful privilege. We were the ones sent to find that special baby in a manger.”

“We beheld the angels of the Lord and hearkened to their voices. So what's so great about that? We were all so blessed that night, but few believed because Christ had not worked any miracles yet. But, we knew we had a God whose love will never let us go.

Dear Heavenly Father, as we approach this wonderful season, help us to have the same faith as the shepherds. Help us to believe and not question without angels speaking to us in a choir. And then help us to search for the truth just as they did and go to the manger and accept Christ as your beloved son. Amen.

1. Why did God choose such a lowly bunch of people for this important task?
2. Would we believe a few nomads or strangers if they came to us today with news of this nature?
3. Would we want to be given the job of the Shepherds? Do we fear public opinion? Are we aware of the wonderful gift given to us at that time?

© Copyright by Gail Kennedy Keffer

THE ANGELS

"And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth--peace, good will toward men.'" Luke 2:9,10,13,14.

"I can remember that night so long ago as if it were yesterday. Why, sometimes, when so much seemed to be going our way, we almost thought we were in charge on that beautiful night."

"It was the busiest we have ever been through. There were angels everywhere and all of us were so joyful to have been given this great story to tell."

We had made many visits to earth in the past. We had pleasant tasks and unpleasant tasks. The visit to Lot was not exciting, but it had to be done."

"The visit to Jacob when we appeared to him was very exciting. There were thousands of us."

"David spoke of us many times in the Psalms. Some of us had spoken to Moses, and appeared as flame in a burning bush.

"Some of us were with God when he spoke to Sarah and told her that her seed would multiply exceedingly, and that she would bear Isaac; some were with Moses in the burning bush."

"After John had baptized our Lord, he was tempted of Satan and we were allowed to minister to him."

"We were there when our Lord was crucified, buried, and then arose. It was a sad time, but we were privileged to give the good news to the women that came to the empty sepulcher."

"But never a message as sweet as we sang so many years ago on that Christmas Eve as we told the entire world of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward all men"

Our Heavenly Father, as we approach this wonderful season, help us to have the same joyful feeling to tell the good news as the angels had. We know that God gave his only son, and that through this wonderful gift we have eternal life. Help us to want to spread that news to all people so that all may accept Christ as a personal Saviour.

1. How would you react if a group of angels appeared to you when you were outside in the dark of the night?
2. How would it be reported in the newspapers, or would you be afraid to tell anyone?
3. Are we given the job of angels here on earth today?
4. What is the purpose of angels today? Do you think they are still appearing to people?

© Copyright by Gail Kennedy Keffer

THE INNKEEPER

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

"Oh, there was room in the inn; of course, there is always room for one who has enough to pay for that special room that is set aside, just in case someone of importance needs accommodations. But, to me, these two were part of the poor that had come as decreed to pay their taxes. After all, perhaps one of the Sanhedrin would come, or even King Herod himself. I did not want to be caught and risk my reputation as a good host.

"Yes, there was room. But who was going to take in a young thing in her condition. I had no idea this so-called miracle was going to happen. No one had told me to be prepared. I ran a very reputable inn. I had fine furnishings and white imported linen sheets. I had heard the cries and groans of these young women, too young to be having children. I had very important people that night, people of stature in the community. And, there was the subject of liability. After all, I carry no insurance for this type of event.

"She was pretty though--for a country lass. The husband seemed a sullen and earnest type. These local men can be risky though, you realize. I didn't actually leave them out in the cold. I sent them along to the lower quarter of town. There were plenty of midwives down there who were accustomed to this type of situation. They had all the needed instruments and swaddling stuff. These young things are always having children, many times they don't even know how to care for them. I was sure she would be better down there with her own kind. I had a reputation to keep. At least that is what I thought that night.

"Christ came to my door and knocked. I turned him away. I can understand the gentleman who laid a festive banquet and waited for the important guests to come. But they didn't come. So, he asked everyone on the street to come. They also had such poor excuses, just as I did. We were always waiting for a better offer, when the Lord, Himself, appeared to us. We failed to answer His call. And so, I turned aside a King while I waited for a proper paying guest."

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father. We know that you did come as a baby to save us from our sins, and yet, we also have a hard time accepting you even after all the years, the many miracles, gifts, and witnessing we have heard and seen. Please, dear Lord, help us not to be like the Innkeeper, or the people who could not come to the Lord's banquet. Help us to say yes and let him into our hearts. Then help us to do your work and spread your Gospel. Amen

1. Would you welcome Joseph and Mary into your home today? Remember, the innkeeper did not have any notice or angels like the shepherds.
2. Do we welcome the stranger in ragged clothes into our church? Do we welcome them into our home? How can we change that?
3. Why is it so much easier to send money than to get personally involved?
4. Have you ever received the wonderful gift of satisfaction after helping someone in need, the stranger, the wayward relative, the unattractive?
5. Do we have room for the Babe of Bethlehem today?

Mary

“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. Luke 1:28-30 KJV

“Blessed are you among women” was the angel’s message. I had wondered. I know now that I was blessed, but can you imagine the feelings I was hiding when no one else knew what was happening. Oh, the angel was so gentle, so understanding, so assured that I was the right one. I wish I could have felt that same self-assurance at the time. All I knew to say was, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ She told me about Elisabeth, my cousin and I realized that with God, all things are possible.

“I had grown up in a home where the scriptures were studied. We had been told that a Messiah would come, but we expected a King arriving in majesty, not through the womb of a peasant girl like me.

“I wondered about Joseph. How was he to believe me? I was innocent of any wrongdoing. This was a wonderful blessing for the Jews, my people. Our race had gone through generations of banishment, subjugation, homelessness, injustice, and prejudice. But, why me?”

“Then, I wondered why this couldn’t have taken place in Nazareth. But the birth of the Messiah needed to be in the City of David.

“And as the child began to grow, I knew a blessing that no one else would ever know, a blessing that would wipe out any fear, and leave me with an eternal joy. “Why did he have to be born in a stable with cows, and ox, and ass. But, I learned that he had come for all people, not just the rich.

“We were young and poor. The only sweet lullaby was the mellow tones of the animals. Now, I wonder how I could have doubted. God would take his love and give it to us.”

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the love you gave to us through Mary, the peasant girl. We thank you for Mary who in blind faith carried the Christ Child so that we may all have eternal life. Help us to spread the Good News and know that You gave Your only Son for us. Amen

1. Why was Mary afraid to tell Joseph?
2. What is the significance of the Christ Child being born to a peasant virgin girl?
3. Do you wonder what people in the small town said behind the backs of the family?
4. Can you begin to understand the feelings of her parents?
5. Do you ever feel chosen for a task that you don’t really want to do? Or that you don’t understand? Does God call to you today?

© by Gail Kennedy Keffer

Joseph

“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”
Matthew 1:20-21 KJV

“I was a simple man living a quiet life in Nazareth. I worked as a carpenter and loved doing a good job. I enjoyed the fresh scents, and the sounds of woodworking. But, that afternoon I will never forget. I was building furniture for the new home I would share with Mary.

I turned around and there was Mary. I stopped, stretched my arms back and reveled in the beauty of my future wife. Mary said she enjoyed watching me work, but I noticed there was a look in her eye that I had never seen before. She was still very beautiful, but she looked troubled and thoughts seemed to be far off.

“Then, she told me that she was with child. The words struck like a sharp knife into my heart. I dropped her hands as if they were filled with leprosy. I had pledged my love to her in front of witnesses. I asked her who the father was, because I knew that I was not. She said an angel had appeared to her and that she would have a son and his name would be Jesus, and he would be the long awaited Messianic King.

“I turned my back on her and she ran out of the shop crying. Should I take her before the Sanhedrin and divulge her shame and condemn her to be stoned. I loved her so much. As I stood, a bright light shone and I heard a voice say, ‘Joseph, fear for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.’” Then the light faded and I was alone again.

“Now, I had another problem. Who would believe us, two common people in the little town of Nazareth? I went to the temple and prayed. I listened as the Rabbi read ‘Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

“I realized that Mary was telling the truth. I ran to Mary’s home. We prayed together. Little did we know what lay ahead, but we knew that we could face it together with the grace of God. We felt burning eyes as we talked and were seen in the streets of that small town. But armed with God’s courage, we set out to do what we were told, and follow the path he had prepared for us.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, so often we forget the importance of Joseph is carrying out your will for our lives. Help us to realize that although we also feel at times that we are unimportant, we know that you need each one of us to do our part to spread the Good News over the earth. Amen.

1. How would you react if you had been in Joseph’s situation?
2. What would be the reaction of people today if this would happen again?
3. Would we have the courage today to do what Joseph did; for what Mary went through?

© by Gail Kennedy Keffer

The Magi

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. Matthew 2:1-2 KJV

“We had been on many excursions before, but none that seemed as futile as this one at the beginning. We were following a star with little knowledge of exactly why we were going or what we were expecting to find. We all knew we were to see a King.”

“When we arrived, the parents seemed sincere and perplexed by all the notice they were receiving. The child seemed quite normal, but was He?”

“We presented our characteristic gifts: frankincense, myrrh, and even a little gold.”

“We had been told about the shepherds, the angels, the animals, but we did not arrive for the birth. Our privilege was to protect this King from the men on earth who did not understand that this was no earthly king, but the Son of God.”

“We even spoke to Herod about it on the way hoping to find some answers to our quandary, but he could only speculate that there was some imposter out there trying to take his throne away.”

Then when we saw the young child, we realized that God was present in everything that we had done. The child was special. God appeared to us in a dream and told us that we should not return to Herod, so we went a different way to our own country.”

“Many never knew of our journey, or cared. Some who did know about it thought we were just some fools that followed a star and thought they had seen a King.”

“King Herod was so upset, jealous, that he set out to kill every male under the age of two years thinking he would get rid of this King. We knew that Joseph was warned to take the young King and journey to Egypt until Herod had died. But, we had completed our mission and followed the star that took us to the Heavenly King.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, you have given us many signs to learn of your greatness, and still we want more. Help us to see those signs, even though they may not be as dramatic as those given to the Magi and others and help us to also have the faith of a child and follow you. Amen

1. Were these Wise Men or fools?
2. Do we have the same fear as Herod?
3. Would you follow a star today if you were given a message to do so? Would you seek a second opinion?

© by Gail Kennedy Keffer

Notes: These references are given to help continuance of study for a particular person, and although the verse is given with the particular name, the reader will find a need to read some verses on either side of the reference to put the name into context. Many books have been written on the people in the Bible and many sources are quoted every day; I have tried to just list the Scripture references. Predominantly the birth of Christ is foretold in Matthew and Luke with earlier reference in Isaiah..

Shepherds: The only reference to the shepherds is found in Luke 2:8-20. Although the birth of Christ is mentioned in Matthew, the shepherds are not mentioned.

Angels: There are many references to angels in the Old and New Testament, but the one we associate with the angels immediately before the birth of Christ is found in Luke 2:15. An angel appears to Mary in Luke 1:26-35, 38 to foretell the birth of Christ. Joseph is visited by an angel to be told of the birth of Christ in Matt 1:20-24. Then, Joseph is visited again by an angel after the birth of Christ telling him to flee to Egypt in Matt 2:13.

Innkeeper: Luke 2:7 is the reference used to indicate that an innkeeper turned Mary and Joseph away. Tradition has built much on this verse!!!

Mary: References regarding Mary and the birth of Christ are limited to Matt 1 and 2, and Luke 1 and 2.

Joseph: Joseph is rarely mentioned in the New Testament. Concerning the birth of Christ we have references to him in Matt 1 and 2, and Luke 1 and 2.

Magi: Matt 2:1-16 is the sole reference to the particular wise men or Magi that went to visit the Christ-child and take him gifts. No reference is made specifically to this in other passages.

© by Gail Kennedy Keffer