

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 1

“1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 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”? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: Let all the angels of God worship Him.” 7 And of the angels He says: “Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire.” 8 But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness & hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” 10 And: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.” 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

'Sent Forth to Minister'

As we saw with the commissioning at the end of our worship service, the season of Advent is both the beginning and the end of the annual Church calendar: Advent comes as we complete the season of normal time and we reflect on the future coming of Jesus as the judge of the world.

- As we prepare to celebrate His incarnation on Christmas we look back to the first coming of Jesus!

Through both of these we are reminded that history is real, that history is moving forward, and that God knows the beginning and the end of history! *[important for our time!]*

Following Pentecost we have counted the weeks of normal or ordinary time, week upon week until we come to the end just as all earthly history will end with the second coming of Jesus.

- And now it is time to begin the church calendar anew just as we do with our lives in each New Year!

We truly look forward to the coming of the King of Kings after the Spirit has brought the nations of the earth under His feet AND now we remember the coming of the King of Kings to save His people from their sins. There would be no joy and no real peace if all the nations were simply gathered together for judgment...

- We saw how that works out in the time of the Great Flood when all of mankind, save Noah and his family were destroyed.

As we turn to study the event that changed all of history and brought joy and peace to all the earth, I want to focus this year on three groups of players who are cast prominently in this important historical event...

This week we will discuss the angels. Next week we will look at shepherds.

- And finally we will consider the role of the parents that we find in the Gospel accounts of the First Christmas.
- We will find that each are seen throughout God's story and each give us important examples that can impact our lives.

And as we study them, we must remember that their examples and actions should teach us about Jesus and His work, just as He explained to the Pharisees and His own disciples when it came to the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament.

- Like those Gentiles who came to Jesus near the end of His earthly ministry, ‘we would see Jesus!’

IF we are to properly understand and appreciate God’s grand story, then we should be familiar with angels and shepherds and faithful parents... Just as anyone who wants to understand, appreciate and enjoy The Lord of the Rings would have to be familiar with orcs & elves & hobbits.

The Bible does not give us a great deal of detail about the angels nor the heavenly hosts. The Hebrew and Greek words translated as Angel means messenger. So when we see that word Angel it could be one of the heavenly cherubim, it could be a Church leader like those who received letters in Revelation chapters two & three...

- And the Lord Himself is often called the Angel of the Lord, as we saw when He came to consult with Abraham about the destruction of Sodom.

Angels appear very early in the story of salvation right after the fall of man and are seen at the end of the story singing praises to the Lamb that was slain. At the end of Genesis chapter three we see Adam & Eve driven out of Eden to protect them for a time from the Tree of Life... Had they partaken of that tree without salvation through the work of Jesus, they would have lived forever in their fallen state.

- Thus an angel with a flaming sword is placed at the entrance to protect that tree!

We again see cherubim as guardians, as the Law is given and Moses is told how the Tabernacle was to be built. The Tabernacle and the later Temples were to be dwelling places for Jehovah God just as He was present in Eden. BUT His presence was now in the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could enter once a year after offering sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people: *the people could not enter!*

At the center of this room was the Ark with a mercy seat guarded by two cherubim, or angels, as described in Exodus 25: “17 You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. 18 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. 20 And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, & they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.”

We also see these cherubim on the veil that hung in front of the Holy of Holies Exodus 26: 31 "You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. 32 You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be gold, upon four sockets of silver. 33 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil.”

Just as mankind was barred from the tree of life in the Garden by an angel with a flaming sword...

- We now have the people of God barred from the presence of God by Angels embroidered on the veil, while two angels guard the Mercy Seat inside the Holy of Holies.

Now obviously Moses is given enough detail to instruct the craftsman about how these golden cherubim or angels were to be made and to properly picture them on those curtains that served as the veil.

- We have neither of those artistic renditions today, nor any detailed instructions so we have to do some speculating about what angels actually look like!

Almost all the angels we picture have wings so we get that part right!

The part I don't think that we get right is their majesty and power. We see that as angels come with their messages that they must first tell people to 'fear not'

- **Now these people were not afraid because angels were scary like zombies or orcs!**

They were afraid because their appearance was powerful or awesome!

We should also remember that most would have been familiar with their appearance from the curtains at the Temple! They knew these were in fact God's messengers.

- **We see Angels announcing the birth of Jesus; we see them comforting Jesus in the wilderness & again in the Garden of Gethsemane.**

We must remember that when Satan quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus he was trying to tempt Jesus to sin, but it does not mean that the Scripture was not true: Psalm 91: 11 For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. 12 In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone."

The angels did comfort and protect Jesus throughout His earthly life...

- **And as He rightly told Pilate, at any time He could have called upon vast legions of them to help Him.**

But Jesus prayed to His Father, Thy will be done not mine because He knew that being the sacrifice for sin was the very purpose for which He had come! It must have brought great sorrow to the hosts of angels as they had to watch the Son of God be humiliated & tortured, scorned & beaten, crucified & buried! And yet where do we see the angels again in the grand story of salvation?

- **That is right, two of them standing on either end of the slab on which Jesus was laid: Just as they had been pictured in the Temple!**

And we must not forget one of the final things that took place on the day that Jesus was crucified... The veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom: That veil which prevented the people of God from approaching His presence: The veil with cherubim woven into it to remind God's people of that guard at the Garden."

- **But now the Tree of Life was available to man once again!**

People could come to Jesus as their Savior, repenting and turning from their sin so they could now stand in the very presence of our Holy God in the full righteousness of Jesus, the Son in whom He was well pleased. So it should not surprise us to see Angels so prominent in the Christmas story. We saw in our text this morning that they are ministering spirits who fully understand the supremacy of the Son of God who was being sent and the importance of his being sent! We see Gabriel announcing the coming of John the Baptist, appearing to Zacharias in the Temple in front of all those embroidered angels! He comes to both Mary and Joseph to announce the birth of Jesus...

The promised Messiah who would save His people from their sins!

- **Mary would give birth to the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us!**

Now if Hollywood were writing this story, the birth of the King of Kings would have come with a great deal of pageantry probably right there in center of Jerusalem or maybe Rome!

God chose to have Jesus born in the very city the Prophets said he would be born & in very humble surroundings:

- **As Francis & Edith Schaeffer rightly point out a smelly stable is not a fitting place for the birth of a King, no less the Son of God, but it is a perfect place for a lamb to be born!**

And the announcement of this important birth was not sent to Caesar or the High Priest as the civil and religious leaders of the day, it was brought by God's ministering spirits to some humble Shepherds who will give us something to study next week, Lord willing.

- We see clearly the majesty and splendor of the angels as Luke gives us the details of that glorious night!

Luke 2:9 "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. **10** Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. **11** For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

This Angel brings glad tidings and great joy! He brings this good news because a Savior has been born... That Savior is Christ the Lord...

- And His coming brings peace on the earth!

It came at the right time and at the right place and even though it was first announced to these rural shepherds, the witness of that Angel and their obedience is today proclaimed around the world with nativity scenes and Christmas carols! Even in some VERY pagan settings!

And there was also a grand celebration that night, that I believe foreshadows what we know is now happening in heaven before God's Throne... At verse 13 we read: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: **14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"**

And finally we see the heavenly host singing again in Revelation chapter five, but now they are singing, along with the Saints of all the ages a new song!

9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, **10** And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." **11** Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

- Truly those few shepherds were given a foretaste of what we will all experience before God's Throne!

Our text from Hebrews clearly teaches that God sends His angels as ministering spirits, and as it should be with our lives their ministry brings glory to the Son:

Hebrews 1: "1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

The angels join with John the Baptist in declaring that He must increase and I must decrease!

So, as we read our Bible and see those ministering spirits from Genesis to Revelation let them always remind us about the person and work of Jesus!

And may their example of service remind us of the great truth that the Apostle Paul shared with the Saints at Philippi:

Philippians 3: “7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 1

8 But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness & hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” 10 And: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.