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Advent Devotional "The Lord's Messenger"

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Advent Devotional
December 17, 2012
The Lord's Messenger
Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:11-20

When April arrives, it will have been three years since we rescued Lydia, the border terrier who shares our lives and our home. She has now spent almost half her life with us, but earlier trauma shows every day in her attitude. She startles at any unexpected noise, and even at some expected ones. Anything out of the ordinary spooks her. She's skittish enough to leap and run at things that don't even register with Ronnie and me. And sometimes in the night, when she's asleep, I hear her whimpering through what can only be an unhappy dream, probably a nightmare.

Lydia reminds me of the way we generally react to the unexpected. A friend and I were talking as we walked across campus one recent morning about our shared reaction to early morning telephone calls—or late night ones. No one with whom I've ever spoken expects one of those calls to be the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes saying that they've won millions (or even thousands). We don't anticipate the unexpected to be good; messages out of the routine always seem to portend evil. I even told my friend of my long-standing practice of prefacing all odd-hour calls to family with "Everything's fine...."

Linking Lydia, that conversation, and these verses summoned a kaleidoscope of images to mind: two uniformed soldiers moving up a walk toward a home; trembling hands opening a yellow Western Union

envelope; a parent with a phone sinking, blank-faced, into a chair; a man walking unseeingly out of a superior's office; a patient sitting uncomprehendingly in an office facing across a desk a white-coated figure with an open folder and a single sheet of paper in one hand. Those are the kinds of things of which we think; somehow the very word "unexpected" has a troublesome connotation.

Why do we always believe that unexpected news will be bad? Do we humans live in the same fear as Lydia, only controlling it better most of the time? And why would we anticipate that unexpected news from God would be bad? We profess that we live in a loving relationship with God. Does the image of a wrathful, vengeful God supersede images of a loving Father God? Do we fear punishment despite this season's images—of God Incarnate wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger? Do we listen to the snake instead of the Man upon the cross? Do we confuse Halloween monsters with the Christmas Child? Is our personal world more the W.W. Jacobs one of "The Monkey's Paw" than God's world revealed in Scripture?

Yes, it IS awe-inspiring to be told by a stranger "I am Gabriel, and I stand in the presence of Yahweh," or "[Yahweh sent me] to tell you this good news," or even "your prayers have been heard." No wonder the first words out of the stranger's mouth each time are "Don't be afraid!" Is it good news to know that "suddenly the Lord,...whom you desire, will come"? It's all so...unexpected!

Our constant hope, Ronnie's and mine, is that one day Lydia will surrender her fear to the security of our home and our love and the care we take of her. I can't

help wondering how often God looks at each of us and hopes that we too will surrender our fear to the security of His love for us and His ever-abundant grace and our experiences with Him. As if the dog could respond, Ronnie often asks Lydia when she will begin to trust us. As we live these increasingly cold and dark days toward the traditional celebration of the Messiah's birth, in the stillness of deep night and my quiet heart, I hear God asking me that same question. Lydia has committed to live with us; we've committed to live with God. How long will it be before we act upon the trust we've said we have in God and show by our actions that we have?

Ray Granade