


The Mystery of Christmas
Part 2: The Angle on Angels

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection

- Did you grow up believing in angels? How about now? **How** have your beliefs changed—and **why**?
- Pastor Dan noted that: angels are **stronger** than us—but **not omnipotent**, as God is, angels are **smarter** than us—but **not omniscient**, as God is, and, angels are **swifter** than us—but **not omnipresent**, as God is. How does each of those angelic attributes—**both** their magnitude **and** their limitation—comfort you?
- Read Acts 12:1-11. What happened to James? What happened to Peter? **Why** the difference?

Notice the mixture of natural and supernatural elements in the way God chose to deliver Peter...

Natural Elements	Supernatural Elements
v. 5 prayer was being made fervently v. 6 soldiers, chains, and more soldiers! v. 7 Peter woken up with a blow to the side v. 8 Peter had to dress himself and follow	v. 5 God answered those prayers with a "yes!" v. 7 soldiers can't keep angels out! v. 7 chains fell off by themselves v. 10 guards don't notice; gates open by themselves

Why do you think God chooses to work in both "direct" (supernatural) and "mediated" (natural) ways?

Think now of a challenge you're facing, something in which you've been asking God to intervene. What responsible actions do you think you should take in this situation?

What obstacles require something greater than your natural abilities?

What response must we have if God chooses a "James-type" outcome for us or those we love?

How about a "Peter-type" outcome?

Application-Challenge

- What is your response to the angels' joyful, good news? Are you receptive and submissive to it, as Mary was? Does the news that a rescuer has come for you thrill you (as it did the shepherds)—or bore you? Do you eagerly tell others how God has saved you from your sins?
- Angels are God's servants—sent to care for us believers. They are strong, smart, and swift. Are you grateful to God for their competent care?
- Angels see God as he truly is—glorious—and they joyfully embrace their role: glorifying him. Is your heart full of the worship of God, as theirs were?

Sermon Summary

Many of us are familiar with the story of Jesus' birth—about his mother's miraculous pregnancy, about his birth in a manger, about angels announcing his arrival to some shepherds (Luke 1:30-33; 2:8-15). And, of course, many of our favorite Christmas songs mention the role of angels too. Today let's gain a better understanding of who those beings are that we call "angels".

The word "angelos" in Greek literally means "messenger", and it has a broad range of uses in the Bible (angelos can refer to a human messenger or to the heavenly kind). Angels—the heavenly messenger type—are beings which were created by God (Nehemiah 9:6), who have great intellect and power, but have no body. They, like God, are "spirit". At times God makes his angels visible to our eyes—and when he does, they take on human form—but their essential nature is spiritual, not physical. Angels are God's warriors, and just as in any army, there's a hierarchy among them. The "commander in chief" of course, is God, but in Colossians 1:16 we learn a little about the various "ranks" of angels.

When God created the angels, of course, they all were holy and good. But some of them rebelled, and this is the origin of Satan and demons (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Satan and demons are corrupted angels. Originally, as they were created by God, they were holy. But now they no longer are as God made them. So, now there also are "thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities" which are evil: Satan and his demons. We want to get back to the encouraging truths about good angels—the sort who brought the message of the Savior's birth. Ever since that angelic rebellion, those who remained loyal to God have been called "holy angels" or "elect angels" (Mark 8:38; 1 Timothy 5:21).

The angels of Christmas, the sort which announced Christ's birth, are what the Bible refers to as holy or elect angels. Angels, as created beings, are not God's equal—nowhere near God's equal. No created thing, no matter how great, are God's equal. This is true of holy, elect angels as well as of evil angels—Satan and his demons. Powerful yes, but no match for God. Nowhere near God's equal. Angels are stronger than us—but not omnipotent, like God. Angels are smarter than us—but not omniscient, like God. Angels are swifter than us—but not omnipresent, like God.

There's a lot of interest in angels—especially at Christmastime—but unfortunately there's a lot of mis-information about them. If you look at drawings of angels, they're often portrayed as cute little babies or beautiful women with flowing hair. These are the depictions of pop culture, but they're not at all biblical. In the Scriptures, whenever people encounter angels, I promise you—cuddling is the last thing on their minds! It seems that angels are all males. Only two angels are named in Scripture—Gabriel and Michael—and both of those are masculine names. But, whenever the gender of an angel is mentioned in Scripture, the pronoun is always masculine (Acts 5:19; 12:7-8; Revelation 7:2; 8:3; 9:11; 10:9; 14:17-18; 19:17). But, although angels all appear to be males, they don't marry or procreate (Matthew 22:30). One more common misunderstanding is that angels are deceased humans.

Angels are God's fearsome warrior-servants of God. In the Scriptures, whenever people encounter angels, they tremble in terror—or else they try to worship them (Luke 1:11-13; Revelation 22:8-9). Whether your reaction is terror or worship, angels are always saying "Don't do that!" to both of them. We're not to tremble in terror because, as God's children, angels are here to help us. And we're certainly not to worship angels or be enamored with them, because, like us, they're creatures. We're to worship God alone.

If you're a believer, God's angels have only the kindest of intentions toward you (Psalm 91:11; Hebrews 1:14). It's fascinating to me that God often mediates his activity through his creation, rather than acting directly. God often mediates his care of us, the guarding of his children, through angels. He doesn't have to—it's not because he's too weak or too busy. God is limitless. He often chooses to work this way. Although angels "guard us in all our ways", there is no biblical support for the idea of individual "guardian angels" per se—as if there's a specific angel assigned to me or to you. The Scriptural picture is of God generally deploying his angels to serve and protect us. Although God often works through an intermediary, called "angels", the Scriptures never show individuals asking angels for help—we ask God for help—but God often sends his angels to deliver that help.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

There's more—lots more—about angels than can be covered in one sermon...

Monday—Some people in Jesus' day denied the existence of angels, but **Jesus believed in them!**

- Read Acts 23:8. The Sadducees were a sect within Judaism that denied the existence of angels, of the spirit-world in general, and of an afterlife. Let's learn more about these "deniers"!
- Read Mark 12:18-27. According to v. 18, what don't the Sadducees believe in? Yet, what is their question in v. 23? So, was this an honest question? According to Jesus (v. 24), **why** were the Sadducees mistaken? What **two** things did they not know? According to Jesus (v. 27), **how badly** mistaken were they?
- According to each of the following verses, what did Jesus know about angels?
 - Matthew 4:1-11; 25:31; and 26:53

Tuesday—So, **how many** angels are there? A few? A bunch? Let's see...

- Read Matthew 22:30. Unlike humans, angels don't procreate, so their number is fixed at however many were created in the beginning (Nehemiah 9:6). So, how many might that be?
- Read Revelation 12:4. One third of the total angelic population defected with Satan. These are now called "demons". Two-thirds of the original angelic population remained faithful.
- The Bible nowhere gives an exact count of God's holy/elect angels (1 Timothy 5:21), but how do the following passages describe their population?
 - Matthew 26:53 (Note: **one** legion equals 6,000)
 - Revelation 5:11 speaks of "myriads of myriads". One myriad equals 10,000. So at a bare minimum, **one** myriad times **one** myriad (ie, 10,000 x 10,000) equals...?
 - Luke 2:13 speaks of a "multitude" of angels. Hebrews 11:12 uses the same Greek word when referring to how many stars there are! Suffice it to say, there are **plenty** of angels!

Wednesday—Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-3. Believers are told not to take each other to court, airing our dirty laundry in front of non-believers. Instead, we are told to settle our own disputes **within** the church, with pastors (ie, elders) serving as judges. The rationale is that if believers are competent to judge even angels, surely we can be trusted to settle disputes between people! Clearly, **holy** angels will not need to be judged, so that means that believers will judge fallen angels (ie., Satan and his demons).

- When will this happen? Read 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, Revelation 20:10, and Matthew 25:41.
- Who will be the judge(s) on the throne? Read Revelation 3:21 and 20:4.

Thursday—When holy angels are not serving us here on earth, where do they reside? Let's see!

- The Bible refers to three "heavens" above planet earth. In ascending order, they are:
 - The "first" heaven is the earth's atmosphere (Genesis 8:2; Deuteronomy 11:11; 1 Kings 8:35)
 - The "second" heaven is the stellar region (Genesis 15:5; Psalm 8:3; Isaiah 13:10; Hebrews 4:14)
 - The "third" heaven ("paradise") is the realm of God's presence, also called the "highest heaven" and God's "holy habitation in heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2-3 cf. Psalm 123:1; Psalm 148:4; and 2 Chronicles 30:27). Holy angels reside with God (until he sends them to care for us).

Friday—Hebrews 13:1-3 speaks of "entertaining angels without knowing it". The Old Testament records four occasions when people entertained angels (Genesis 18:1-3; 19:1-2 and Judges 6:11-24; 13:6-20). Each time, those who hosted the angels were blessed.

- Read 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8). What role does hospitality play in the believer's life?
- Remember, **"Context is King!"**, so let's put the encouragement of Hebrews 13:2 in it's context: What is commanded in v. 1? What is commanded in v. 3? What is commanded in v. 2? Should you likewise expect that showing hospitality **to others** will bless **you**? (Yup.)

Saturday—In what ways are **you** more privileged than God's holy, elect angels?

- 1 Peter 1:10-12
- Angels "long"—literally "crave"—to look into the details of our salvation. Do you ever get **bored** by the gospel?
- Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. List everything you learn about your salvation. Worship and thank God for it!

Coming next week—A Gospel "Primer" for Christians. How well do **you** know the gospel?