

# What happens when the angels go back to heaven?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I feel all good this thing is working that was the one thing I wasn't sure anyway before we look together at the passage of Shred let's pray God our Father as we come near to you we pray that you will most graciously come near to us that you will open your word to our hearts and minds and open our hearts and minds to your word in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Amen I imagine that most people are familiar with the feeling that often comes late on Christmas Day the feeling that comes late on Christmas Day the food is eaten the presents are open and there is a sense of empty context it's all over prepared for for months and it's gone in a flash even the decorations look a bit indeed and it has to be said this often is the experience of many creatures on the Sunday after Christmas the carol services are over the visitors have mostly gone and we're wondering what it's all about in other words we're wondering we use the words of verse 15 what happens when the angels have gone back to heaven that's our subject today what is left when the angels have gone back to heaven

I want to suggest everything is left we have the Saviour and we have the message about him that is what is left and I'll notice the two responses here in verse 17 the shepherds the shepherds explained the message and Mary treasured it in her heart and these surely are the twin responses to the message first of all to tell it to others and secondly to reflect on it deeply to allow it to shape our lives to allow it to shape other behaviour now just a quick word we're going a quick word of introduction to this passage we're particularly going to look at 25 to 38 but just a word about verse 21 to 24 Jesus is now six weeks old still a baby but six weeks after the birth and his parents have brought him as Moses commanded earlier in the Old Testament to the temple to be presented they are a poor family because they bring a pair of doves on two young pigeons a rich family would have brought a lamb they bring pigeons now hundreds of years before the prophet Isaiah had promised that the Lord would come and he would come to the remnant that's the faithful few who are waiting for him and here in Luke 1 and 2 he does just that he comes to the remnant and it's interesting the remnant spans the generations

Elizabeth and Zacharias the parents of John the Baptist were middle aged John the Baptist was a late baby Mary and Joseph are young in fact Mary is probably hardly out of her teens and now in this incident two very elderly people near the end of their lives Anna but Anna and Simeon who I was particularly looking at these are the people to whom he comes so he comes to the remnant and the remnant respond to him you know what suggests there are three elements in this episode here verses 20 25 to 38 first of all there is praise because the waiting time is over Simeon now as a man in Jerusalem verse 25 who was righteous and devout he was waiting for the consolation of Israel the waiting time is over the fulfilment of the ancient promises beginning in

Genesis 3 15 the descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent and it was a long long long wait we have no idea how many years passed between Genesis 3 and Luke 1 and 2 but it was a long long long wait and throughout the whole of the Old Testament the prophets talked about someone who would come Emmanuel God with us Isaiah particularly talks about the one who would come to comfort to console to strengthen his people now look at verse 25 the Holy Spirit was on him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit he would not die before he saw the Lord's Messiah now that's a fascinating little detail the Spirit inspired the prophets to look forward down through the long ages to the coming of Emmanuel and that same Spirit though inspires

Simeon to realise who he is see the whole of the Bible runs through this story God is not a Christmas visitor like great Aunt Matilda that is why many people find God boring if he is simply a Christmas visitor then what about the rest of the year he comes as promised and he comes to save and Simeon sees the fullness of God in this helpless six week old baby and he bursts into a song of praise the fourth in these chapters now let your servant you may dismiss your servant in peace if you like latins sometimes called the luke dimittis you've probably seen that in the books anyway the point is the waiting time is over and this old man who will know nothing else about him he has the privilege to hold in his hands the baby who is God himself the baby who is Christ the Lord and like a faithful watcher he can now leave his post the anticipated event has arrived my eyes have seen your salvation you may dismiss your servant in peace he's waited all his life just as the nation and others have waited for an uncountable number of years and he has now come my eyes have seen your salvation he is the saviour this is what

[ 6 : 44 ] Christmas is a match the angels have left too because they've faithfully delivered that message and notice it's a worldwide message you are prepared in the sight of all nations this is not a message simply for God's ancient people this is a message for the world because why we are here tonight this afternoon is it not because this is a universal message all nations and Sam has often called out all the nations you have made will come and worship before you and so it is here and the glory of your people Israel now this word glory is one of these words which is often used rather thoughtlessly it actually means to be solid to be heavy to be real the glory of God means that he is totally real totally solid the word for idol is often used in the old testament is an opposite word it means a puff of wind God is not like that he is real and because he is real his light shines into the whole world and just as long ago in the old testament the glory of God hovered over the ark of the covenant so we are told in earlier in this story he had overshadowed

Mary Christ the true ark of the covenant later on when Paul says Christ in you the hope of glory Mary literally did this she carried the word now here in flesh word of the father now in flesh appearing so the first thing is praise becoming waiting time is over and Simeon is work completed can now hand over it to Lord himself but secondly the second part of what Simeon says in verses 33 to 35 is a warning of dark days ahead the waiting time is over but already the shadow of the cross is falling this child verse 34 is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sorrow will pierce your soul too see

Luke is to develop this theme in chapter 9 Jesus resolutely sets out for Jerusalem a remarkable painting I can't remember who painted it of Mary with the baby at the cradle and looking out into the open countryside and the shadow of the cross falling over the cradle you see just as we can have divorced Christ from the past from the past of these long long years when his coming was for a toll so we cannot divorce him from the cross from the future suffering it is hard and bitter and some of the writers represent this as a kind of cosmic drama Revelation 12 says the child is born and the dragon the devil stands in front of him to devour him which almost certainly in historical terms refers to Herod trying to destroy him but then he's caught up to God and to his throne you see what happens is the prince of glory lands incognito behind the enemy lines he meets the serpent dragon the devil deals him a deadly blow but is himself crushed and bruised and so this is what

Sidney is talking about the falling and rising and the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed he divides humanity and he still divides humanity he is the one on whom our eternal destiny depends thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and that's very very important then as now he divides humanity humanity and the sword will pierce your own soul too now John's gospel tells about Mary standing weeping at the cross very poignant and moving little scene and Jesus said John is also standing there and Jesus says Jesus says to John son behold your mother and to his mother mother behold your son and John takes Mary into his home interesting we know from historians that John in later years was associated with the town of

Ephesus and it's very probable that Luke who visited Ephesus met Mary there and Mary gave him many of the details of these chapters chapters of course it was the guidance of the Holy Spirit but as Luke tells us in chapter one he is writing history he's writing reliable history he's listened to people he's read what they've said and it's almost certain that one of the people he had listened to was Mary herself and these wonderful stories which are so much part of the gospel he divides humanity some of you may know the journey of the magi by T.S.

[ 12 : 15 ] Eliot one of the magi says I had seen birth and death but thought they were different and so it is here the birth and the death belong together so different from there and of course there's one reason why many people don't want to divorce Christmas from the rest of the story the cross and what it means the cross and its agony is not doesn't fit very well with all the red nosed reindeer and all the rest of it and therefore Jesus baby Jesus the one who didn't cry is consigned to the nursery along the center cross now we can't do that without the cross salvation will not happen and the kingdom will not come you see Jesus himself is at the end of the gospel that do not cry the

Messiah to have suffered and then entered into his glory so you see there is praise praise waiting time is over there is a warning of dark days ahead and of course in the gospels the writers of the four gospels point out that the way of the cross is the way of discipleship but thirdly and this is verses 36 and following there is reassurance that all will be well there is praise there is warning and now there is reassurance and this is the other representative of the remnant Anna the daughter of the tribe of Asher very old lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was 84 and it could equally be translated she was a widow for 84 years an unthinkable long time far far longer than she had been a wife

Anna of course is the great form of Hannah the Hebrew name and this is a reminder of that earlier story that earlier Hannah was given birth to Samuel one of the forerunners of the Messiah and she is a prophet we are told the New Testament tells of many female prophets including of course Hannah the earlier Hannah long time widow much longer than she had been a wife thank you not the prophet died I said before I will answer I noticed that rather than remarrying she had devoted her life to the service of God now once again that's not an absolute that's not saying what had to happen it did happen in her case and she devoted her life to the service of God she never left the temple now the last Old

Testament voice Malachi had said the Lord you look for will suddenly come to his temple and of course this is the first time he came remember that the temple remains the place where God reveals himself until Jesus turns his back on it and indeed even in the early chapters of Acts the Christians are still meeting in the temple precincts so Anna is saying something very important it's not just a repetition of what Simeon has said she coming up to them verse 38 she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who are looking forward to the redemption of Israel she gave thanks joins in the hallelujah chorus which won through Luke 1 and 2 the angels of heaven and the people on earth have joined in that chorus this is he he's come he's here he's arrived now Simeon had rightly reminded us of the necessity of the cross as well as the cradle and now

Anna reminds us that the cross is not the end either this word redemption very carefully children that is the great word of the exodus the word of God freeing his people from slavery in Egypt leading them beyond the waters of death to the promised land and in Luke chapter 9 Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and they speak of his word that Luke uses is exodus they speak of his exodus which he would carry out at Jerusalem so you see we've got we've got the reassurance that the first waiting time is over there are hard times ahead but it will all be well in the end you see if we confine the gospel either to the cradle or the cross and forget the resurrection then we've got an incomplete gospel and Luke's gospel particularly hangs together in chapter 24 that wonderful story of the road to

[ 17 : 45 ] Emmaus the two dejected disciples said we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel that Anna says the redemption of Jerusalem these two on the road to Emmaus say we had hoped we waited so long we had hoped and then the Lord the stranger whom they don't immediately recognise opens to them the scriptures points out that the Messiah had to suffer but then rise again very interesting by the way he doesn't say you don't need the Bible now you've got me what he says if you want to understand me you need to read the Bible and of course at that time that meant the Old Testament because none of the New Testament had been written that remains true and so the story hangs together does it not the story of the baby and the cradle the story of the man who died on the cross but the story of the

Lord of the life who broke open who broke the power of death and hell and opened the kingdom of life of all who will believe and Ruth's gospel ends and his second volume begins with the final pointing to the final part of that story Jesus leads his disciples out to the Mount of Olives and as he's speaking to them he raises his hands in blessing and then leaves them and goes to heaven and once again the angels appear the angels would come to Bethlehem to the shepherds and say to you is born the saviour who is Christ the Lord again the angels appear and tell us this same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven this Jesus of the cradle this Jesus of the cross this Jesus of the rest of the they did everything they turned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth and the child grew and became strong he was filled with wisdom and the grace of

God upon him you see Mary and Joseph and indeed Jesus had to go back to normal life the angels have gone but the message remains that message and what is that message Christ Christ is born Christ has died Christ will come again and that is enough until he comes now then let's pray Almighty God give us grace to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light here in the time of this mortal life when our Savior came to visit us in great humility so that on the last day and he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead we may be made like him in his eternal kingdom where he lives and reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit in one God now and forever

Amen Now in a moment we are going to sing our final carol let me say a word about it we've sung this several times over the last few weeks I've chosen this because it does emphasize so much the story hanging together he came down to earth from heaven didn't begin in Bethlehem it began in heaven it wasn't once upon a time in a never never land it was once in royal David's city fulfilling the scriptures and his true humanity he was little weak and helpless tears and smiles like us he knew and finally the part that's still to come the part that will keep us persevering and our eyes at last shall see him lord and shall see with who público and one who has the into the the most maybe

I see