

The Angels of Christmas



In Frank Peretti's fictional novel, "This Present Darkness," he describes the unseen spiritual world through the tool of his imagination.

But one shadow did not stir with the wind as did the tree shadows, and neither did it stand still as did the building shadows. It crawled, quivered, moved along the street toward the church, while any light it crossed seemed to sink into its blackness, as if it were a breach torn in space. But this shadow had a shape, an animated, creature like shape, and as it neared the church sounds could be heard: the scratching of claws along the ground, the faint rustling of breeze-blown, membranous wings wafting just above the creature's shoulders.

It had arms and it had legs, but it seemed to move without them crossing the street and mounting the front steps of the church. Its leering, bulbous eyes reflected the stark blue light of the full moon with their own jaundiced glow. The gnarled head protruded from hunched shoulders, and wisps of rancid red breath seethed in labored hisses through rows of jagged fangs.¹

While Peretti's imaginative descriptions of angels and demons press beyond reality, the existence of a vast unseen spiritual world is not an exercise of the imagination. The Bible tells us angels and demons are interacting with us in the tangible world on a daily basis. What is this unseen world like? How intricately involved is the spiritual world with our daily life? Join me in this series to answer these questions and many others.

This series was delivered for Christmas 2008 to the congregation of Faith Evangelical Free Church. It is my hope and prayer these messages become a source of spiritual encouragement to those who read them.

Because of God's Mercy,

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¹ Frank Peretti, [This Present Darkness](#), pg. 11.

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Meet the Enemy

Sign Title: Meet the Enemy

November 30, 2008

If you are new to Faith EFC, I would like to welcome you. You came on a good morning because today I begin a small series entitled, "The Angels of Christmas". One part of the Christmas story that is often ignored is the powerful role angels play.

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary the birth of Jesus. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream telling him to take Mary as his wife. An angel warns Joseph to flee to Egypt. An angel appears to Zechariah announcing the impending birth of his son, John the Baptist. As your finger flips through the text, you find angels are quite busy at Christmas.

Amazingly, it is not just the angels of God active in the Christmas story but Satan, the chief fallen angel is there as well. Matthew 2:13 tells us of Herod's search and destroy mission for the baby Jesus. Was the brutal slaying of infants Herod's idea? Revelation 12:4-6, which is considered by many students of the Bible to be a mini-history of Satan, talks of Satan seeking the death of the child who would rule the earth when he was born. Who do you think was the real evil power behind Herod?

Yes, angels, both good and fallen, play a major role in the Christmas story. During this short 3-week series we will look at them. This morning, we examine Satan, the chief fallen angel. We will learn of his origins and capabilities. Next week we will look at God's elect angels, our unseen advocates, and in our final message, we will learn about a very special angel in the Old Testament as we answer the question, "Where was Christ before the Manger?"

Where did Satan come from?

Where did Satan and his demons come from? The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about his origins. The purpose of the Bible is not to give us a cosmic history book but salvation history book. Nevertheless, there are two passages that pull back the curtain a little and give us a glimpse of Satan's beginnings. They are Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14.

The first ten verses of Ezekiel 28 speak of a human leader who was ruling the ancient city of Tyre but in verses 11-19, it changes from talking about the *ruler* of city of Tyre to the *king* of Tyre. Immediately, we see these two individuals are different. There was an unseen power behind the human leader.

You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were

blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. Ezekiel 28:11-17

Who is this being? Someone who was a Guardian Cherub, someone who was in the “inner circle” of angels with closest access to God. He was blameless and sinless. He was created in a perfect state. He was a model of perfection, wisdom and beauty. It doesn’t get any smarter or more attractive than Lucifer. God did not create Satan as a prime minister of evil. Satan was one of the crowning achievements in the creation of God’s angelic realm.

What happened? V.17 we read that his heart became proud because of his beauty. He looked at himself and realized nothing was as beautiful as what he saw. He looked at his wisdom and saw nothing in all of God’s creation possessed wisdom like he had. He was so impressed with himself he began to desire the honor and glory that belonged to God alone. Pride corrupted his wisdom. He may have been wise but now he couldn’t think clearly. So with full understanding of the issues involved, with no imperfection in his nature, he decided he would role the dice and see if he could get away with rebellion. Apparently, that moment is the beginning of the existence of evil in the universe.

What was Satan’s objective?

What did Satan hope to gain? The other passage of Scripture that gives us some insight to the background of Satan is Isaiah 14:12-17. Like the passage from Ezekiel, it begins by talking about a human king, then flips to talk about the real power behind the human king because it talks about things a human king can not do. This time, it is the ruler of Babylon.

You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” Isaiah 14: 13-14

The 5 “I will” statements tell us about Satan’s objectives in his rebellion.

I will abide in heaven – Lucifer wanted equal recognition alongside God in heaven.

I will raise my throne above the stars of God – The stars of God is a term the Bible often uses to refer to angels. Apparently, Lucifer wanted to rule over the angels with the same authority as God.

I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly – Satan literally wanted God’s seat as the CEO of the universe. He wants to be the guy in the big chair that everybody answers to.

I will ascend above the tops of the clouds – His desire was to become the top being in the universe.

I will make myself like the Most High – Apparently Lucifer sought the supreme position of rulership in the universe for himself. He wanted to exercise the authority and control in the world that only belonged to God.

It was an audacious plan. Today, we wonder how he thought he could get away with it but evil corrupts wisdom, it warps thinking. Just as we struggle to understand the wisdom in a Terrorist's mind, we will struggle to understand Satan's thinking behind his decision to rebel.

As a result of this rebellion, what happened to Satan? He was cast out of heaven to earth, his power was completely perverted (Isaiah 14:12,16,17). His name was changed from Lucifer (morning star) to Satan (adversary). According to Revelation 20:3, he will be bound in the pit for a 1,000 years during the millennial kingdom before he is released for a short time. After that, he will be decisively defeated and thrown forever into the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41).

On planet earth, we are playing our part in the unfolding of this cosmic drama. The struggle between God and Satan. While Satan is the most powerful and majestic being God created, one of the things Satan can't do is create subjects, he needs to recruit them. Revelation 12 tells us Satan recruited a third of the angelic order to follow him and in Genesis we find him corrupting and recruiting the greatest of God's earthly creation. Adam and Eve.

Have you ever wondered why God continues to tolerate Satan? Why didn't God just banish him to the Lake of Fire? Why didn't God banish him to Mars instead of earth? Why does God allow him to continue to create havoc as he tries to establish a rival kingdom?

Is it because God cannot stop him? That is what many people think. I want to propose a stunning answer to this question.... God is using him. The devil is serving God in his rebellion, just as he served God in his obedience. The world is not spinning out of control with Satan at the helm; even though it may look that way. The Bible tells us Satan only has as much power as God allows him to exercise, not one bit more. Yes, Satan does have incredible powers but they can only be exercised at God's permission.

This is really important. Many people think Satan has complete freedom to do as he wishes in this world. They believe God will win the great cosmic battle in the end but it will be a close finish. That is not true. God is still in charge of every bit of this creation, even the parts of his creation that chose to rebel against him.

Let me show you how God controls and uses Satan.

God uses Satan to refine the obedient.

On Friday I took my sons to our first Iowa wrestling tournament. There was one match I saw from the stands that stuck out to me. One boy, who was either in kindergarten or first grade, was going out for his first wrestling match,

and he was scared, he was in tears. This tiny boy kept looking back at his 250+ pound farmer father on the sidelines wanting to get off the mat, while his father kept encouraging him to go out. This boy didn't want to engage in the match his father arranged. Sometimes God sends us on the mat for a battle, but Satan is our opponent. Do you remember the story of Job? God is the one who brings up Job's name to Satan.

“have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. Job 1:8

After an extended discussion on Job's possible motives for obedience, *God gives Satan permission to fight against Job*, but only within specific parameters. Nothing can happen to Job other than what God allows.

Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Job 1:12

What happens next is a testimony to Satan's power in the world. Lightning kills Job's servants, evil armies destroy more servants and his animals, lastly Satan causes a wind that demolishes the home where Job's children are eating and all ten are killed. As you know, in spite of this loss, Job maintained his integrity.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” Job 1:21

Job passed the test that God chose to allow Satan to execute; but Satan complains again. “Job passed the test because nothing touched him personally.” It would have been different if the man's health was at stake.

God then put Satan on the mat with Job again, this time to afflict Job's health. Note: *Satan's power over Job was increased, but only because God allowed it! Satan had to get God's permission.* We should not underestimate Satan's power, but realize *it can only be exercised under God's restraining hand.* Did Job's trial come from Satan or God? The immediate cause was Satan, but the ultimate cause was God. He allowed it.

It isn't just in the story of Job where we find Satan needing permission from God to afflict us. Just prior to the crucifixion, Satan saw a weakness in Peter he wanted to exploit. It was just after the disciples had a discussion about who was the greatest. Peter was feeling on top of his game. He felt he was ready to go with Jesus to prison or to death. He was at the peak of enthusiasm for team Jesus. What does Jesus say to Peter?

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Luke 22:31

Satan had a sinister plan for Peter, but he had to check with Christ before he could do it. He could not approach Peter without divine approval.

While Satan is incredibly powerful; he wants us to think he can exercise his powers of destruction whenever he wants so we are filled with fear about him and we feel life is out of control when tragedies strike. That isn't true. In tough times God may be putting us on the mat with Satan or his demons to test us. In Greek the word for *trials* and *temptations* is the same. Tests from God are designed to demonstrate what we are made of. Everyone of us is like a jelly donut. When we are put under pressure, what is inside of us comes out.

Nothing happens in our lives according to Satan's will, only according to God's will. Our future is always in God's hands, not Satan's. Life isn't out of control. God has not destroyed Satan yet because, he is using him, like a tool.

God uses Satan to discipline the disobedient.

The Old Testament tells us the story of King Saul. Given the bitter end of his life, many wonder if he will be in heaven. I think he will be. He had incredible moments of spiritual victory, even though his life ended as a burning pile of wreckage. God chose to strip the kingdom out of Saul's hands and give it to David because of his persistent disobedience.

A watershed moment in this God ordained transfer of power was David's victory over Goliath. With Goliath, David did what Saul should have done but was too fearful to do. The people fell in love with David because of it. Imagine being Saul and hearing the women sing, "Saul has slain thousands but David tens of thousands". The comparison stung and it fanned the flames of pride and jealousy in his soul.

Then there comes an interesting twist in the story.

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice." 1 Samuel 18:10-11

Saul was doing something very spiritual. He was prophesying. Shouldn't it read that the evil spirit came unexpected from Satan? This demon was from God. It was a messenger of Satan allowed by God. Here is a principle we can count on: *God disciplines disobedient children by turning them over to the control of their enemies.* This demon was sent to discipline Saul by exploiting his jealousy and pride. If Saul chose to be jealous, God would discipline him by letting him become consumed by jealousy. If Saul didn't think it was wise to submit to God's will then let him learn what it is like to submit to Satan so that in despair and the darkness of getting what he wanted he might be driven back to God.

This is not just something that happens in the Old Testament, it happens in the New. In 1 Corinthians 5, we find a man who was sexually involved with his stepmother and the church was tolerating it. What does Paul say to do with him?

Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:5

Again, Satan's role was to be used by God as an agent of God's discipline against a Christian. If the man will not submit to the truth of God, let him fully experience the sinful nature of the devil. This last week, Ted Haggard returned as a guest preacher to a church in Illinois. You might remember him. He was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals and the pastor of a large church in Colorado when he fell into sin, serious sin. He regularly visited a homosexual prostitute and used meth. What happened to him? I don't know all the details but it might have been pride. It might have been a consistent dabbling in either of those sins until God said. You want it? Have at it. What an incredible life was shattered. Lord, keep us from the same.

God uses Satan to keep us from corruption.

Paul had an interesting experience that God used to keep him humble.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:7-8

Prior to this passage, Paul explains how God revealed incredible mysteries to him and he was even caught up to paradise where he learned incredible mysteries about God. What a privilege. What an opportunity to think you are someone special. To keep Paul from becoming conceited, to keep him from falling into the same trap as the Devil, a thorn in the flesh was given him. The Bible doesn't tell us what this thorn was but it does say it was a messenger from Satan to torment him.

God chose to use Satan for his purpose; to keep Paul humble in the face of an incredible opportunity for pride. Paul asked God to remove this thorn in the flesh, but he wouldn't. The thorn, the messenger of Satan, was there to teach Paul to make much of God and the privileged position God had chosen for him.

Satan, who intends to harm us, can be used by God to do us spiritual good. God uses Satan to break us and to help seal us against pride. The brokenness God allows Satan to create in us brings us to the point of daily dependence and guards our character against corrupting pride and thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought.

As I have come to know many of you these last two months, I have seen many broken hearts and deep wounds. Many times we wonder why God would allow pain into our lives. This may be one of the reasons. In brokenness the poison of pride is flushed from our souls.

Conclusion

This Christmas, as we hear about terrorism in India, global recession, the death of the auto industry, or the deterioration of someone we love; should we be

sad? Yes, this was brought about by the devil. Should we lose hope? No! This world is not spinning out of control. I want you to imagine I had a fierce German shepherd with me this morning. He may bite, he can growl, he can lunge and bark at you... but if he is on this leash, he can do nothing to you, unless I let him.

Satan is on a leash. Remember, that he can only do to us what God allows. Even Satan will serve the purposes of God.

Unseen Advocates

Sign Title: Unseen Advocates

December 7, 2008

If you are new to Faith EFC, I would like to welcome you. We are in the second week of a small Christmas series on Angels. Angels play an important role in the Christmas story. An angel announces Jesus' impending birth to Mary, an angel prepares Zechariah for the unexpected birth of his son, John the Baptist. An angel assures Joseph he can take Mary as his wife and later warns him to flee to Egypt for the protection of their infant son.

While angels play a major roll in the Bible, most of us know very little about, how God uses them and what they can and can not do. To whet your appetite for a little angel knowledge, we are having a pop quiz this morning. Take out your outlines, we are having a little 8 question pop quiz.

1. Do angels have wings?

- a. Cherubim and Seraphim do, no indication that others have them

2. What gender are angels? Male, Female or neither or both

- a. When angels appear in the Bible, they always have a male form.

3. Do angels age?

- a. No, Gabriel appears in Daniel 9 then 500 years later to Mary.

4. Which has a higher intelligence, an angel or a human?

- a. Angels have the collective knowledge of all of history at their disposal

5. How many angels are there?

- a. 399,920,004 – Saint Gregory 604 A.D.
- b. 301,655,722 – Kabbalists (medieval Jews)
- c. 6,000 (approx.) – Clement of Alexandria – 2nd century, associated with the stars in the heaven. That number is visible to the eyes. Billions are we don't see.

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.
Revelation 5:11 – This is an expression for an uncountable number

6. Can an angel be in more than one place at a time?

- a. Luke 2:15 – The angels then left and went back into heaven.

7. Can angels take the form of objects, animals or birds?

- a. No, we never find that happening in Scripture. That is the new age book store where angels take the form of swans.

8. Are all angels essentially the same?

- a. No, there are a variety of kinds of angels

This morning, I want to do two things with the balance of our time. First, let's take a brief survey of the different types of angels we see in Scripture. Second, we will wrap up by discovering the role angels play in our life.

What types of angels are there?

Let's develop a type of angelic organizational chart beginning at the top and working our way down. Who occupies the top?

Michael the Archangel

Let's start by looking at one very unique angel, Michael the archangel. Archangel implies he is first among all the angels. Michael is referenced just twice in the New Testament (1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9) and each time it is preceded by the definite article. Since it is always "the" archangel, it seems reasonable to assume there is just one chief angel named Michael. In addition to being first among the angels, Michael also has the role of being the angelic protector of the Jews.

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. Daniel 12:1

He is also referred to as the head of the angelic armies who originally removed Satan from heaven when he rebelled and who will eventually remove Satan and his demons forever confining them to hell.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. Revelation 12:7-8.

The Cherubim – Angels of Power and Majesty

When we think of Cherubs, we think of pudgy naked babies, at least that is the way Valentines Day cards picture them. The Bible doesn't describe them as anything like that. What are they like? They are incredibly powerful and beautiful angels that surround God's throne and defend his holiness. The best description of them is in Ezekiel 1. Let me summarize how the chapter describes them.

They have human form but four faces, one on each side of their head. They have a face of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. They have human hands, but have four wings. Two wings cover their bodies in reverence; two wings are outstretched touching the tip of the wing of the angel next to them. Their appearance is bright like a burning coal, fire flashes back and forth between them, lightening flashes out from them. How fast do they travel? Ezekiel describes their speed like a flash of lightening.

Cherubs are a special type of angel that guard God's holiness. Because of their special function, God had pictures of this type of angel worked into the design of the Old Testament tabernacle. For instance, cherubs were on opposite ends of the cover of the Ark of the Covenant because God's presence was said to dwell between the cherubs. They are pictured as guarding his presence on earth, just as they actually guard his presence in heaven. Weavers wove cherub designs into the curtains of Moses' portable temple. Later in Solomon's temple, cherubs were carved into the walls and the doors of the tabernacle. 1 Kings 6:23-25 describe huge figures of cherubs constructed in the tabernacle.

The only time we don't find them as a bodyguard for God is in Genesis 3:24 when God had them guard the entrance to Eden after Adam and Eve were expelled.

Probably the most startling thing we know about Cherubs is what we learned last week. God's highest cherub was Lucifer until he chose to rebel.

The Seraphim – The Burning Ones

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw a vision of God seated on his throne in the temple. Flying above him was another type of astonishing angel called a seraph. This word literally means, *burning ones*. These angels dwell so close to God's presence they are literally on fire. Isaiah describes them with 6 wings. Two to cover their faces, two to cover their feet and two to fly. They have human like features to them. According to Isaiah, their voices are so strong and powerful they shake the doorposts of God's heavenly dwelling and filled the temple with smoke. What do they do? Unendingly they announce God's holy character, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah 6:3.

We see Seraphs again in Revelation 4, they are doing the same thing except this time they are described as covered with eyes. What are they? They are angelic worship leaders literally on fire with passion for declaring God's greatness.

Gabriel

Besides the Archangel Michael, and the fallen cherub Lucifer, the only other angel mentioned by name in the Bible is Gabriel. Luke 1:19 describes him as one of the highest ranking angels that stands in the very presence of God. Gabriel is an angel who brings a message to God's people about God's programs. In the book of Daniel, we find Gabriel interpreting a vision for Daniel and giving him understanding and wisdom. 500 years later we find him announcing the Birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the birth of Jesus to Mary. Just how important is Gabriel? He was charged with conveying the most important message that ever left heaven, the birth of Christ.

Under him there are still more levels of angelic organization. Colossians 1:16 and Ephesians 6:12 clue us in to some of these different angelic rankings.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. Ephesians 6:12

Apparently the angels are organized into different levels of authority and power.

What does all this mean? As I researched angels this week, I noticed something about God. He likes structures of authority. God sets things in this universe up in an ordered way. God set up a structured and orderly world of spiritual beings. God set up an authority structure in the church with pastors and elders being responsible to him for the health of the church. There is an authority structure in the family where the father is priest of his home and is responsible for the spiritual nourishment of his family.

Without question, there is a vast world of angelic beings we can not see. The important question for us this morning is "What difference do they make?"

In what ways do angels help us?

The December 1993 issue of Time magazine describes angels this way. *"For those who choke too easily on God and his rules, ... angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind, nonjudgmental and... available to everyone, like aspirin."* What do you think? True or false? The Bible doesn't describe angels as available to everyone just like aspirin. God uses angels for a specific group of people.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Hebrews 1:14

Angels are sent by God to serve those who will inherit salvation. If you are a Christian this morning, know God sends his angels to help and serve you, not everyone. Be encouraged. God sends his angels to protect you and insure the success of what he calls us to do.

Right now there are millions of angels standing at attention ready to come to our help, as fast as a bolt of lightning, in response to God's word. Billy Graham in his book on angels makes the point that if we only realized just how close God's angels are to us right now and if we only realized the many times and many ways they protect and help us on a daily basis so nothing more can happen to us than God allows, we would handle the tough times of life much better. So angels are sent, to Christians to help them. In what specific ways do we see them doing that? Let's flip through Scripture to find out.

Angels Are God's Unseen Bodyguards Around Us.

This week I was reading 2 Kings to my sons in our family quiet time and we read these verses.

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those

who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:15-17

Elisha perceived the presence of the angels that came to help them. It was only after Elisha prayed for his frightened servant that the servant could see the angels sent to protect them. Like Elisha’s servant, I am convinced that many times we are unaware of the presence of angels God sends to protect us. We have no idea how many times God has kept us safe through the work of his angels.

When it comes to angels as unseen allies, many people wonder if we have guardian angels. Acts 12:15 leads us to believe that may be true.

You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.” Acts 12:15

The idea of guardian angels is popular in our chaotic world. Wouldn’t it be nice if we knew we had a guardian angel? Before you think too deeply about guardian angels, I think the guardian angel question may be the wrong question to ask.

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; Psalm 91:9-11

God giving us a guardian angel is shortchanging things a bit. There are multitudes of angels. God sends them on assignments to help and protect us. While God may send one angel, many times he sends *more than one* angel. Hoping that we have one guardian angel is too small of a dream. He sends what we need, more than one if necessary. Remember, Elisha had *an entire angelic army* sent to protect him!

Angels are God’s Messengers to Us.

The word angel literally means *messenger*. This is the primary way we see angels in action. The angel Gabriel appeared as a messenger to Daniel, Zechariah, and Mary. An angel appeared to Cornelius in Acts 10 telling him to find Peter and hear the gospel. An angel appeared to Phillip in Acts 8 to bring him to meet an Ethiopian. According to the Bible, angels were involved in giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Do angels still play the roll of angelic messengers today? I suspect we don’t have many stories of miraculous angel encounters but that doesn’t mean angels are not performing this roll. Many times, we find angels carrying out their role as a messengers of God in human form. In Genesis 19 angels appeared as men to warn Lot before they destroyed Sodom. Nobody recognized them as angels. They looked just like men.

In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews believed angels were working as God's messengers in human form.

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

If we are to take this seriously, and I believe we should, God's angels may come into our lives as strangers.

Angels Are Used By God to Answer Our Prayers.

God does not have to use angels to answer our prayers but Scripture teaches that many times he chooses to use angels. For example, in Acts 12 we find Peter wrongfully imprisoned. We read in Acts 12:5 the church was earnestly praying for him. What happened next? An angel appeared in Peter's prison cell and helped him escape.

We find the same thing in Daniel 10:3 where God sent an angel in response to Daniel's prayer.

Christians prayed and God responded by sending an angel. Many times, God answers our prayers by dispatching an angel.

Angels Escort Us to Heaven at the Moment of Death.

Perhaps the most meaningful ministry angels have to us as believers is that at the moment of death, they accompany us to heaven.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. Luke 16:22

Conclusion

So how does all this information apply to us? There are a few things I want you to walk away with this morning. **First**, *I want you to walk away with correct information about angels* and **second**, *I want you to walk away encouraged by it.*

There is a vast unseen angelic world around us of complex and incredibly powerful creatures called angels. Don't leave believing the only reality is what we can see.

If you know and love Christ, be encouraged! As God's child, he loves you and it is only for his children that God promises to send and use angels. They are our unseen advocates, working in ways we cannot see.

Know some of the many ways God uses them in your life. They are body guards to protect us, they are messengers to guide and encourage us, they are sent by God in answer to our prayers and they will eventually escort us to heaven.

Where was Christ before the Manger?

Sign Title: Where was Christ before the Manger?

December 21, 2008

At Christmas we reflect on the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. We talk about Bethlehem. We talk about the shepherds and the wise men. We reflect upon the angelic visit to Mary and Zechariah. These are all good things to reflect on about the birth of Jesus.

But I have a question. What was Jesus doing before his birth? Where was Jesus before the manger? We have potential existence before our conception but Jesus had actual existence. The Bible says so...

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Micah 5:2

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was around long before Christmas. Where was he?

This morning, I want to answer that question. Rather than develop the answer, I will propose an answer. Then, like a lawyer in a courtroom, I will lay the evidence before you. You be the judge and jury. When all is said and done, let's see if you come to the same conclusion.

Ready for the answer? In the Old Testament, when you have a reference to *The Angel of the Lord*; it is a reference to Christ interacting with people in his pre-incarnate form. Pre-incarnate means, before Jesus took on flesh, before he was born in Bethlehem. Now, understand this distinction, I am not talking about references to "an angel of the Lord" but the references to *The Angel of the Lord*. The word *angel* in the Bible doesn't necessarily refer to a created spiritual being, angel literally means messenger.

I realize I made a huge assertion. I hope you are wondering if I can prove this from Scripture. I am glad you asked. You should always ask that at Faith Evangelical Free Church. Let me lay the evidence before you with three assertions and one question:

The Angel of the Lord is God in the Old Testament.

The Angel of the Lord claims to be God.

When we turn to our Old Testament and trace *The Angel of the Lord*, we find he makes some very definite claims to be deity. One of the best examples of this is found in the account of Moses and the burning bush.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. Exodus 3:1-2

If we continue reading a little further, look at how *The Angel of the Lord* identifies himself to Moses.

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3:5-6

The Angel of the Lord is clearly claiming to be God. Interestingly, notice how Moses responded after the angel of the Lord identified himself as God. *Moses hid his face*. Why did he do that? I think Moses had in mind the Old Testament teaching in Genesis 32:30 that said no man can see God and live. It may sound like I am reading into things a bit but if we keep reading and get to v. 13, we find not just *The Angel of the Lord* calling himself God to Moses, but Moses calling *The Angel of the Lord* God.

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:13-14

The angel of the Lord answered by identifying himself with the name of God, Yahweh. It is hard to conceive *The Angel of the Lord* claiming to be deity in any stronger way.

This isn't the only time where *The Angel of the Lord* claims to be deity. As you comb through the Old Testament you find evidence of this scattered through Old Testament books.

Another example is found in Genesis 22. In this chapter we find God instructing Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” Genesis 22:2

Abraham is following God's plans. Guess who shows up at the last minute to complete the conversation?

Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Genesis 22:10-12

Put the pieces together. *Withholding Isaac from the Angel of the Lord is identical to withholding him from God*,

The Angel of the Lord has the attributes of deity.

The Angel of the Lord not only calls himself God but he has attributes that are only true of God. Look with me at the story of Hagar, Sarah's servant, when she was sent into the wilderness to die with her son Ishmael.

And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. Genesis 21:17-19.

The angel of God (the Lord) just claimed he would do something only God can do. He will *make him into a great nation*. To do that involves *omnipotence* and *omniscience*. That means *The Angel of the Lord* knows the future and has the power to change the future. No ordinary angel can do that, only God can.

Now we will stop here but if you want to learn more about *The Angel of the Lord* being God, turn to your small group notes today and dig deeper.

The evidence is stacking up. As we continue to sift through the evidence, we find *The Angel of the Lord* is God is distinct from God.

The Angel of the Lord is God but is Distinct from God.

Zechariah 1:12 is a very interesting passage.

Then the angel of the Lord said, “Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?” Zechariah 1:12

Here we have *The Angel of the Lord* interceding to another person called Yahweh on behalf of the people of Jerusalem and Judah. We have one person who is God interceding before another person who is called God on behalf of God’s people. How are we to understand this? Is God having a split personality disorder? This is the Trinity. It is the second person of the Godhead, the son; interceding to the first person, the father for God’s people. How can there be two different people called *the Lord*? The answer is found in the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit all being God.

The Angel of the Lord Functions Similar to Christ.

We have established *The Angel of the Lord* is God, and he is separate from God the Father. But how do we know this is Christ before the manger? I believe there are a number of fundamental considerations which, when combined, present a strong case for *The Angel of the Lord* being Christ before the manger.

Both The Angel of the Lord and Jesus reveal God to man.

While the Bible tell us the Father’s voice was heard from heaven and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism, it was only Jesus who took on bodily form.

For in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form. Colossians 2:9

It seems reasonable to conclude that Christ is the visible manifestation of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible says no one has ever seen God the father in either Testaments.

No one has seen the Father who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. 1 Timothy 6:16

No one has ever seen God [God the Father], but God the One and Only [Jesus the Son] ,who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:18

The Bible also tells us the Holy Spirit is invisible to the human eye.

...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:17

The Holy Spirit is known by us by because he *lives within us* and because of the *effect* he has on people.

Jesus, the son, always had the job of making God known to us. That didn't change from one testament to the other.

Both The Angel of the Lord and Jesus Intercede for people.

In the New Testament we find Jesus interceding for Christians to his heavenly father.

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:25

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 1 John 2:1

Isn't this the same thing we saw the angel of the Lord doing in Zechariah 1 for the people of Jerusalem and Judea?

Both The Angel of the Lord and Jesus Comfort People.

We find the angel of the Lord comforting Elijah after he was exhausted from his confrontation with Jezebel and the prophets of Baal. He had post traumatic stress disorder after a tough day of work. He was so exhausted he sat down under a broom tree and wished he would die. Look what happens when he is broken.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 1 Kings 19:7

We find Jesus acting as the comforter of God's people in the New Testament.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matt 11:28

Both The Angel of the Lord and Jesus Judge People.

David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown. 1 Chronicles 21:16

What happened? David numbered his army. God was angry with him because he was beginning to place his confidence in the size of his army rather than the God who was the power behind his army. As judgment, God sent a plague upon the people. That would reduce the size of the military machine he was proud of. In this memorable scene, David saw the people of the city of Jerusalem about to be destroyed by the angel of the Lord. Do we find Jesus acting as the judge in the New Testament?

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, John 5:22

The Angel of the Lord disappears in the New Testament.

After seeing how busy The Angel of the Lord is in the Old Testament, it is strange when we get to the New Testament; he completely disappears. Yes, there are references to angels in the New Testament but *The Angel of the Lord*, who is worshiped as God,... is gone. But in the New Testament, Jesus Christ plays the same role *The Angel of the Lord* played in the Old. Perhaps, they are one and the same? The evidence is laid before you, what do you think?

Is this some new fangled theory? When was this connection between *The Angel of the Lord* and Jesus first made? This is what many people in the early church believed and we find it in their writings as early as a little over 100 years after Christ's death.

Well, we established three things.

- The angel of the Lord is God.
- The angel of the Lord is distinct from God the Father.
- The angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, plays the same roles as Jesus in the New Testament.

When we began I said I would give you three propositions and one question. What is the question? "Why Bethlehem and the incarnation? In other words, why did the angel of the Lord take on flesh?"

Why would The Angel of the Lord take on a body and become Jesus?

He could not pay for our sin unless he had a body that could die.

You could not take and nail the angel of the Lord to a cross. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. If God was going to have a sacrifice he could accept for our sin, there was a body that needed to be nailed to a cross. If *The Angel of the Lord* didn't have a body, he couldn't die for us.

He would not be our brother unless he took on flesh.

Inheritance deals with family. The Bible says Christians are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. When the will of the universe is opened and read, it will

apply to us because we will inherit all of the same things our brother Jesus inherits, because Jesus took on flesh and blood, we are now part of the family.

Have you ever wished you could be an angel? You could travel with swiftness and speed; you would have incredible power and strength. I am thankful I am not an angel. I would not trade my place with them, no matter how mighty or powerful. No angel will ever be an heir of God or a joint heir with Christ. No angel will ever have that privilege because no angel will ever be called a brother of Jesus. The Bible tells us someday we will judge the angels. None of that would happen if it wasn't for Bethlehem.

He could not conquer death unless he died.

The Angel of the Lord could not die. In order for there to be death, there has to be humanity. The Bible says Jesus became 100% man yet stayed 100% God. So he could die as a man in our place, so he could rise from the dead to be alive forever to conquer the power the grave has over us.

Do you see why we celebrate Christmas? The coming of *The Angel of the Lord* in the flesh is absolutely central to everything we believe because without *The Angel of the Lord* in the flesh, we are hopeless, because of Bethlehem, we have more than we ever imagined.

How does this apply to us?

There is a story that comes to us from Russia during the days of the Czars. There was a man who was given an important responsibility over the soldiers of Nicholas' army. He was to give them their pay. Unfortunately, he was also a gambler and one night he gambled away the money he was to pay the troops.

Brokenhearted over what he did, he took out a ledger and calculated how much he owed but had no way to pay. He wrote across the bottom of the sheet these words, "Who can pay?" He lay down to take a short nap because in the middle of the night he planned to get up and blow his brains out.

Unknown to him Nicholas, came visiting the military camp that night, he entered the sleeping man's tent and saw the ledger sheet with the question on the bottom. He wrote one word under the question, "Nicholas".

When the young man got up in the middle of the night, he glanced at the paper and immediately recognized the name. Intrigued because the signature looked so authentic, he reconsidered his death sentence. The next day the money came and the man's unpayable debt was covered.

As you look at your life this morning, have you written that question as the subtitle of the sin and brokenness in your life? Who can pay? We can't make it up. But *The Angel of the Lord* became one of us. He died in our place to pay the debt of our sin that we could not pay to bring us back to God. Because of Bethlehem, Jesus can pay. God holds out his hand to forgive our sin and gather to heal the broken pieces we call life. Have you received him? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ to be your Lord and asked his death on the cross to be the

forgiveness for your sin? Have you thanked *The Angel of the Lord*, for taking on flesh so you could become part of the family of God and have your name written into the will of the universe, to with him inherit all things?



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