

“The Age of Angels”
Christmas Eve, 2016

Think of an angel. Go ahead. Think of an angel in your mind. Got it? Are you thinking of an angel? How old is the angel? I have to tell you that my angel is eight. When she was about eight when my daughter Annie was sharing a room with her sister Kendall. It was our practice that I would sit on their bed and read to them every night before bed. And then I would kiss them good night saying, “Good night Kendall princess, and good night Annie angel.” And one night I made the mistake of calling Kendall by the nickname “angel.” Uh oh. Well, Annie let me know it, “No, Daddy, Im your angel.” And she is, still. Even though she's not eight any more but she's 28 and married, she's an angel still. How old is your angel, the one in your mind?

Maybe about five years old, appearing on stage, afraid to deliver her line, even though the line is “Fear not”, halo made of tinsel pipe cleaners slightly askew, cardboard wings attached with duct tape under her white sheet robe. Is that the angel you thought of? Those are the ones that I think of because I don't really have too much experience of the other kind. And who knows how old they are? How old were those angels in the Gospel stories, the ones who the kids dressed up as angels were telling us about, the angel that appeared to Mary and to Joseph and then to the shepherds in the fields? How old were they? No one knows. And who can tell really? Angels exist in God's time, not in ours, not according to our clocks and calendars. They see eternity in the blink of an eye. They are so far beyond us mortals who dwell in time and space that it barely bears contemplation, or does it?

The word angel comes from a Greek word “angelos” meaning “messenger.” Take away the fancy wings and halos and the statues in old cathedrals or the pictures in old stained glass, get rid of the shining robes and harps and what you have, in fact, is a message bearer, one who brings, who bears the word of God into the world. That's who came and spoke to Mary and Joseph and to the shepherds—messengers. Telling them each time to “fear not—something wonderful is about to happen.” That's what angels say. That's what they still say today if you can hear them.

But in order to hear them, we must remain open to the true mysteries of life and death and love, and not run and hide deep in the forest of the facts. These facts that we like to deal with that we make so much of are simply fine, as far as they go, simply fine for answering so many of our practical, everyday questions. But they are far too small, too narrow, and too limited in their scope alone to describe and deal with the totality of what we all experience as reality, as life within this multi-layered and mysterious creation.

In that powerfully perceptive drama *Saint Joan*, by George Bernard Shaw, the Dauphin questions Joan of Arc in petulant anger about the voices that she claims are guiding her. “Oh your voices, your voices. Why don't the voices come to me? I am king, not you.”

Joan responds: “They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it, but if you prayed from your heart and listening to the trilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.”

We have to listen to the voices, listen to the message. Because the voices still come to us. Even to you and me. And not from some ethereal being that dwells in eternity whose age cannot be reckoned.

These angel voices have ages. What is the age of angels? Well, how old are you? How old is the person next to you in the pew? How old is the child who waits at home? That's how old the angels are, as old as wisdom and as young as hope. The voice of the angels comes in the voice of our neighbor, in the cry of the stranger. The voice comes even in our own voice, whispering in our heart that same message: Don't be afraid. Something wonderful is about to happen. It's time.

This meditation was inspired by “How Old Were the Angels?” by Jan Sutch Pickard, and “Angels and Animals” by J. Barrie Shepherd.