

In the
Company
of
Angels



Advent
Devotional



2025



Dear Church,

When I first heard that your traditional practice at this church was to write your own Advent Devotional, every Advent season, I remember thinking that it was quite an ambitious commitment.

Then I started reading the entries as they came in and it became quite clear why this is such a beloved and honored tradition. There is so much wisdom here amongst our people, and what a better way to share one another's wisdom than to publish a regular collection of testimonies of faith.

So this year, I threw a bit of a curveball by asking contributors to write on only a single prompt, on a topic that is very personal, and which would require some vulnerability to share. I didn't propose this devotional because it would be challenging, I proposed it because it is *life-giving* to hear one another's unexplainable stories of faith - which are so much more prevalent than we know.

So every devotional you will find in this booklet came from the following prompt: *"...we want to hear about your experiences with the company of angels. How does God show up in your life, especially around the Christmas season?...share about a time in your life when you were given the gift of any kind of Holy encounter..."*

If we can't share about angelic and Holy encounters in church, then there is no safe place at all. The Lord does indeed work in mysterious ways, and it is good to be reminded again.

I am so grateful for all of those who took a risk and decided to share their testimony with the congregation. And, grateful for those using this devotional as part of your spiritual practices this season. And, most of all, I am grateful to be doing ministry here with you.

In Christ,
Pastor Adam

Sunday, November 30th

What is an angel?

Would you know if you encountered one?

Would you be frightened, encouraged, overjoyed, or overwhelmed?

What would you tell, or ask of, an angel?

I hadn't given the subject much thought until I was recently asked to. As a young Catholic boy I was taught that angels announced Jesus' conception, birth, and resurrection, but little else about them. I eventually disregarded my Catholic faith, but the urge to seek God finally led me to the Disciples, kindling a desire to interpret Jesus' teachings myself, with guidance from friends. So far I've read the New Testament and a few books of the Old Testament. Angels are usually presented as messengers of God, but from the third person perspective. I'm often left wondering if the people in these stories realized they were in the company of an angel. Would it have mattered? Should it have mattered?

Consider Hebrews 13:1 (from the English Standard Version): "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Some say respect must be earned. Since childhood I've been taught and continue to believe the opposite: respect must be given unconditionally until one has proven unworthy, and then as a last resort. If angels are worthy of divine adoration by their mere existence, so surely is our human family. All of us are God's children, made in His image.

Have I been in the company of angels? Have you? Until we know better, let's assume we're always in the company of angels. When I'm with you, my fellow worshippers, it certainly feels that way.

Chris Carrico

Monday, December 1st

I was alone in my room, praying. Not eloquent prayers—just the ragged kind where you finally stop bargaining and say, "Okay, God. Your will, not mine."

The air shifted.

I don't know how else to say it. The room felt charged, like right before lightning strikes. My skin prickled. Then this trembling started in my chest and spread through my whole body—not like shivering from cold, but like my body recognized something my mind couldn't name yet.

Presence.

Something vast was there with me. I couldn't see it, but I felt it the way you feel someone standing behind you in a dark room. Only this wasn't frightening. It was... holy. Overwhelmingly holy. The kind of presence that makes you understand why angels always say "Don't be afraid" first—because holiness is terrifying and beautiful at once.

Heat moved through me. Not burning, but cleansing. Like it was finding every shadowed corner where I'd hidden shame or fear and flooding it with light. I was crying without knowing why. My hands were shaking.

And then—peace. The kind I'd been chasing my whole life without ever catching. It didn't seep in gradually; it crashed through me like a wave.

Heaven didn't break down my door. It waited until I opened it. And when I did, love walked in.

Heaven never intrudes—it responds to invitation. Where might God be waiting for your yes this Advent?

Michele Bradley

Tuesday, December 2nd

My father was a minister, mostly in small churches in small communities, in Iowa. As such, he had to be a jack of all trades and was involved in everything at the church and in the community. At community events he was called upon to open the event with a prayer, to say grace, to mediate disputes, and to give the benediction.

He was a commencement speaker, he hung out at the post office gossiping with the locals, and he drove a school bus route. At church, he delivered sermons, ministered to the sick, conducted too many funerals to keep track of, conducted countless meetings, was the choir director, sang solos, taught catechism, and he was the youth leader. He was the self-appointed softball pitcher for both teams at young fellowship outings. He was in the center of everything.

One particular small community, a community that was so small that it had no stop lights on its one block main street, was serviced by a volunteer fire department. The volunteers would be called, day or night, by a siren attached to the local water tower. The water tower was virtually in our backyard and the fire station was down the hill and two blocks away.

No matter what time of the day, if the siren blew, my father would rush out and position himself on the corner to direct traffic, making sure the volunteers got to the station safely. If the fire truck happened to come up the hill en route to the fire, he made sure it got through the intersection safely. If it was during the night, he often directed traffic with his clothes pulled on over his pajamas. There was never an accident at this corner when my father was on duty. My family eventually moved from that community, I became an adult and moved to a different state, and my father passed away in April of 1997.

In November of 1997, we lost our two beloved cats within two weeks of each other. They were 14 years old and had each succumbed to different diseases. It surprised me how intensely I grieved over their loss, how much I missed them when they were not there to greet me at the door, and when my lap was empty as I watched television.

During that first week, more than a few tears were shed in their memory. Then the dream came. In my dream my father was sitting. On the floor beside him were our precious Pooky and Cassie. I awoke understanding that like my father, Pooky and Cassie were now in a better place and no longer suffering from the pain of their diseases.

Sandy Surface

On September 11, 2001, I was delayed leaving for work, waiting for a service person to arrive at my home. To occupy myself, while waiting, I switched on the Today Show. At first I thought they were advertising for some new movie, but very quickly I realized that I was watching a live report and that the first tower had been hit in New York City.

The service man arrived and we watched in horror when the second tower was hit, as well as the Pentagon. I had to go to work, but like many offices, everyone was distressed and there were many radios and televisions tuned in to the continuing horror story. Not much work got done that day. The following Friday, I attended a noon prayer service for the casualties of the event, their families, and for all of us that were trying to make sense out of a world turned momentarily upside down.

The tone of the prayer service stayed with me as I returned to work. As I walked up the stairs and headed for my desk, I suddenly had a clear image of my father. I had not been thinking of him that day, or even in the days following September 11, so it was surprising when his image came to me out of the blue. But, there he was, and he was directing the traffic and flow of all those new souls who were transcended to heaven. I first had to chuckle, because it was so like him to rush to direct traffic, but then I felt a great peace because I knew that all those souls were being greeted in heaven by someone who cared.

What I believe, after these two experiences, is that our journey does not end here on earth. Our talents will be utilized when we pass on to a new life.

Sandy Surface

Wednesday, December 3rd

I've never had an angelic encounter with wings, halos, or anyone popping up with a "fear not" at inconvenient hours. Honestly, if an angel ever did appear in my living room, I'd probably throw a pillow at it out of pure reflex. But I have had moments when something holy showed up quietly and caught me off guard.

It happened once on a night when I was running on fumes; one of those stretches when life feels like it's piling bricks on your shoulders just to see how many you can hold. I was driving home, exhausted, hungry, and dangerously close to Googling "can a human hibernate?" Everything felt heavy, inside and out.

And then - no visions, no spotlight - just a sudden warmth, a steadying presence that settled somewhere between my ribs. It felt like someone reached into the chaos and said, "Hey. Breathe. You're not doing this alone." The kind of holy nudge that doesn't fix anything, but somehow makes it possible to pull into the driveway without crying into the steering wheel.

The older I get, the more I think angels don't always show up with feathers; sometimes they arrive as an unexpected kindness, a quiet peace, or that moment when your spirit unclenches just enough to remember you're held. The Holy Spirit has a habit of sneaking in sideways like that: less "heavenly messenger," more "divine emotional support animal."

Advent reminds us that God's messengers come in all forms. Sometimes they visit Mary with world-altering news, and sometimes they sit beside you in the car on a Tuesday night, whispering, "You're gonna make it, kid." No trumpets, no drama; just presence.

So this season, I'm paying attention to the subtle stuff: the warmth, the sigh of relief, the unexpected courage to keep going. If that's not being in the company of angels, I don't know what is.

Pastor Mason Fitch

Thursday, December 4th

The Holy Spirit Is the Holy Communicator!

John 14:16-17

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

In the Responders class, we sometimes discuss how we know God is talking to us. As a nurse scientist, I like hard data and solid proof, so I am a bit of a skeptic about what we attribute to God. However, our discussions recently turned into a big ah-ha moment for me: Is the Holy Spirit God's communication agent? Not just a Spirit who helps us discern right or wrong, but a Spirit who helps us have difficult conversations, provides support for the grieving, and gifts us with wisdom in making decisions.

This must be what happens intuitively between the brain and the heart.

The message from God comes from your core, is intuitive, and arises out of the thoughts appearing in our brains. What a gift, busy all day long, popping into the mind with ideas, reminding us of something we need to do.

Lord, help us notice when you are working with us. Help us listen for your voice (in whatever form) and heed your advice. Amen.

Becky Sisk

Friday, December 5th

Years ago I read a sampler that in blue crossed stitch said, “Coincidence is when God chooses to act anonymously.”

I have seen all kinds of interesting and coincidental happenings. Were these God events or something else? In John 12:27-32, we are told of God speaking from Heaven. Some heard the voice of an angel and others thought it had merely thundered. Perhaps, life is designed to create interpretative options.

One time I dropped in unannounced to see my cousin at his one person auto repair shop in Claremore, OK. We hadn't seen each other in years.

As I pulled into the place, there were three customers, a delivery man and the phone was ringing. I thought my timing awful as I stood there waiting to get his attention. Then his looking up seemed to clear the room and hush the phone. We visited for an hour and a half without interruption. We were both starving for the connection. Ours had been a large family and now only a few remained. The time was magical and healing. He, a Vietnam Marine Vet, absolved my guilt for not serving. I brought him up to date on others and encouraged him. As I got up to leave, customers started coming and the phone began ringing.

Coincidence? For us it was sacred time and some only heard it thunder.

Pray now that God uses this Advent to draw us closer to God's self and to each other.

Randy Williams

Saturday, December 6th

My Angel

Being asked to think of an angel encounter brought back a great memory from 1960. Isn't it interesting how we can remember something from so long ago, and yet forget why we went to the kitchen. Well obviously, that long ago incident had a strong impact on our life.

It was the night my hometown church put on the Christmas play centered around the birth of Christ. Playing the part of a shepherd I got to wear my bathrobe and a towel wrapped around my head. We shepherds were look'n' good. But what hit me the most was seeing my dad playing the part of Gabriel. My dad was a very quiet, behind the scenes kind of guy. So, I was taken aback seeing him in a white robe, halo, and wings. I was at a very impressionable age and it has stayed with me until today.

He delivered those famous lines with such conviction:

Luke 2:8-14

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.

My dad passed away in 2005, and is my angel yet today.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the encounters we've had with those that have influenced our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Larry Weber

Sunday, December 7th

In May of 1980, my dad had open heart surgery. He recovered rather quickly, and was ready to be out and about. However, his doctor wouldn't let him! So some friends started picking him up every Friday morning and took him garage "sale-ing". He had a wonderful time, found some treasures and was hooked for life! When my parents moved to Foxwood Springs, he chaired the annual rummage sale there for many years.

This experience with garage sales turned into something rather fun for the family. Every year on December 26th, the extended family gathered to celebrate Christmas. After everyone was done sharing and opening gifts, dad would stand up and announce that we weren't done. He proceeded to hand out "garage sale treasures". And he wrapped them all in the Wall Street Journal – to give them class! We all loved this and looked forward every year to our garage sale treasures.

On November 11, 2004 dad passed to life in the spirit. We all had a hard time with this...partly because the holidays were coming. We made it through Thanksgiving and the holiday parties and programs. And then came family Christmas.

We had a great time opening gifts and enjoying each other. When we had opened all the gifts, no one moved. We knew that what was supposed to happen wasn't going to happen that year. We didn't know how to move on. Then, all of a sudden, my nephew (Daniel B. Merrick, IV) appeared in the room wearing dad's red cardigan and announced that it was time for garage sale treasures. We sat in stunned silence. And then we cheered and clapped and cried and everything was so much better.

My angel that year was a teenage boy who stepped up to remind us that dad lives in each of us. Daniel continues to share garage sale treasures and we continue to love the tradition.

Loving God, open our eyes so that we can see the angels around us who share God's love in so many way. Amen.



Linda Williams

Monday, December 8th

There are moments in prayer when Heaven feels close—and then there are moments when it breaks through.

It starts with a hum. A vibration I feel in my chest before I hear it. When we pray together, something gathers. The air gets thick with it. You can feel the shift when hearts align, when everyone stops performing and starts opening.

Then the energy rises. Not metaphorically—actually rises. My hands get hot. My whole body starts trembling with it. It's like standing too close to something powerful and pure, something you can't contain even if you tried.

And then—the release. A blast of light that doesn't just fill the room but shoots out beyond it, carrying every prayer we couldn't find words for. It's not loud, but you feel the force of it. Like Heaven finally answering every cry we've held onto for too long.

I've felt it enough times now to know it's real. That kind of power doesn't come from trying harder or praying louder. It comes when we stop posturing and start surrendering. When we open our hands and say, "Use me."

This Advent, I'm remembering that light isn't just a pretty word we use in church. It's real. It's alive. And when we're willing to become vessels for it, when we let it move through us without holding back—nothing can stand against it. Not fear. Not darkness. Not despair.

When you pray, do you hold back—or are you willing to become a vessel for the light that heals the world?

Michele Bradley

Tuesday, December 9th

My father, Edgar, was reflecting back in his ninth decade of life when it came to him that he had been spared often enough from death that it surely was not a long almost continuous string of coincidences.

The first time was in 1920 when he was seven years old. He walked alone from the family farm 1.5 miles to see the marvelous new concrete highway (Route 9) that stretched from Bloomington to Pekin. When he got there his 7 year old mind was frozen by the sight of a long gypsy caravan, huge boxed in wagons pulled by teams of mules. They had stopped because the weather was threatening. A gnarled old gypsy woman popped out the back of the closest wagon, swooped young Edgar up in her arms, and ran him up into the back of her wagon. She hurriedly slammed the back door closed. As soon as his eyes adjusted to the darkness Edgar saw a big black pot boiling on a steel wood stove.

His immediate thought was that a witch had captured him and was about to boil him for food. No sooner had that thought entered his mind when a tornado hit the heavy wagon and laid it on its side. The boiling water spilled scalding Edgar's legs. He almost passed out from the pain. When the storm passed the small elderly woman carried 7 year old Edgar the mile and a half to the Sinn Farm where the same tornado narrowly missed the Sinn house but destroyed the big wooden fully loaded corn crib building. Not a single piece of that corn crib nor even a kernel from 2000 bushels of corn was ever found in that neighborhood.

Edgar was at the time too young to appreciate his miraculous rescue from that tornado but his mother, Sophie, wasn't. She had five of Edgar's 12 siblings in the house that day. She knew which direction Edgar had gone so when the tornado hit the farm she immediately sensed that Edgar was in very grave danger. When she saw the old gypsy woman struggling as she carried Edgar across the fields she was tremendously relieved. His siblings did not run out to help the old gypsy because they were frightened of her. But she eventually lifted Edgar into the arms of a very grateful Sophie. 84 years later Edgar realized that not all angels have wings, and some are not even pretty. But as Psalm 91 v.12 says, "they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

The next angel Edgar met did have wings. He was a Messerschmidt pilot strafing Edgar and his men in a box canyon below Monte Cassino. But that's a story for another day.

Dave Sinn

Wednesday, December 10th

Just three years ago, I had the privilege of directing my first musical for Penguin Players, a program of The Penguin Project. Artists with disabilities are paired with peer mentors who work together from audition day all the way through the final curtain call to put on some of the most entertaining shows in community theater. I chose to direct *The Addams Family* because I knew the kooky, quirky show would bring out the individuality in all of us.

The story centers on the Addams family and their adventures in love. Wednesday Addams is secretly engaged to a boy from a family completely unlike her own, and in order for their families to find common ground, she calls upon her ancestors to point everyone in the right direction.

These ancestors function like a Greek chorus, appearing in picture frames, peeking around furniture, and even steering an arrow from Wednesday's bow straight into an apple perched on her fiancé's head in a show of radical trust between them. Their job is clear: help love win. In our production, this chorus was made up of artists with disabilities and their mentors, side-by-side, grinning from ear to ear at every laugh from the audience and every triumphant final pose.

Opening night was a night I'll never forget. As a first-time director, I was just as overwhelmed, excited, and nervous as my cast. Despite the usual opening-night flukes and spooks, they left everything on that stage. And my ensemble of ancestors radiated a familiar "knowing" that love would win today.

After the traditional "Don't Stop Believin'" dance performed at the end of every Penguin show across the country, the audience erupted. The lights came up, and the cast melted into the auditorium to greet their families, hugging and shrieking with pride.

If the Holy Spirit moves among us, I'm convinced it was there, insisting that love would win that night, making space for overflowing confidence, unrestrained joy, and the unmistakably sacred bond of a community working toward something so good.

Katie Fitch

Thursday, December 11th

My Train Ride with an Angel

Many years ago when we were living in Bloomington, I received a call from my brother that my father had accidentally bumped into our mother in his cart resulting in a broken leg. Dad suffered a major stroke several years earlier, which disabled him in many ways, but did not affect his confidence that no matter what happened, he would determine what needed to be done. Dad ordered my brother to call me so that I could take care of whatever needed to be done. So I left my life and responsibilities to head down for St. Louis where my parents lived.

I don't remember too many details about that week, which is probably a blessing. Suffice it to say that living within the bosom of my birth family for a week under these circumstances was quite a bit beyond stressful. I left a very demanding job. I was working on my dissertation which looked into problem-solving expertise of principals. The work was interesting, but kept me preoccupied after school. I interviewed incredible problem-solvers as well as some on another level of expertise. Principal interviews were coded on levels of problem solvers - expert, typical, and novice. Problems were sorted as either well-structured or ill-structured problems. Ill-structured problems gather at all schools daily and require problem solvers to consider new elements of the problem to determine a suitable solution. Ill structured problems require a very sophisticated level of knowledge about a particular subject(s) and problems involving people tend to fall into the ill-structured category...that week in St. Louis dealing with Mother's injuries and Dad's insistence that he and only he knew what action should be taken.

My angel encounter happened on a train back to Bloomington. Waiting for the train to arrive, I started to consciously ruminate on what needed to be done on my return and what hadn't been done in my absence. I desperately needed to return to my life. I was deep into my own thoughts when two nuns arrived with an older woman in tow. She looked very sad. Her companions said their goodbyes. A large group of boisterous young men or boys arrived in the waiting lounge which seemed to overwhelm the old woman. I sensed she could use company, so I crossed over and sat next to her. She told me she was going to Springfield. We agreed sit together on the train.

Jenny Tripses

We shared our stories on the ride. She and her physician husband immigrated to St. Louis from an Eastern European country. Because his medical training didn't match American licensure requirements, he worked at a lesser level in the medical field. Their life together was interesting and fulfilling. He recently passed away and she was traveling to Springfield to live in a religious community there. As we talked, she reached into her open bag to show me some kind of scarf that was special to her. As she pulled it out of her bag, an amazing fragrance filled the air between us. It wasn't perfume or incense, but whatever it was the fragrance was very appealing. I asked her if she smelled it as well. She did, but she was as puzzled as I about its origins. Together we marveled our shared experience with the fabric she drew out of her bag. All too soon, the train arrived in the Springfield train station. We parted expressing our gratitude for the time together. I watched out the window as several nuns gathered around her on the platform.

I have no rational, scientific explanation for the aroma both of us experienced as she pulled the fabric or scarf or whatever out of her bag. What I do know is that each of us desperately needed an angel to look over us during our journey. I have to believe that is exactly what happened to us between St. Louis and Springfield.

Jenny Tripses

Friday, December 12th

On December 27, 2024 my daughter, son-in-law, and grandpup, two humans and a canine I love very much, dropped me off at Denver International after spending a lovely Christmas week together. We did our always emotional farewells at the curb. I checked my bag curbside and headed into what I knew would be a 45-60 minute wait in just the Security line. It's Denver; it's post Christmas; I've done this before.

As I walked and walked, anticipating the end of the Security line, which exceeded the confines of the enormous security area, I encountered a compact Hispanic man with a blue airport wheelchair approaching from the opposite direction. (I'm going to call my new acquaintance Jorge.) "You are flying out?" Jorge asked.

"Yes, I'm just finding the end of the line," I explained.

Jorge: Sit down. Give me your bag. I take you to your gate.

Me: Oh, no, I'm fine. I can walk and stand with no difficulty.

Jorge: No. It is too long, too far. I take you.

Me (thinking): I know I'm sad, but how old, how infirm am I looking?

After more fervent denial of my need, I capitulate with great chagrin. Jorge flies me through Security, passed all these folks standing in the snaking lines. I feel like a fraud and try to look acceptably frail. I'm wheeled onto the elevator and onto the train that takes us to my terminal, where Jorge asks if I can proceed on my own to my gate. Yes. Yes, I can. I embarrass Jorge with a big hug and a big tip. I am still utterly bemused by this encounter. What. Just. Happened?

In retrospect, I'm pretty sure Jorge was an angel. I wasn't looking for him, but he was looking for me and was very insistent. You could say we "wrestled".....and both of us won!

Thank you, Father God, for this late Christmas gift last year and for all the gifts, great and small, all year long. Amen.

*We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.
Proverbs 16:9 (wink, wink)*

Kathy Fenton

Saturday, December 13th

I grew up believing in guardian angels. I know I've had them watching over me. Let me tell you about a few of those times.

It was just prior to Christmas when I was seven years old. My mother & I were waiting for my dad to get home from work, so we could leave on vacation. While waiting, I got a terrible pain in my abdomen. My appendix had ruptured & needed to be removed. If it had happened while we were on the road, the result could've been much worse.

At around age 30, I was about to drive down Forest Park Dr. It was snowing. As I stepped on the brake to turn off Prospect, I had no brakes! Miraculously I made it to the bottom & was able to stop. I knew an angel was on duty keeping me safe.

Six years ago, I received a notice that I was due for my annual mammogram. I decided to take care of it immediately to get it over. I was shocked when some cancer cells were found. Because it was caught so early, I only needed radiation & not chemo. Once again, my guardian angels let their presence be known. I am absolutely confident that throughout my life angels have protected, guided, & directed me. When I pray, I thank God for His angels that have watched over me.

Kate Spielman

Sunday, December 14th

By definition, an angel is a spiritual being believed to act as an attendant, agent or messenger of God. An angel is conventionally represented in human form with wings and a long robe.

As a child, when I was afraid of the dark at bedtime, my mother reassured me that angels were at the four corners of my bed watching over me. This was a great comfort to me as I mentally pictured four swirling bed posts, even though my bed did not have bed posts, with angels holding onto each post with their loving gaze upon me.

When I asked my mother how she knew about angels, she told me a true story edited for my age. As I grew older, the details of this event became more real and deeply moving. My mother, her siblings and her parents grew up on a farm. At the age of 12, my mother experienced a great loss. Her 16 year old brother, while playing with his friends in a nearby barn, jumped from the hayloft and was impaled by a pitchfork. His friends, trying to cover up the accident, delayed the urgency of seeking medical treatment. Eventually he was taken to a hospital several miles away. My grandparents and my mother's siblings were devastated! On the third day following the accident, my mother's brother asked my grandmother, his mother, if he was going to die. My grandmother replied that she didn't know. She must have summoned God for help and strength. She advised her horribly injured son to fold his hands and pray, "Thy will be done." After folding his hands he prayed those words. Moments later her son spoke softly and described in detail angels coming towards and for him. He began to slowly count the angels as his siblings and parents surrounded his hospital bed. He counted 22 angels, closed his eyes and peacefully passed from his earthly home to his forever Heavenly home prepared for him by God.

Even though his life, though very short, the revelation and proof of the true presence of angels comforted my 12 year old mother. It has also amazed and comforted me all my life during times of fear, uncertainty and turmoil.

When the shepherds witnessed the angels filling the sky and announcing the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior, they were amazed! I take comfort that the angels recorded in the Bible are the angels my mother's brother experienced. There is an undeniable beauty in both of these heavenly angelic encounters! We can experience the wonder of the birth of Jesus because of the angelic triumphant pronouncement over 2000 years ago!

Dear God, We give thanks to you for the presence of angels, Your heavenly messengers and protectors to us in our earthly realm. The gift of angels gives us a glimpse of the amazing beauty of the Heavenly World that awaits us and God's great and unending love for us! Thank you for sending us your Son, our Savior through the birth of Jesus, a tiny baby! Let us always be amazed by the presence of angels and Jesus in our lives! Amen.

Chere Peters

Monday, December 15th

The word “angel” comes from the Greek word aggelos, which means “messenger.” The Torah defines an angel as “malich,” or a messenger of God. All the Holy Scriptures refer to angels. Whether you envision them as human spirits, enlightened souls, or simply imagine them as a sudden feeling of God’s presence for guidance and inspiration.

You may be used to the traditional depiction of angels with wings and harps...but the real angels, those who reveal the angelic qualities of the spirit, walk among us and help guide us through life. To find “angels” in your midst, you can look for people who demonstrate kindness and compassion, reflecting spiritual qualities. I am sure we have all, at one time or another, told someone “you are an angel!”

Several years ago I was volunteering at a soup kitchen. Toward the end of the afternoon, as we were cleaning up, a man with a big toothless smile approached me. He said that he could tell I was a good person because my smile reached my eyes. He then told me that I had the most beautiful hair...“it looks so soft...could I touch it?”

Now, I need to tell you that this man was in dire need of a bath and reeked of alcohol. There was no way I wanted this man to invade my space, much less touch my hair. But, not wanting to be rude, I allowed it. But...then he asked me if he could give me a hug! I most definitely did not want to hug this man!!! But, as he put his arms around me and I, in turn, hugged him...it felt like a sacrament! Tears unwillingly sprung from my eyes and I immediately experienced an overwhelming sense of peace and love that felt divine. I think I just hugged an Angel!

God’s intervention is manifested by each one of us, for each one of us. If we live a life centered on love towards others it can lead to an intuition guided by wisdom, as angelic wisdom flows through us. May we be guided by the angels that God has implanted among us.

And remember Hebrews 13:2, which says, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Connie Sinn

Tuesday, December 16th

*For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.
Psalm 91:11*

The Bible reports the activities of angels from the Genesis to Revelation. Popular culture identifies angels as winged metaphysical beings watching over us. Or in the case of Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life*, someone striving to become a winged metaphysical being. I can't say I've directly experienced an encounter with an angel, at least not one that I recognize, but I know I've been blessed and lucky throughout my life. There are many times I think back and go, "man, I'm lucky I didn't get hurt" or "I'm lucky I didn't get caught".

There is another perspective on angels that I can say I recognize, the everyday angel. These are the people doing God's work, serving food in a refugee camp, working with inner city kids to show them a path out of poverty, or healthcare workers caring for people at low points in their lives.

One person who stands out to me is Rae, the nurse on duty when Laura was pregnant with our son Jake. This wasn't a low point in our lives, but it was a stressful point. Laura was due any day and she thought her water broke. It wasn't an obvious water breaking, but she knew. We went to the hospital and the doctor examined her and said everything was fine and we should go home. We went home but Laura knew something wasn't right. After a few hours at home, we decided to go back to the hospital. Explaining the situation to Rae our nurse, she did a quick test and declared, yes your water broke and you are staying here. Later that day Laura delivered a healthy baby boy.

Rae was doing her job but to us she was an angel. She listened to our concerns and took us seriously, something the doctor did not do. She put us at ease with humor and compassion. She is what I would call an everyday angel.

Ever-loving God, we thank you for the angels in our midst, the ones we see and the ones we don't see. Help us recognize and be thankful for those times when we encounter angels. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

Mike Buckley

Wednesday, December 17th

I've learned to recognize the shift. One moment I'm praying with words, effort, intention. The next, all of that falls away. Something greater takes over.

You can't force it. Only allow it.

For me, it starts with a sensation—like warmth spreading through my chest, then my arms, then everywhere. My breathing changes. Deepens. Sometimes my hands start moving on their own, lifted in a gesture I didn't plan. It's like my body knows something my mind is just catching up to.

I used to fight it. Thought I needed to stay in control, stay coherent. But I've learned that this is what surrender actually feels like—letting go so completely that God can use even my breath, even my trembling hands, as instruments.

In those moments, I'm not doing prayer anymore. I am the prayer. The light moves through me to places I didn't even know were dark. Old wounds. Buried shame. The parts of myself I'd written off as unreachable. And somehow, in that flow, they start to heal.

But here's the thing: it only happens by invitation. God never barges in. The angels wait at the threshold until the heart says yes. When we finally open the door—really open it—the light rushes in to fill the space we made.

This Advent, I'm remembering: I'm not the source of the light. Just the channel. And when I stop trying to generate it myself and simply let it move through me, something shifts. The same divine power that entered the world through Christ becomes alive in me—healing, radiant, free.

Where in your life is God asking you to stop striving and simply let the light move through you?

Michele Bradley

Thursday, December 18th

Angel on Earth

The term “better angels of our nature” was first used by Abraham Lincoln in his inaugural address in 1861. Better Angels suggests that within all of us are the angel like qualities of empathy, generosity, love, trust and selflessness. I believe that such people exist and I call them my Angels on earth. Those few people whose “better angel” qualities made life long changes in my life.

My Littlest Angel

It was one week before my Christmas concert at my new school. I had accepted a new job just 3 years after receiving my music degree. Being a young band director I was focused on success and being included in the ranks of noted directors of the area. I had been blessed with a district that was financially solvent. The district was supportive and the number of kids participating in band grew quickly. This prompted the administration to approach me with an offer to buy new uniforms. Wow, how could I say no? We had received the new uniforms in the time to wear them at our Christmas concert. I had hounded the kids about wearing black socks and black dress shoes. I even had them bring them in and show me after millions of questions about what kind.

It was a week before the concert when one of my quiet little flute players bounced into my music room right off the bus all smiles carrying a shoe box. “I have my new shoes!” This was more than I had heard from her as she hardly ever talked. “I can have one Christmas present every year and this is what I got”, she said. She opened the box carefully and pulled back the tissue paper. In that special box, as if they were gold, laid black shiny dress shoes. I choked out, “they are beautiful”. As she left I realized I had been focused on appearances. I had not met my students where they were. I had assumed every family had money given the houses around the school. But I was wrong. Some students had little and lived down by the river. She had made a sacrifice that none of the other students had to make. The night of the concert she sat beaming. Even though we were a beginning band, the music that night was special. She was an angel on earth. Others made fun of her, but she always was kind, giving, humble, and sacrificed her time for her family. She was the student that changed my life and how I taught for the next plus 30 years. I learned to meet each student just as they were when they came through that door.

Cindy Bridges

Friday, December 19th



Angels of the Caribbean

I have always believed in angels, but as I vacationed in St. Maarten, I actually experienced them. I was on a cruise going through the Caribbean in 2019. One of our stops was the beautiful island of St. Maarten. I decided to take an excursion to Maho Beach.

Maho Beach was amazing! The water was a beautiful blue color. And it was warm! The planes flew right above your head because the airport was next to the beach. You could see the belly of each plane clearly!

I love the beach and water so much I just had to try it out. I travel alone and was on the beach with several people that day. As I walked into the ocean, enjoying the feel of the warm water and the sand, I suddenly felt the sand quickly giving away at my feet. I lost my footing and fell into the water and could not get up.

I started to panic. It was such a scary feeling, the loss of control. As I panicked, 2 people came along and pulled me out of the water. I don't know who they were or where they went but they were my angels that day.

Dear God, thank you for your watchful eye. Thank you for sending your angels to rescue me. Help us all to recognize angels in our lives. Amen.



Dana Powers

Saturday, December 20th

Angels are talked about in the Bible as messengers, protectors, prophets and more. Angels seem to always be positive, hope filled and peace seeking! I would say this is the truth based on my angelic encounter.

My true story starts with my Mom being very sick with cancer. She had gone through about 8 months of serious illness and treatments and was at the point where no more could be done medically for her. She was close to death and sleeping a lot.

I was with her constantly and was doing a lot of praying for peace and hope. She opened her eyes and motioned for me to come over to her. I went close to her face and she said "the angels are here". I asked her what she meant, mainly because I wasn't sure I heard her correctly. She said "the angels are here for me, I love you." And then she very peacefully closed her eyes and passed to heaven.

During the holidays when we think of our loved ones who are passed, let's try to think of them with the angels (I know that's where my Mom is) and that they are bringing all of us hope and peace and messages of God's love!!

Linda Rex

Sunday, December 21st

In my life there have been several distinct encounters with the Holy. Moments that I can think back on and still feel that breath, that wonder, that awe. I mean, come on, there is just something magical about the mess of a living room on Christmas morning. Or even the wonder of a scary storm that is prayed for by a 3rd grader and suddenly it is just a gentle rain. The Holy shows up in the unexpected more often than not.

I remember driving home from eating at Sugar with a friend on a rainy December Friday night and hearing *Christmas Makes Me Cry* sung by Matthew West and Mandisa for the first time. There was nothing overly special about the song but then they started on the 4th verse...

*I think of Mary and the virgin birth
And I'm amazed at how much God thinks we are worth
That He would send His only Son to die
And sometimes Christmas makes me cry*

And with those first two stanzas I was pulling over. 'Cause suddenly Christmas made me cry. Between rain and tears I couldn't see to drive. Talk about an encounter with the Holy. Suddenly this non-overly special song woke my soul up...and I cried

*Tears of thankfulness, tears of hope
I cried tears of joy at Christmas **because I knew**
There is peace on earth for every heart to find
And sometimes **Christmas makes me cry***

You never know when the Holy is going to show up and wake you up. That is why you have to start expecting miracles...not just hoping for them. Be ready. At this time of year the Holy is waiting around every corner. In the ringing of bells. In the sound of a silent night. The Holy is here!

Emily Williams

Monday, December 22nd

As I sat down and started to think about this year's advent devotional and the subject of "holy encounters" in our lives, it occurred to me that one event that really stood out and had a huge impact in my life was really a continuation of a series of events / conversations that occurred over a number of years with a very special person, Mary Jane West. In retrospect it clearly showed me that our Lord calls us individually, continually seeks us out, and places people and events in our lives that demonstrates his love for us. So it was with our encounter with Mary Jane and Randy. When we moved to Peoria, we first lived in the apartments next to the church. Growing up in a Disciples church it was easy to walk across the parking lot that first Sunday to First Christian. We sat next to Mary Jane and after the service was over, she welcomed us to FCC, introduced us to a number of young couples in our church and suddenly we felt like we belonged.

Fast forward almost 10 years. Things weren't going very well at work...the economy had ground to a halt and there didn't seem to be much of a future for me at Cat. I was beginning to wonder if I needed to start over with a different company, in a different place. Kind of out of the blue Mary Jane called me one day, told me about a retreat program called Cursillo offered by the Catholic church and encouraged me to try it. At first, I thought that was kind of odd, seeing as we were both protestants! But the more we talked about it the more I began to think that maybe the timing of this conversation wasn't just a random event...that maybe there was something in this Cursillo weekend I was supposed to hear. So, I agreed to go and spent a weekend with about 40 or so other men...essentially "reintroducing" us to the Christian faith and the love Christ Jesus has for each and every one of us! It was a remarkable weekend...one I'll never forget.

So, what does that have to do with an "angelic" encounter? During this weekend retreat I experienced what I think was my first "encounter" with the Holy Spirit. It was during an evening prayer session where we retreated to the cathedral for some personal time...to pray, reflect on the day's events, and to listen for God to speak to us. I think he did. I came to the retreat with questions about where my life was going and what I should do differently. I came away with the feeling that I was in God's hands, he had a plan for my life, and everything was really under His control. So don't worry about it...have some Faith! That's what I've been trying to do since then. Accept that God does have a plan for me...look for the positives in everything that happens...and trust that things will work out as He intends. In hind sight you can often see God's plan unfolding through the people you meet, the situations you go through (both good and bad) and the spiritual growth that happens as a result. And I'm convinced that Mary Jane West was part of God's plan for me!!

Roger Baker

Tuesday, December 23rd

Angels in the Bible deliver “good news of great joy” announcing that the Savior has been born. If I think of one word that most describes the Christmas story to me, it is “humble.” The news of great joy was announced to shepherds, lowly people. Jesus was born in a stable, in a manger. The angels, however, show us, remind us of the miraculousness, the divine, of our savior’s humble beginning.

When I think of my paternal grandparents, I also think humble. Christmases with my dad’s family were always low-keyed and full of love. Relaxed happiness in a small house filled with quiet conversations and great food. My grandparents came to Illinois, one from Kentucky and the other from Missouri in the 1920’s. They met at the Armington post office where my grandmother worked and they were married shortly thereafter.

I read a “family history” story about their wedding that told a tale of a noisy shivaree with wedding night pranks that included the short sheeting of their wedding bed. Inexpensive fun and love shown to them by town folk and friends. My grandparents were honest and down-to-earth with no pretensions of being better or living better than anyone else, lending credence to this story told to me by my grandma.

When my dad was a young boy, my grandfather worked at Keystone Steel and Wire. As Granddad was leaving work one day, he was struck by a car and dragged several feet. He was taken to the hospital where his left leg had to be amputated up to his hip. His condition was critical and he was not expected to live. The doctor told my grandma she could sit beside his bed as they waited to see if his condition might improve.

During the night, my grandma said she felt a presence, a luminous radiance, an angel in the room. My grandfather survived and when he woke told my grandmother that the angels came for him. He told her he wanted to go with them, but knew he had three small boys to raise.

I didn’t give much thought to how my grandparents must have struggled during this time of trauma recovery until years later while doing an ortho rotation in nursing school. As I’ve tried to describe, my grandparents were unassuming, kind and loving. I never knew them to give fluff to a story. I only heard of this event once while visiting my grandma, then a widow.

While I was growing up, my grandparents lived across the street from one of the most beautiful churches I have seen, Armington Christian Church. The stained glass windows there were and still do leave me with a feeling of awe and closeness to God. I feel very blessed to have had many Christmases in Armington. Many Christmases where I saw and felt the love of family “touched by angels.”

We thank you Lord for reminders of your greatness whether in the form of angels, the love of family, or the smile and kindness of others. Keep us humble, but not afraid to boldly share the story of your birth and and your message of peace, hope, and love for all through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Connie Julien

Christmas Eve

I have come to believe that there are thin places in the world. Places where the metaphysical distance between our world and the realm of heaven is so slight that we can feel heaven's warmth on our skin - even when the world is cold.

In my life, one of these thin places is the Community of the Great Commission - the Disciples campground in the Northern California region where I grew up. It is on these hallowed grounds that I met my to-be spouse and proposed to her - not in the same visit!

My spouse Michele and I met as counselors at the same Junior summer camp. We hit it off immediately, teasing being our early love language. As the week progressed, we just wanted to spend more and more time with each other. So, foolishly as young people sometimes do, we hatched a plan to sneak out of our cabins after the campers had gone to sleep and meet up at the campfire for more conversation...and such.

So the night came and campers were fast asleep, so we sat at the campfire watching the last embers flicker and smoke. We talked about what we were afraid of and what we hoped for. We talked about our favorite things and our detestables. We talked about God and our spiritual callings and strategized about how we might avoid such weighty responsibilities. And we talked about what we appreciated about the other - the kind of honesty that takes courage to share.

In a late pause in the conversation, after we had shared our hearts and felt the butterflies flutter, we shared something else - a kind of unexplainable experience.

What we saw felt more like a dream, but we were both wide awake. In that moment of stillness and vulnerable affection between us suddenly there came swooping in from the sky beyond what seemed like a wind - moving the branches of the pine trees encircling the firepit - but, yet we felt no breeze.

A translucent washing of pale white light settled itself then in the tree branches just beyond us across the firepit clearing, and then for only a few moments or so, there was the silhouette which looked like... well, angelic. There just isn't any other way to describe it.

I remember blinking a few times, just in case it was some optical issue of mine. But no amount of blinking or rubbing my eyes altered what I saw. And then after only moments of amazement, as suddenly as the vision had appeared, it was gone.

I realized at some point after it had gone that I was holding my breath, and so when I finally let it out, it was an audible exhale. Neither Michele nor I immediately spoke, and as I was considering asking if she had seen that too, she turned to me and asked, "Uh, did you see that too?" Yes, yes I had. We described what we experienced and it was a shared one, we remembered it the same way. It really happened.

Ten years later, I would propose to Michele at the same campground - just down the way from the firepit. And, as God as my witness, as I was spreading rose petals along the path I noticed the pine branches swaying and rustling as I walked, even without a lick of wind on that sunny summer afternoon. Angels are in the midst of us, pointing us towards our best choices - guiding us if we will have them.

Pastor Adam Bradley

Christmas Day

Being raised in a large Christian family, we were taught that as Christians, when we died, we would be joining our other family members in our Heavenly Home.

Recently, our family was faced with a very unexpected situation. One of our family members was in critical condition at the hospital. He was unresponsive and on a ventilator. His condition was not stable. He had expressed to his friends and family what his wishes were had his life ever come to this. As hard as it was, we wanted to respect his wishes. He was strong in his faith and knew that he would spend his eternal life in the presence of the Lord.

The nursing staff at the hospital were giving him excellent care throughout his stay. They allowed us to be at his bedside day and night. His first night there, his nurse had decided to stay over her long shift to continue to care for him. We had asked her if she minded if we could pray with him and she stepped right up to the bed and bowed her head with us as we prayed. When we finished, she told us she was leaving the next day for a mission trip for 2 weeks, continuing to spread her love for the Lord. Another nurse gave a letter to our family thanking us for allowing her to care for him during his last hours. The Lord sure does have a way of sending you angels when you need them.

Photography was his passion. Seeing the world through his eyes. He had just taken photos of a wedding the weekend before. Giving the couple photos to have for a lifetime. It was his way of spreading joy with others. He worked closely with his best friend on different photo projects. Going on photography excursions, conferences, or even just around town. That is what he found joy in.

As this has not been a joyful time for our family, I am reminded of the scripture passage "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints". We know that our cousin is with his sister, parents, and a multitude of family members. As we surrounded him, sharing happy memories, singing hymns and sharing a joyful noise with the Lord, reading passages, and showering him with love, he took his final breath. You could feel the presence of the Lord in the room. He was finally at peace. Resting in his Heavenly Home.

"Go Rest High on That Mountain"
"Angels We Have Heard on High"

Wishing you all a joyous and blessed holiday season!

Beth Reynolds

Merry
Christmas!

