

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of  
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts  
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on December 24, 2021 (Christmas Eve)**

This summer, when I was back home in Baltimore visiting family, we toured a whiskey distillery. Now, that may seem like an odd family outing, especially since only two of the five cousins were actually of legal drinking age, but it was a rainy day and we needed an indoor activity. So after breakfast, we headed down to the Sagamore Spirit Distillery in South Baltimore.

I didn't realize that before Prohibition, Maryland was the rye whiskey capital of America. And that it wasn't until after World War II that the industry became consolidated in Kentucky. But Maryland-style whiskey was a thing, and a number of boutique distilleries are seeking to bring it back. The Baltimore scribe and whiskey enthusiast H.L. Mencken was a big fan, calling Maryland whiskey "the most healthful appetizer known to man."

We can debate that; but I find the whole process of distilling spirits both fascinating and mysterious — with its mashing and malting, fermenting and aging. It's part science project and part art form, often conducted by large apron-wearing bearded men. But the piece I love the most happens inside those wooden barrels. As part of the aging process, a small percentage of the liquid evaporates. In fact, 2% of what's inside the barrel evaporates for every year that it's aged. Which is both a blessing and a curse. It means that a portion of the whiskey is lost, but it's only through the aging process that the whiskey develops its unique flavor and character.

Distillers refer to this lost portion of whiskey that dissipates into the heavens as the "angel's share." And on this night, when angels feature so prominently in the Christmas story, it's worth reflecting upon the ways in which we are connected to the Christmas angels, and it's worth considering our own angel's share.

As the angels gather together to witness and testify to our Lord's birth, there is great joy. That we know, both from Luke's gospel and from every Christmas pageant we've ever seen. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace goodwill towards men!'" That's a party to which we are all invited. We all share in the angels' sense of joy and wonder as they gather round about God's newborn son to witness and testify to the light that has entered the world.

The question for us on this most holy night, is how do we offer our own angel's share? How do we give back to the world a small share of that joy, peace, and goodwill that surrounds us. How do we return a share of that spirit with which we have been entrusted by the Christmas angels?

You know, the word angel literally means "messenger" in Greek. That's what angels do, they bring messages from God. Like the the Archangel Gabriel who announces to Mary that she will bear God's son. So perhaps we can offer our own angel's share by acting as messengers in the lives of all whom we encounter. Through our actions and interactions we can bring messages of kindness or compassion, love or friendship. Opportunities to offer our own angel's share abound.

When we pray without ceasing, when we offer compassion, when we lift up the lowly, when we work for justice, when we reach out our hands in love to those in need, we offer up our angel's share. When we share our faith with others, not in an overbearing way, but as an invitation to come and see what gladdens our hearts, we offer up our angel's share. When we allow our hearts to be moved by Jesus' message of peace and love and then act accordingly, we offer up our angel's share.

Never forget that the Christmas angels bring this message of God's love to you. The angels aren't just a bunch of town criers sharing the news of the day — as incredible and noteworthy as it may be. The joy of Christmas is that this news of our Savior's birth is given directly and irrevocably to you. The message of the Christmas angels reminds us that God doesn't merely love the world in the abstract; God specifically and wholeheartedly and unabashedly loves you. Whether or not you feel worthy, whether or not you can even feel it at all, God enters the world in human form because God loves you...and me, and the people sitting next to you, and the people joining us online, and the people whose existence we're not even aware of. Jesus came to us as the light of the world, because God loves each and every one of us with utter and reckless abandon.

And that's the power of Christmas. That's why the angels make all that racket. That's why our angel's share matters.

And so, we join our voices to those of the heavenly chorus in recognition that on this holy night heaven comes near to us in the birth of Jesus. And not just near us, heaven quite literally enters right into the midst of us. In all our messiness and bumbling, in all our unworthiness and stumbling, God enters the world in human form, as Christ our Savior is born.

May you share in the joy of the Christmas angels this season. May you rejoice along with the multitude of the heavenly host. And may you all have a very merry Christmas.