

**DATE: Friday December 24, 11.00 pm**

**CHURCH: St Matthew's Kensington**

**BIBLE PASSAGE: Luke 2:8-14**

**GENERAL THEME/TOPIC: Christmas /Epiphany 2021 Series**

**SUBJECT: Angels**

Just about every organisation you can name has its hierarchy – the armed services have their hierarchy of officers that start with the lowliest Private and shoots up to the Field Marshal. Most companies start with the Office Junior and rise to the Managing Director. Sports teams start with the newest signing and go up to the team captain.

And angels too! We don't think about angels much. They are sentimental figures on cards or in statues in a cemetery. They're a caricature rather than a character. But there are ranks and a hierarchy of angels too. Frankly, I'm making this up right here because I've never read about a hierarchy of angels. At the top there are the archangels, and we know the names of 7 of them – Michael; Gabriel; Raphael; Uriel; Selaphiel; Raguel and Barachiel. All their names end in -el, one of the way that Jewish people write the name of God. It's short for "Elohim."

There are the guardian angels – in popular thought their job is to care for individual people. Especially children.

There are cherubs – rather chubby angels who look as though they are 3 or 4 years old. Their job seems to be to look cute.

And there are herald-angels whose job is to announce whatever it is that God wants to have announced. Their message was always important. The nearest we have to them these days are the newsreaders on radio and TV, who announce what their bosses want to have announced.

We are most familiar with herald-angels. Every Christmas we hear about how they did their job over the hills at Bethlehem and gave the shepherds a right proper scare. The herald-angels' announcement wasn't only for the shepherds – it was for the whole world. At our service tonight we've majored on the herald-angels. Look back at the carols we have sung so well ... *The First Nowell the angels did say... Hark! The herald-angels sing ...* Our third Bible Reading was about the angels.

And the message they announced? "Peace on earth among people with whom God is pleased." (Luke 2:14). Have you ever wondered what has happened to that message from the herald-angels? When we look at the world, we see little evidence of "peace on earth." Wars ... terrorism ... civil disobedience ... domestic violence ... damaging personal relationships. It would be so easy to become jaundiced about "peace on earth." Where is it? What ever happened to it? Is it a joke?

Peace on earth. We have to pray so diligently for diplomats, for national leaders, for their advisers and helpers. The world is a big place, and the effort and wisdom to achieve peace all over the world seems to be a mere pipe dream. It can be done only with enormous co-operation from all sides, and a willingness to let go some closely-held desires.

But the herald-angels were also announcing their news to a small group of individuals. We don't know how many shepherds there were out of the hillside. That night. But let's estimate that here are 80 or 90 people here in St Matthews at the moment. And the news is announced to us again this year as it is every year ... "Peace on earth." It's easy to be so overwhelmed with the big picture of world peace that we can overlook the intimate picture of personal peace and family peace.

I can't bring peace to Afghanistan or to Myanmar or to anywhere else where war and violence are so obvious. But I can do things to bring peace to my home ... peace to my family ... peace to my small areas of influence. I can make up my mind that, as much as it depends on me, there will be peace in my miniscule piece of earth at this Christmas. To my family I can bring peace by the way I speak to them and relate to them as I spend time with them later today ... peace on earth. To my neighbours I can bring peace by the way I relate to them and react to them this Christmas ... peace on earth. To my work colleagues I can bring peace by the way I reveal my expectations of them and cope with their idiosyncrasies ... peace on earth.

And here's an amazing thing ... as I do this ... as you do this ... as we do this in the 60 or so homes represented here at St Matthew's tonight, we will have started a revolution for peace ... and that is one of the greatest gifts we can give to others this Christmas ... peace in our piece of earth.

And here's the other amazing thing ... as we live and work for peace, and show others the sheer beauty of peace this Christmas, we become herald-angels! God wants us to announce that peace is possible if we work at it in our small patch. So when we sing, "Hark! The herald-angels sing ... Peace on earth and mercy mild..." we're singing about ourselves.

Peace on earth ... your gift to those you love this Christmas.

Peace on earth ... your message by the way you live and speak this Christmas.

Peace on earth ... the herald-angels' song ... our song too this Christmas. (883)