



Open Table Worship – Leader’s Sheets
Are Angels still speaking?
A service interwoven with scripture & conversation
By Ana Gobledale
Angel art, by Ava-Rose Tonkin, Salisbury UK

Set up:

- Centre piece on each table: theme-related items: angels of all sizes and all varieties
- Place a copy of the readings, or a Bible marked at the reading, or printed handouts, in the centre of each table. The first reading involves several readers, each receiving a strip of paper cut from the printed sheet.
- Bible translations: suggested are *The Inclusive Bible: the first Egalitarian Translation* 2007 by Priests for Equality; *New Revised Standard Version*; or *The Message*. Ideally, have all three available. NRSV provides the scholarly translation and TM provides an interpretation in modern vernacular. *The Inclusive Bible* provides a ready-to-read inclusive language translation.
- Candles to light (one lit candle to use for lighting others)
- Communion elements: juice – or grapes - and bread to be shared (gluten free and non-alcoholic, so no one is excluded). These might be set out before the service on each table, or set aside to be brought forward later in the service.

Coffee & Chat

Look at the angels in the centre of your table.

Questions for discussion around the tables:

- *What do you think an angel is? Or is not?*
- *Where have your ideas about angels come from?*

Gathering –

Purpose: *to establish as a group; to each fully arrive, moving from the outside world to being fully present here; to get to know names; to affirm one another as God’s creation.*

All: We are here. We are who we are.

Introduce yourself using only your first name, then saying either ‘I am here.’ or ‘I am who I am,’ or both.

Alternatively: Introduce yourself using your first name. Then say, ‘I am here.’ Then everyone responds with the affirmation, ‘You are who you are, created by God.’

Sharing a greeting of peace (optional)

Luke 2.8-10

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of God shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...

Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, this good news is for you, for all of us. However much you or I feel like an angel or not, or whether we, like the shepherds long ago, have knowingly met an angel face-to-face or not, we are welcome here. Angels in the Bible, like those that visited the shepherds, often bring the message of peace, saying ‘Do not be afraid. Peace be with you.’ I invite you to turn to those near you, and be an angel to them greeting one another saying, ‘Peace’ or ‘Shalom’ or ‘Saalam,’ whichever you are comfortable with.

Looking into the Bible *A montage of verses involving angels*
(Print up the page of readings and cut into strips to distribute to willing readers. The Leader reads an explanatory comment before each reading.)

Leader: In the Bible, God speaks through angels several times, from the beginning in Genesis to the last book, Revelations. Angels often bring the message of peace and assurance. Do not be afraid! An amazing message spoken into our world, a place which is often full of reasons to be afraid. We're going to hear angel's voices in several readings.
(hand out to readers)

Leader: God's angels visit the ancient families of the Bible:

Exodus 20:20-22a & 23:20 **Leader or Reader 1**

God speaks to Moses, saying: 'I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to the angel, and listen to the angel's voice.

Genesis 21.17 **Reader 1**

... The **angel** of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid...

Leader: God's angels visit the prophets...

2 Kings 1.15 **Reader 2**

Then the **angel** of the LORD said to Elijah...do not be afraid ..'

Leader: God's angels appear to Mary and Joseph and Zechariah, encouraging them when they feel afraid. Assuring them of their important roles in the unfolding story of Jesus's birth.

Matthew 1.20 - first Joseph **Reader 3**

...an **angel** of God appears to Joseph in a dream and says, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Leader: Next Zechariah...

Luke 1.13 **Reader 4**

The **angel** says to Zechariah, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

Leader: Next Mary:

Luke 1.30 **Reader 5**

The **angel** says to Mary, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

Leader: God's angels appear to the shepherds in the fields.

Luke 2.8-10 **Reader 6**

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...

Sing *a familiar song/hymn on the theme*

If Christmas carols are chosen, and it is not Advent nor the Christmas season, sing only the relevant verses, keeping the focus on angels and not the entire Nativity story.

Suggestions: *Angel voices ever singing*

While Shepherds watched their flocks by night

Angels from the realms of glory

Angel Hymn by Chris & Ted Haines

(alternative lyrics for Angels from the realms)

Hark the herald angels sing

Angels we have heard on high

Conversations: *An idea to ponder: Are God's angels still speaking?*

Questions and responses might be shared in pairs or threes. Inform everyone that there will not be any plenary or feedback time.

- Do you think God's angels, however we understand them, are still speaking today, to us? Are they still proclaiming, 'Do not be afraid. God is with you.'?
- Have you ever encountered what you would call an angel?
- Consider, when have you been afraid and someone has helped you, like an angel, encouraging you to not be afraid, giving you courage?
- When have you been the angel someone needed in their life? What message did you deliver to them?

Angel Litany *(to be read responsively)*

Celebrating all the angels who have touched our lives, join me in the Angel Litany printed on your service sheets.

For all the angels who have spoken to our hearts and touched us with courage,

We thank you, God.

For all the angels who live in our midst, with whom we work, play and worship,

We thank you, God.

For all the angels who challenge us to boldly, fearlessly, change the world with them,

We thank you, God. Amen.

Sharing & Caring – Bringing light into our world

- As we meditate upon angels, especially their message to not be afraid, if you would like to light a candle, to celebrate someone who has been like an angel to you, or to remember someone who is in need of hearing the angels' message, please do so at this time.
- If you would like to share for whom you are lighting a candle, feel free to say the name aloud, or you may light a candle in silence.
- (optional) **Prayers for our world** – a reading for 2 or more people using the underlying theme, 'Do not be afraid.' This might be read before or after the individual candles are lit.

A song to lead into communion

a familiar reflective song/hymn on the theme of communion

Time for quiet reflection

Lord's Prayer

Use a familiar version (which many people will know from memory) or introduce an alternative version. Several alternative versions are available at <http://worshipwords.co.uk/lords-prayer/>

Invitation to Communion:

The table is set for our special meal. The bread, the juice, prepared and presented. Ready to be served and shared.

We remember Jesus sharing a meal like this with his disciples, his friends. He included everyone, those he could trust and those he could not trust. Today we are his disciples, his friends. Each one of us is welcome.

How amazing it is to be loved and wanted even when we have not been perfect. How wonderful it is to be included as we are. The bread is gluten free and the juice is non-alcoholic so that all may partake freely. No one is excluded from this meal.

Prayer of preparation & confession (optional)

As we approach this meal of mystery in the hope and promise of reconciliation, we prepare ourselves through prayer. Pray with me.

We come before you God, in joy and anticipation, united in the spirit of celebration and worship. Thank you for searching for us, finding us, and calling us by name to this fellowship and this table. Grant us the faith proclaimed by angels through the centuries, the faith that trusts in the possibility of a world without fear, without reason for fear, a world of justice, peace, shalom, salaam.

We are sorry for those times we have given into fear, and as a result have acted out in anger, jealousy, selfishness or spite. Forgive us, change us, and use us, that we might be more like angels, ourselves, bringing the Good News of your love and justice into our homes and our community, bringing courage and assurance where there is fear.

God of joy and promise, inspire, challenge and shape us through this meal, that we might better reflect your ideals, your hopes, your peace here on earth. This we pray through Jesus, our host. Amen.

Words of Assurance (optional)

Be assured that God, wants us to not be afraid. God, perhaps with the help of angels, whatever they may be, watches over us all, rejoicing when we are found and restored to wholeness, generously forgiving a repentant heart. Receive God's healing mercy.

Words of Remembrance: the communion story

When Jesus shared the bread with his friends, he explained that he is the Bread of Life. Like bread, Jesus nourishes and strengthens us so that we can know right and wrong and not be confused. When we eat the bread together, we are strengthened as a community to remember Jesus and to do the things Jesus would do in our world.

Jesus also used a cup of the fruit of grapes to teach his disciples. He compared the red juice to blood, to help us remember the suffering and bloodshed in the world. Drinking the juice together helps us remember that we are all part of a special agreement, a covenant, with God.

God loves us so much that when we make mistakes, or when we make bad choices, God has agreed to forgive us and grants us a second chance, every time.

This is ordinary bread and ordinary juice. But when we eat the bread together and drink the juice together, something extraordinary happens which brings us closer to Jesus and to one another. We become the 'Body of Christ.' which means that our eyes and ears see and hear what Jesus would see in our world. And our arms and hands do Jesus's work to help others. May this shared meal of mystery and awe manifest for us the very essence of the risen Christ in our midst.

Prayer of Thanks

God, for this time together around this table, we give thanks. For the power of this meal, this simple bread and juice, to unite us as the Body of Christ, we give thanks. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread *Break bread as words are spoken:*

Although the bread is broken like Jesus' body, by sharing it, we are made one.

Pouring of the cup *Pour our juice as words are spoken:*

Although the cup represents blood spilled, by sharing it, we are healed with God and one another.

Blessing of the Bread and Juice

Pray with me. Eternal Spirit, fill this bread and these cups with your spirit that we might feel your nourishment, making us one spiritual body, one family, united with one another and all peoples of all nations. Amen. Ministering to you in Christ's name, all things are ready.

Sharing the bread

When you take a piece of bread, please hold it until everyone has a piece. Then we will all eat together. [or: Please eat the bread as you receive it.]

When everyone has bread:

Although the bread is broken like Jesus's body, we are made one. Eat of the Bread of Life.

Sharing the juice

When you take a cup of juice, please hold it until everyone has been served. Then we will all drink together.

When everyone has a cup:

Although the cup represents blood spilled, we are healed, reconciled with God and one another. Drink of the Cup of Forgiveness.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison, or Leader may read as solo voice)

**God of mercy and power, mother and father of us all,
thank you for inviting us into a world
where we need not be afraid,
and for uniting us through this meal.
May it empower us to go forth in joy,
renewed and invigorated, to be your messengers
sharing your message of justice, love and peace. Amen.**

Closing Prayer

Pray with me.

Emmanuel! God, you are indeed with us.

What a wonderful, comforting encouraging truth.

May we always be open to hearing the words of your angels, 'Do not be afraid.' And may we always respond with courage, trust and faith. Amen.

Sending forth (optional responsive reading)

Be not afraid.

We are not afraid.

Go to share the Good News with the courage, faith, and conviction of an angel.

We go with God.

Sing *a familiar uplifting song/hymn*

--on the theme

Closing act

Have another cuppa?

Shake hands?

Slip away quietly?

Whatever is comfortable for the group and for the individuals.

Readings

In large font, ready to print and read.

Angel Hymn

Angels from the realms of glory

Alternative lyrics by Chris & Ted Haines, Salisbury UK

Angels from the realms of glory
Wing your flight around this place,
You who sang creations story,
Bless our worship here with grace

Gloria....

In excelsis deo

We in church have heard the story
Of Messiah's humble birth.
We must take to all the city
God's great love and all its worth.

Gloria.....

Prayers for our World *1 Peter 3:10-12*

Reader 1:

‘Those who desire life and desire to see good days,...
let them turn away from evil and do good;
let them seek peace and pursue it.
For ...God’s ears are open to their prayer.’
Pray with us.

Reader 2: God, open our hearts,
that we will be ready for the messengers you send to us.
Help us find your message,
in a world that needs it more than ever.

Reader 1:

Open our ears and hearts to the message of the angels, ‘Be not afraid.’

Reader 2:

Grant courage and comfort to those who are afraid.
the abandoned and forgotten,
the victims of violence and oppression,
the hungry,
the poor.

Reader 1:

May they hear the angel’s voices saying,
‘Be not afraid.’

Reader 2:

Grant true courage
to those who are afraid to be vulnerable,
To bullies and tyrants, even world leaders,

To people trying to be big
by making others small
To people grabbing for more
because they are afraid they will not have enough.
To people driven by greed and fear.

Reader 1:

May they hear the angel’s voices saying,
‘Be not afraid.’

Reader 2:

Grant courage to those from whom much is expected, upon
whose care we are dependent:
Doctors, nurses and everyone in the NHS
Firefighters and police officers,
Social workers, teachers and carers,
Environmentalists and activists,
Partners, parents and grandparents.

Reader 1:

May they hear the angel’s voices saying,
‘Be not afraid.’

Reader 2:

Grant us courage to look at the world
with wonder, hope and trust,
rather than fear, anxiety and worry.

Reader 1:

Open our ears and our hearts to the angels’ voices, calling to
all who will listen,
‘Do not be afraid.’
Amen.

These readings are available as a separate document, with the readings written in strips ready to be cut and distributed. They are included in the Leader's Sheets so that you have a copy if needed.

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... The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid...

2 Kings 1.15

Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah... Do not be afraid ..'

Matthew 1.20

...an angel of God appears to Joseph in a dream and says, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1.13

The angel says to Zechariah, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

Luke 1.30

The angel says to Mary, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

Luke 2.8-10

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of God shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...

Matthew 28.5

...the angel says to the women [in the garden], 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.