It’s a theme covered in fiction. Consider George Bailey. What would have happened to this poor banker had not an angel earned his wings by saving his life? Clarence Odbody is a guardian angel in Frank Capra’s 1946 film, *It’s a Wonderful Life*. On Christmas Eve, Bailey, facing financial ruin and disgrace, is thinking about suicide. He plans to jump off a bridge into an icy river because the payout on his $15,000 life insurance policy would solve the problems confronting his business and family. Two celestial beings observe George’s intent to kill himself and decide to send an angel to save him.

For this task, the only available angel is Clarence Odbody, AS2 (Angel Second Class), who, after 200 years, has yet to win his wings. To prepare for this assignment, Clarence is shown several scenes from George’s life that show some of his selfless acts. Sent to Earth, Clarence finds George standing on a bridge about to leap into the river. Before George can jump, Clarence jumps in the water, prompting George to dive in to rescue him. Both are rescued by the bridge keeper, who allows them to dry off in his shack. As Clarence dries off, he reveals he is an angel, causing the tollkeeper to flee in fear.

**A Life Worth Investing In?** The idea that the heavens might be full of angel investors watching us mortals on Earth is an intriguing idea. How would that work? Do you suppose God has a Department of Guardians which is divided into continents, nations, regions, districts, cities, and neighborhoods? Are there angel conventions with seminars on how to weatherize one’s wings or how to approach a human without inducing a cardiac event or how to spot a life worth saving?

If there were such celestial discussions, would these angel investors consider your life worth saving, as they did George Bailey’s? Of course, they would! Any other answer is unthinkable. The essence of the gospel is that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son…” We celebrate this event tonight. The whole Christmas thing, this unbelievable and incredible idea that God was born in a cow barn as a helpless baby, is only comprehensible because God thought that humans in general, and we in particular, were worth saving.

Of course, it is a very human thing to sometimes have doubts. The ancient patriarch Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown in prison on trumped-up charges and had every reason to wonder if his life was basically over. But God worked masterminded events because Joseph’s was a life worth saving.

King David, a man after God’s own heart, battled depression his entire life. Many of his calamities he brought on himself. But although he frequently gave up on himself, God never did. David was worth saving.

Job had everything going for him; in fact, he had everything. And then he didn’t. His wife and friends told him to curse God and die. Instead, he said, “I know that my redeemer lives.” Job was worth saving.

There are many other such stories in the Bible: the apostle Paul in a Philippian jail; Moses, a fugitive from the law while in the wilderness, for example. And we see it on movie screens: Private Ryan. A life worth saving. Christmas reminds us that God thinks your life is a life worth investing in. A life worth saving. You need to know this, believe this deep in your heart.

**Life with You in It.** Back to George Bailey. The angel shows him what life would be like for others if he were never in it. After seeing his wife as a spinster and watching his brother Harry drown because he wasn’t there to save him, George begs the angel Clarence for his life back. George’s original reality is restored, with all its worries and financial problems. A grateful George rushes home, thinking he will be arrested, only to discover that the townspeople rallied to him, came to the Bailey home, and donated more than enough to cover money that was missing.

George’s brother Harry arrives and toasts George as “the richest man in town.” Among the donations George finds a copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a gift from Clarence and inscribed, “Remember, no man is a failure who has friends. Thanks for the wings!” When a bell on the Christmas tree rings, George’s youngest daughter, Zuzu, explains that “every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings.” George looks upward smiling and says, “Atta boy, Clarence!”

**It’s a Wonder-Filled Life!** You might wonder if we have guardian angels protecting us or angel investors watching out for our interests. The surprising answer is “yes,” but it’s not who you think. It’s not a heavenly being like Clarence Odbody, the biblical Gabriel, or the archangel Michael.

The truth is even more amazing. We need only turn our gaze to the nativity scene, whether in Alicante, Spain, or in yards around our own community. The “angel” we long for is lying in a bed of straw. Our angel investor is the child who will grow up and give us what we need to see the light of the Lord. The guardian angel we need is the Son of God, who came to “save his people from their sins” (Luke 1), and who reminds us, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

So along with George Bailey, we learn the lessons of Christmas. God loves us. We are worth saving. God invests in our life. If we have friends, we are rich. We should be grateful for God’s interest in us and for family and friends who love us. We should stand in awe before the manger and wonder what kind of love would send God down into our world. When we give this some thought, we begin to understand that we live a wonder-filled life in a wonder-filled world.

Louis Armstrong expressed this famously in his song, “What a Wonderful World.” One of the verses mentions babies, appropriate for this Christmas Eve:

*I hear babies crying, I watch them grow,*

*They’ll learn much more than I’ll never know,*

*And I think to myself what a wonderful world,*

*Yes, I think to myself what a wonderful world.*

A wonder-filled life in a wonder-filled world made possible because of a baby born in a cattle stall.

*We hear the Baby cry, we’ll watch him die,*

*Jesus our Lord, and then we will sigh,*

*As we think to ourselves what a wonder-filled life!*

*Yes, we’ll think to ourselves, what a wonder-filled world!* Amen.

Prayer: Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen. (Robert Louis Stevenson)

**Source:** Mauro, J-P. “The world’s largest Nativity scene is in Alicante, Spain.” aleteia.org, December 4, 2020. Retrieved May 2, 2023.

**A Wonder-Filled Life**

Sunday, December 24, 2023 [Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3a1-14+(15-20)&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

If you visited the Spanish city of Alicante during the Covid-19 pandemic and happened to be traveling during Advent, you might have spotted what city officials boasted was the largest nativity scene on the planet. The figure of Joseph alone was almost 60 feet high, and mother Mary and the baby Jesus were beside him in appropriate proportions.

It was no idle boast. Officials at Guinness World Records certified the results. Encompassing an*area of 602 square feet*, the Alicante Nativity was, at the time, the world’s tallest static nativity scene ever recorded, as well as the largest by area. Alicante is famous for its interest in nativity scenes: there is an association of artists who devote their skills to the creation of a wide variety of creches. The city even boasts a nativity scene museum.

In many of the portrayals of this most holy, sacred, and sometimes silent night, the usual participants are noted: The Holy Family, of course, but also the shepherds and sheep, perhaps a camel or two, a few cows (“the cattle are lowing …”) and some chickens and geese. But in the Alicante scene, and many others, there’s one significant omission. The “angel of the Lord” (v. 9) is missing. A “multitude of the heavenly host” is likewise nowhere to be found.

Perhaps a closer look at this very important participant in the story of the birth of Christ is warranted. In this brief and skillfully narrated story there are two, possibly three, principal characters: Mary, Joseph, and the baby. But the secondary or supporting cast interests us. This includes the shepherds, of course, but also the angel and later the supporting chorus of angels.

Think about the angels. We’re fascinated — even obsessed — with them, especially since the Bible suggests we have our own angelic bodyguard that watches over us. Psalms 91:11: “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” Hebrews 1:14: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” Psalm 34:7: “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” These and other verses have led many to believe, right or wrong, that we all have a celestial being who hovers above us. The claim may be on the shakiest of biblical grounds, but the belief persists.