

ANGELS: EXALTING THE CHRIST CHILD

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

Angels – discuss our concept of angels – treetop decorations – typically female, blond, wings, white sparkling gown. It is easy to allow that to become our view of what angels are. Yet, that is hardly the biblical picture. The Bible tells us that angels have no gender, they are neither male nor female, but whenever they are named in the Bible, they have masculine names, and it is highly unlikely that they were blondes in sparkling gowns.

This morning, I would like briefly discuss the role that angels played in the events of the Nativity. But before that, we need to look at the question, who or what are angels?

Angels are very much misunderstood in today's world. Much of what people believe about angels comes from paintings, movies, television shows and the like. And much of that is not very biblically accurate.

The term angel (Greek *αγγελος*) means “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent from God.” The primary definition is messenger and that is exactly what they often are seen doing in the pages of the Bible:

- Sometimes they carry a message of warning, as with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19).
- Sometimes they carry a message of rescue, as with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace (Dan. 3).
- Sometimes they carry a message of instruction, as with Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden (Gen. 16).

In each of these instances where we see angels active on earth, they are delivering messages from God. Certainly angels do more than simply carry messages, but it's impossible to underestimate their critical role as messengers bringing announcements from heaven to earth.

So, how are angels a part of the Christmas story?

The Angelic Task - Announcements

Why do we put an angel on the top of our tree? Some people use a star, but many, like our family, use an angel. Why? Because the Christmas story is filled with angels, busily carrying messages to people who are integral to the story.

The first angel we encounter in the Christmas story is Gabriel, an archangel—apparently the highest ranking in the command structure of the angelic realm. Gabriel visited planet earth to inform the principal players, and, ultimately, the world that the “fullness of time” had come—that long-awaited moment in history when the promised Messiah would arrive (Gal. 4:4). This came in a series of announcements:

- The first announcement was about the coming of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. (*Briefly review the events with Zacharias, the priest and his wife, Elizabeth.*)
- Six months later, Gabriel came to the village of Nazareth to give a message from God to a young woman named Mary (Lk. 1:26-38). Gabriel informed Mary that she had been selected for the role of giving birth to the promised Messiah.
- Following his visit to Mary, Gabriel also visited Joseph, her husband-to-be, and gave him the same message—Mary's child was of God, not man (Mt. 1:20-25). Joseph could take her to be his wife with full confidence in her purity.
- Nine months later an angel, who may have been Gabriel, although we don't really know, returned with yet another message—this time not a message of anticipation, but one of arrival. The angel of the Lord appeared in the Judean skies over the shepherds' fields of Bethlehem. This time the glory of the Lord accompanied the angel's message, and the shepherds were terrified by the sight. And the message itself could not have been more dramatic. (Read Luke 2:10-12.)

The Angelic Response – Exaltation

It is at this point that we see a change in the role of the angels. Up to this point in the Christmas story the angels have served as God's messengers. But carrying messages is not the only function of angels. In fact, it may actually be secondary to their primary activities in heaven, those being praise and worship.

In both the OT and the NT we see the angels worshipping and exalting God. (See Is. 6, Rev. 4-5) Let me read a quote directly from a booklet by Bill Crowder from Radio Bible Class:

“In Revelation 4 and 5, the angelic realm celebrates God's creation and Christ's salvation. But in the Christmas story, they assemble in a glorious mass choir to celebrate His invasion of the broken planet that is the object of His eternal love (Lk. 2). When the angel announced the arrival of the Son of God in human form, the heavenly host could remain silent no longer. They raised their voices in exaltation of God for His glory, for His Son, and for His plan to rescue the lost, tired, and confused race of men and women who, like the sheep guarded by the angels' Bedouin audience, had long since gone astray.

This response of exaltation becomes the great thread of worship that began that first Christmas and continues in our worship today.”

Listen to that cry of exultation – (read Luke 2:13-14). The shepherds heard the angels affirm the glory of God and announce that Christ had come to offer peace with God to a race in rebellion against Him.

The reconciliation between God and mankind—the solution for the human condition of sin—is summed up in the simple word *peace*. But more than that, it is the perfect expression of *love*. The love of God is completely and forever demonstrated in the sending of His own Son into the world to be the Savior.

It was in response to this expression of love by God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ that the angels raised their voices in exaltation that night in fields near Bethlehem. There was exuberant joy in heaven that night that overflowed into the earthly skies.

Conclusion:

Let me conclude by quoting again from Bill Crowder:

The angels exalt Christ for who He is and for what He has done. They exalted Him in His birth, ministered to Him in His life, supported Him in His anguish, announced Him in His resurrection—all because He is the Christ. All because He chose to do all of that for an undeserving, sin-stained race. All because He chose to express His inexpressible love in such a mysterious and wonderful way—and pour it out on His wayward creation.

The angels know what we too easily forget: that the Lord Jesus Christ is ever and always deserving of the highest exaltation. And, as Clarke said, if

the angels, who can only observe redeeming love but never experience it, exalt Christ for His grace, how much more should adoration of the Savior drive the hearts and passions of the men and women who have been granted this great grace!

This marriage of awe and exaltation from the observing angels and from redeemed humanity finds wonderful expression in one of the most familiar of Christmas hymns:

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

May we, with grateful hearts, join in the exaltation of the birth of Christ, the perfect expression of God's love and His glorious gift to us.