



CHRISTMAS *Stories*

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GABRIEL'S *Story*

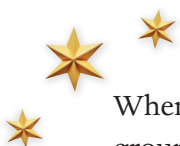


OF ALL THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN, I was the one who was given the privilege of announcing the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. I can't tell you how many angels there are, but when the apostle John caught a glimpse of us, he reported seeing more than a hundred million angels, and those are just the ones that he saw. Frankly, I've got more important things to do than try to count them, but I suspect that there are at least as many angels as there are people in the world.

People who become fascinated with angels have usually missed the point, which is that we are fascinated with God. The great privilege of my life is to stand in His presence, and to see how God's love flows between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and from them to us all.

Let me tell you about myself before I get into my story. Did you know that there are only two angels mentioned *by name* in the Bible? One is Michael the archangel, and the other is me—Gabriel. I was chosen as God's messenger, not once, but three times!

I was sent to the prophet Daniel. He had been given a vision, but he didn't understand it, and I was sent to help him make sense of it all.



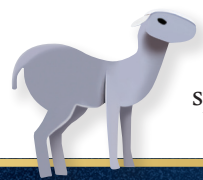
When I appeared to him, he was so devastated that he fell on the ground trembling, and it took him days to recover.

My second assignment was to visit Zechariah, a priest serving in the temple of God. My mission was to announce the birth of John the Baptist, and when I appeared to Zechariah, he too was gripped with fear. I told him what God would do, but he didn't believe it.

Well, you can't have spiritual leaders spreading unbelief, so the gift of speech was taken from him until the boy was born. And when his speech returned, he used it to praise and worship God.

My visits to Daniel and Zechariah had clearly terrified them, so when I was sent on a mission to a country girl in her early teens, my first instinct was to wonder, *Am I the right one for the job?*

"There is a young woman to whom you must give this message," I was told. "It is the most important announcement I have ever made. The future of the world hangs on it."



When I heard the message, I was the one who couldn't speak. I could hardly take it in. The truth is, I still can't.

I took down the details and off I went, not to Jerusalem, not to the temple, not to a daughter of Caiaphas the High Priest, but to a peasant girl in a despised little town called Nazareth. Why she was chosen, I cannot say. All I can tell you is that He has the right to choose.




A MEETING WITH MARY

The young woman's name was Mary, and she was a virgin, pledged to be married to a man called Joseph. Their marriage was planned, but it had not yet taken place.

When I appeared, I gave her my warmest greeting. "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

I don't know who was more afraid—she of what was happening, or me of how she might respond. What if she screamed and ran away? But it was obvious to me that she was a woman of faith, and she seemed to sense that I had come as a messenger from the Lord.

Seeing how much she was troubled I said, "Don't be afraid, Mary, you have found *favor* with God." The word *favor*



means “grace.” “You have been graced by God”—that’s what I told her.

Then I gave her the message: “You will be with child, and give birth to a Son,” I said. “And you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.”

I paused and wondered what she would say. It seemed as if time stood still, just as it does in eternity. Then she spoke: “How will this be,” she asked, “since I am a virgin?”

She hadn’t grasped what I was saying. She thought I meant that she and her future husband would have a son who would turn out to be one of the great figures of human history.

So I tried to explain. It wasn’t easy to find words to express the greatest mystery your world has ever known. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you,” I said. “And the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.”

How God could take human form and be born into the world as a helpless baby is beyond what even angels can understand. All I can tell you is what I told Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.”



God works through people who freely and gladly obey Him. He has a way of drawing our wills like a lover, but He does not force His will on anyone.


So Mary had a choice to make, and I trembled as I waited to hear what she would say. Then she spoke. “I am the Lord’s servant,” she said. “Let it be to me as you have said.”

JESUS

And so it was that nine months later, Jesus was born. A whole company of my colleagues appeared in the sky that night, praising God and announcing the good news to men and women.

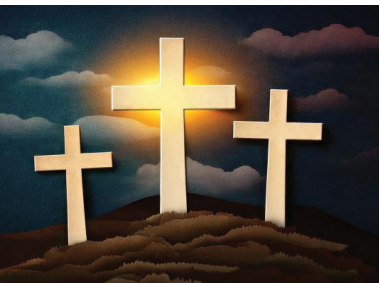


We marveled as we watched His life. He was everything God intended a person to be, and His ministry brought more good to the



world in three years than anything else we had seen in all of human history. That's why we could hardly believe it when we saw what happened next: You crucified him.

I'll never forget that day. We watched in horror as He was scourged and bound and led away. We waited for Him to call on us, but He never did. When He was nailed to the cross, we said to the Father: "Please, let us go and save Him!" But He held us back.



Human beings have done some terrible things, but this was the worst of all. God's judgment had to fall that day. And it did. But to our complete astonishment, it fell on Jesus! He absorbed God's judgment in His own body, on *your* behalf. He gave Himself as the sacrifice for *your* sins.

When He died, heaven fell silent.

It wasn't until the third day that we understood what God was doing. I will never forget that glorious morning. The corpse of

Jesus that had been laid in a sealed tomb was animated with His life. His human body was transformed and adapted for eternity.

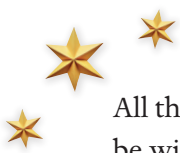


When the women came to the tomb looking for His body, another angel was sent to tell them, “He is risen!” After that, He appeared to His disciples many times, and then he ascended into heaven. You can imagine our joy in receiving Him back.

But your joy should be even greater than ours. Jesus didn’t die for angels. It wasn’t the nature of angels that He assumed when He came into the world. God became a man. He died and rose again for people like you.

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There’s a *man* in heaven, and His name is Jesus. He is there for you. He is the pioneer—the first of many men and women who will rejoice forever in the presence of God for all eternity.



All the talk up here now is about the day of His second coming. I will be with Him then, along with all who love and trust Him, and I hope that you will be there too.

A CELEBRATION IN HEAVEN

There are some things known to me that are hidden from you, and there are other things known to you that are hidden from me. Do you have any idea how privileged you are to have your sins forgiven, to be reconciled to God, and to have God's Spirit living in you?

I have never been lost, so I cannot know the joy of being found. I have never sinned, so I cannot imagine what it is like to be forgiven. The intimacy with God that is possible for you is staggering to me. You can experience the love of God in ways that I can never know.

But there are other things known to me that are hidden from you. You cannot imagine heaven or hell. You cannot begin to picture what Jesus has saved you from or what He has saved you for.



What's staggering to me is that so many humans give such little thought to their eternal future, living as if this

fleeting world was everything, totally unaware of the eternity that is just beyond your line of sight.

But I have to tell you that every time a sinner repents, there is a great celebration in heaven. God is for you and however far you may be from Him today, He wants you back.

That is why Jesus Christ came into the world. He came to seek and to save the lost, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Believe in Him and you will not be disappointed. Follow Him and He will lead you into greater joy than you have ever known.



PRAYER

Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world for us.

And thank you for reminding us today that Jesus is the greatest joy of heaven.

May He be our greatest joy too! Amen.

