

The Angels
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We are in a sermon series called the Cast of Christmas. Last week I preached on The Prophets who prophesied about the birth of Jesus and today I'm preaching on The Angels who proclaimed the birth of Jesus. I don't recall preaching an entire message on angels before, so I felt led to do so today.

Angels had key roles in the Christmas story. In fact, this story is full of angels all the way through. Other than the Holy Spirit, angels are the most pivotal players in the Christmas story.

Their role has been immortalized by our hymn writers. Think of the hymns we hear at Christmas time:

Angels from the Realms of Glory... Angels We have heard on High ...
 The First Noel the angels did say... Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.

You may not have realized it, but it is mainly through angels that we learn the significance of Jesus' birth. What is it about them that makes them reliable sources to listen to? Very simply, the angels came from the very presence of God in heaven to declare to us on earth all that is important for us to know God's truth about the birth of Jesus.

The first angelic voice in the Christmas story was heard when an angel told a priest named Zechariah that his wife would have a son who would prepare the way for the Messiah. That son was John the Baptist. Then the archangel Gabriel told Mary about the upcoming birth of Jesus. Luke 1:30-33 says:

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."

Since Mary was only engaged to Joseph and not yet married, she knew she would be stoned to death when her pregnancy became known. Joseph also knew this and planned to secretly divorce Mary. But again, God sent an angel in a dream to soothe Joseph's fears. The angel told him in Matthew 1:20-21

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you are to name Him Jesus.

When it came time for Mary to give birth to Jesus, who declared this historic event? Angels!

Luke 2:8-14 says:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

When King Herod was told by the wise men that the king of the Jews had been born, he ordered all children aged two and under to be killed. Again, an angel was sent to save the life of Jesus. The Lord sent an angel in a dream to Joseph, who told him in Matthew 2:13

Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you for Herod is about to search for the child and destroy Him.

Joseph did as God told him through the angel's message in the dream, and Jesus' life was spared. Without angels, the Christmas story would not have happened in the same way.

So – with that in mind – let's take in in-depth look at angels. Let me first dispel a false belief that many people have – angels are not people who died and went to heaven. Believers who die do go to heaven – but they don't become angels.

Angels are not human beings, they are spirit beings created by God. They were created by God to be angels. Angels were created before the earth because they were present at the time of creation. Job 38:7 says that when God created the universe:

...the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.

Like the rest of creation, angels were made by and for Jesus to glorify and praise God. Psalm 148:1-2 says:

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the heights above. Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him, all His heavenly hosts.

When it says praise Him ALL His angels – that's a lot of angels. In fact, Revelation 5:11 says:

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand.

A thousand times a thousand is a million – so thousands of thousands is many millions. Ten thousand times ten thousand is 100 million! So there are way over 100 million angels!

Basically, the inference is that there are too many angels to count. That's why Hebrews 12:22 says what when we gather to worship:

You have come to Mount Zion, even to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless multitudes of angels.

And not all angels are the same. There are different ranks of angels. There is a hierarchy and some angels rule over others. The highest rank is archangel. There are three archangels in the Bible:

Gabriel – who is a messenger speaking God's word

Michael – who is a warrior – and

Lucifer – who was the worship leader in heaven before he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven.

Cherubim are angels with four wings who guard God's domain. They are mentioned in several places throughout Scripture. For instance:

- They guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden.
- Two golden figures of cherubim sit above the Ark of the Covenant, where God promised to dwell among His people.

Another type of angel, the seraphim, are only mentioned once in the Bible. These angels have six wings – 2 cover their face, 2 cover their feet, and with 2 they fly. They appear in Isaiah 6, where they continually worship the Lord and say in verse 3:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

Ezekiel and Revelation speak of other angels known as "living creatures" around God's throne. They have 6 wings and their faces appear like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. They, too, worship God continually because Revelation 4:8 says:

Day and night they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

Then there are those who are just called angels. Angels can't usually be seen by humans unless God reveals them. However, from time to time angels took on a bodily form and appeared to various people in Scripture. That's why Hebrews 13:2 tells us:

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

So, you might have encountered an angel and not even known it!

Angels have intelligence, emotions and language. In fact, 1 Cor 13:1 says we can:
...speak in the tongues of men and of angels...

Angels don't die, marry or pro-create. We see this in Luke 20:34-36:

The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.

This shows that angels do not die or marry.

God's angels also know their rightful place, as created beings of God. They exist to worship and serve God – not be worshipped themselves. Listen to this awesome truth from Hebrews 1:3-6:

When Jesus had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"?

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

This show us that Jesus Christ is Lord of all – including angels – and He is the one we should worship – not the angels! In the Bible – you find that everyone who worshipped an angel was always stopped by the angel! For instance – Revelation 22:8-9 says:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me.

But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

We don't worship angels because God created them and we do not worship any created thing – only the Creator of all things!

Angels are powerful – certainly more powerful than humans. But they are not all-powerful like God. Angels have certain limitations. They are not all-knowing, all-powerful or omnipresent. The fact that angels are not omnipresent is made clear when an angel said to Daniel in Daniel 10:12-14

Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer.

But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. Now I am here to explain what will happen to your people in the future, for this vision concerns a time yet to come.

Unlike God, who is omnipresent, angels are limited to 1 place at a time. If angels were omnipresent, Michael wouldn't have come to help because he would've already been there. And if angels were all powerful, they would not need help. Angels are powerful – but not all-powerful.

Jesus taught that angels are not all-knowing when He said this about His second coming in Matthew 24:36

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven...

So – we've looked at what angels are – but what do angels do?

Throughout the Bible we are told that angels have many roles including being messengers. The word angel means 'Messenger' so, not surprisingly, many times in the Bible, God chooses angels to take His message to people.

Probably the most famous time that happened was at the birth of Christ. But we also see angels announcing the resurrection of Christ. And angels will be the ones who announce the second coming of Christ and they will accompany Him as a great and mighty army.

Angels can be agents of God's blessing – as in announcing the birth of Christ. But angels are not just messengers of good news. They can also be messengers from God to warn people. Angels warned Lot about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Angels can also be agents of God's wrath and judgment. For instance- Angels brought plagues upon Israel for disobedience. Angels destroyed many armies who came against Israel. And in the book of Revelation, angels pour out God's wrath on the earth.

This shows that angels are not just nice, kind beings, they are also the mighty and powerful warriors of God. The Bible says that angels war with spiritual forces that are against them and us and God. Psalm 34:7 says:

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and he delivers them.

In the New Testament, angels helped to bring followers of Christ to people who don't know about Jesus. They also can sometimes bring people to believers. Revelation 14:6 says: *Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.*

Angels also really celebrate when someone becomes a Christian and accepts Jesus into their life! Luke 15:10 says:

There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

In the Bible, the most frequent and important role for angels is worship. Almost every glimpse you get of heaven in the Bible – you will find angels worshipping God. Psalm 103:20 says:

Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word.

Perhaps the most famous role of angels is as guardian angels. Several times in the Bible, angels are seen as guardians, protectors and comforters. A very familiar example is when angels guarded and protected Daniel when he was thrown into a lion's den.

There are only a couple of verses in the Bible that suggest 'personal' angels. One relates to children. Jesus said in Matthew 18:10

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven.

It's thought that this verse is about angels having a duty to care for ALL children. It is thought that ALL children 'belong to God' until what we call the age of accountability – when they can decide for themselves whether to follow God or not. During this time, angels watch over them.

And angels don't just watch over children. In the story of the rich man and poor man who died – found in Luke 16 – the believer who died was carried to Paradise by angels. So angels are watching over us from birth until death.

Basically, angels exist to do the will of God. 1 Peter 3:22 says:

Jesus Christ has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.

- Angels were there when God created the world.
- Angels were there when Adam and Eve sinned.
- When Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, angels were the ones who stood guard.
- Angels were there when Israel was freed from the bondage of Egypt.
- Angels were in the Holy of Holies at the Tabernacle of Moses.
- Angels were there to announce the birth of Christ.
- They were there when He was born and they were there when He died.
- They announced His resurrection and they will announce His return.

And here's the amazing thing: Hebrews 1:14 says:

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Not only do angels minister to the Lord – they also minister to us!

As I said earlier, we are not to worship angels – we only worship God. Also, we should not pray to angels or saints or Mary. We pray to God who is the commander of all angelic forces. However, it is not wrong to ask God to fulfill His promise to send angels to protect us in times of need. Psalm 91:9-11 says:

If you make the Most High your dwelling — even the Lord, who is my refuge — then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

So you should pray for God to send angels to protect you and your family.

We do not have authority to command angels, but we have the right to ask God to send angels to minister to us and for us. And we have many examples of this in the Bible.

Since God sent an angel to tell Mary her destiny to be the mother of Jesus, you can pray that God will send an angel to reveal your destiny.

Since an angel led the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, you can pray for angels to lead you to your promise from God.

Since angels ministered to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness, you can ask God to send angels to minister to you during your wilderness temptations.

Since God sent an angel to strengthen and comfort Christ while He was in Gethsemane the night before His death, you can pray for God to send angels to strengthen and comfort you in times of grief.

Since God sent an angel to get Peter out of prison, you can pray for God to send angels to get you out of tough situations.

Since an angel spoke to Cornelius and told him how to receive the truth about Jesus – you can pray that God would send angels to your loved ones to show them the way to Christ.

Since an angel gave Elijah strength for a long journey when he was tired, you can ask God to send angels to strengthen you for your journey.

Since God used angels many times in the Bible to defeat the enemies of God's people, you can ask God to send angels to defeat your enemy.

Since God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, you can ask God to send angels to shut the mouths of those trying to devour you!

Since God sent an angel to comfort and reassure Paul when he got caught in a violent storm at sea, you can ask God to send angels to comfort and reassure you when you are in a storm in life.

Hallelujah!

If God used angels to minister to believers all through the Bible, you can count on God using angels to minister to you all through your life!

So join with the angels in giving God thanks, praise, honor and worship!!