

TFTD Advent 16: A scary angel



If you are a Doctor Who fan, you may have a very different reaction to the picture of the angel statue above to someone who has not seen the Blink episode of Doctor Who.

The Weeping Angels are, in my opinion, the scariest monsters in the revamped Doctor Who universe. They look like normal statues, but when no one is looking at them, they can move, and if they touch you they transport you back in time and live off the energy of the life not lived. That may not make any sense to you, but just trust me — it was a scary episode, and they are scary alien monsters!

Why am I talking about Doctor Who scary monsters in a thought-for-the-day on Angels in the Christmas story? Well, their scariness may have more to do with the Christmas angels than we first expect.

The cute children dressed as angels in the Nativity play or the little ornaments or tree decorations of pretty angels singing carols or praying don't really express the fear Mary, Zechariah or the Shepherds must have felt when the angels appeared to them.

How do I know they were scared? Because it says so-

In Luke's Gospel it says of Zechariah *"he was startled and was gripped with fear"*. Mary was *"troubled"* and the Shepherds were *terrified!* And the first words out of the angel's mouth is *"Do not be afraid"* — I think the angels knew how scary they were.

Angel means messenger, these angels had messages from God. The messages were "Good News". I put Good News in quotation marks because the messages were definitely good news for all people, *"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord... You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"* as the Angels told the shepherds.

But Mary had every right to feel troubled, she had to explain to Joseph, and the rest of her family how she was pregnant — I bet that wasn't an easy task, and even with Joseph onside I think she still got a few strange looks.

And Zechariah had to get his head around the fact that his wife, who we are told was barren and well along in years, would have a child. That isn't bad news but it is life-changing for both of them.

And the shepherds, who were outcasts were entrusted with the news that the Christ had been born. That is a responsibility they were definitely not expecting.

So the angels were scary and the message they gave was quite scary too.

However, though angels mean messenger they also are traditionally thought to show up when people are in trouble and need comforting. This is one of the key factors in the enduring idea of guardian angels. So I think these angels though scary and with a life-changing message also brought comfort. The comfort they brought was the knowledge that there was more out there than we can see. That God is working behind the scenes, he has a plan. Even though the part Mary, especially, had to play was scary and life-changing, she was in God's hands.

Angels are the messengers between the unseen world of God and our world. They move between the two giving us glimpses behind the curtain. That will always make them scary and meeting one will probably always be life-changing but having a glimpse of the reality we can't see, of God at work in history, I think would always be worth it.

And of course, these angels, in this story, had the good news that the ultimate messenger from God was born, the ultimate messenger between the unseen world of God and our world, the ultimate knowledge that there is more out there than we can see and that God has a plan — God's Son! Meeting him was life-changing for Mary and the Shepherds and is just as life-changing for us.

I, sadly, have never seen an angel — well, a supernatural one anyway. However, as it says in the letter to the Hebrews *"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it"* (Heb 13:2). The message of Christmas is always to love each other and to care for strangers, but the chance that we might have a life-changing scary meeting with an angel just gives us another incentive to do just that.

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