

The ministering spirits Angels - part 1

What is it that you seek?

- 1) How would you describe an angel?
- 2) Upon what are you basing that description?
- 3) Why should we learn about angels?

Classes outline

- Week 1 - Source materials for angels
- Week 2 - Biblical depictions / descriptions and origins
- Week 3 - Messengers of God
- Week 4 - THE Angel of the LORD (Christ before Christmas?)
- Week 5 - The fallen ones (what's the difference between a devil and a demon?)
- Week 6 - Warrior angels
- Week 7 - Guardian angels & escort duty
- Week 8 - Angels among us (esp. Hebrews 10:1-4)
- Week 9 - Other angelic questions

I) Where do we learn about angels?

A) Scripture

- 1) The word "angel" (usually with ...of the LORD) occurs 207 times in Scripture
 - as it means "messenger" it is often also used of a human messenger
 - the pastors of the 7 churches of Asia are called "angels"
 - John the Baptist is called "the messenger" sent to proclaim the Christ
 - Context tells us which meaning is being used
- 2) The plural, angels, occurs only 97 times (mostly in Psalms and Revelation)
- 3) The phrase, "The angel of the LORD" occurs 64 times (59 in OT, only 5 NT)
 - the definite article makes all the difference, this is a specific heavenly being.

B) The Lutheran Confessions / Church Fathers (ancient and not-so-ancient)

- 1) Melancthon mentions angels in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article XXI paragraph 8 in the discourse on "invocation of the saints" - that's the only mention
- 2) Angels are not hinted at in the explanation of the Nicene Creed, Article 1
- 3) The Explanation of the Small Catechism (Confirmation stuff) 1991 has a section on angels as part of the explanation to the 1st article of the Apostles' creed; though this explanation portion came centuries after Luther
- 4) Angelology is considered a "tertiary doctrine" in Confessional Lutheranism
 - One's salvation is not dependent on what one believes about angels
 - They appear in Scripture, but have a relatively minor role - mostly messengers
 - We cannot, therefore, make a weighty doctrine given such little information
- 5) The early Church Fathers spoke of angels often in their messenger and defender roles
 - Irenaeus is the first Father to mention angels at length
 - Cyprian has the most to say about angels

- 5) The Church Fathers
 - Tertullian, Polycarp, Origin, and Jerome all speak of angels as intercessors
 - These early witnesses are helpful for understanding, but not for establishing official Church teaching (doctrine)
 - There were very few “heresies” concerning angels until the late middle ages
- 6) St. Thomas Aquinas (Doctor Angelicus) and the *Summa Theologica* (1273 AD)
 - This is considered the Magnum Opus on angeology and the definitive work
 - He set the heavenly beings into “choirs” and arranged a hierarchy of angels
 - * Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones (Ophanim) at the top, closest to God
 - * Dominions (governors), Virtues (natural laws), and Powers (enforcers) next
 - * Principalities (localized), Archangels, and angels closest to mankind
 - This third “tier” is further broken down into other choirs with particular functions
 - * Gregorii - “Watchers”
 - * Heralds and messengers for routine heavenly announcements
 - * Guardian angels fall in this last category
 - Very little of this hierarchy or roles is backed by Scripture
 - By the Renaissance, this was the common understanding of angels
- 7) The Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism work that also mentions angels and their work

C) Pseudepigrapha and Apocalyptic literature

- 1) These books didn’t “make the cut” to be considered Scripture
- 2) Luther still found them helpful for instruction and understanding, just not authoritative enough to base doctrine on.
- 3) Tobit introduces us to Raphael (archangel) and 2 Esdras also mentions angels’ work
- 4) The book of Enoch has more angelic references than all of Scripture combined
 - in popular culture, the language of heaven is called “Enochian”
 - This apocryphal book was a mjr influence on Aquinas and Dante (Comedy)
 - Much of what we see about angels here is sontrary to what we find in Scripture

D) Hymnody

- 1) How many hymns mention (or are about) angels and their work?
- 2) How many Christmas Carols are based on Luke 2:8-14? (And Linus’ speech)
- 3) Should we base our uderstandng of something that is by definition “poetic license”?

E) Visual arts (paintings, sculpture, stained glass windows, etc.)

- 1) How are angels depicted in Christian art throughout the ages? (Get Dr. in this!)
- 2) Raphael (Renaissance artist) gave us “chubby cherubs” popular in Victorian times
- 3) Many nurseries are adorned with a picture of a guardian angel (bridge scene)
- 4) How much of this comes from Greco-Roman influence?
- 5) These visual images shape our understanding even more than the written Word
- 6) Byzantine icons gave us the “halo”

F) Modern Art (Television, movies, music)

- 1) Modern films and TV series’ in the last 20 or so years have left all Biblical records behind as source material and are purely in the realm of fantasy.
 - * Angels anthropomorphized into being “less than holy”

- * often pictured as morally ambiguous “celestial bureaucrats”
 - * In many cases the angel is the “bad guy” (anti-hero)
 - * Sometimes TV gets closer to the truth, but still needs to make the ratings
- 2) A few examples of “angelic” TV shows (and I’m dating myself here)
 - * Touched by an Angel, Roma Downey mid 1980’s
 - * Highway to Heaven (Pa Ingalls was an angel?)
 - * Supernatural, of the 11 seasons, 9 focused on angels and demons (Castiel?)
 - * Lucifer (6 seasons) - gives a different perspective on celestial beings
 - * Any others?
 - 3) Movies featuring angels
 - * Sci-Fi / Fantasy genre has a great many (Legion, End of Days, etc.)
 - * It’s a Wonderful Life - what would that movie be without Clarence?
 - * City of Angels with Nicolas Cage
 - * Any others come to mind?
 - 4) Music
 - * Angel, by Sarah McLachlan (a wonderful Viennese waltz, but very sad)
 - * Angels by Robbie Williams (pop-rock ballad about finding comfort)
 - * Mostly references to “angel” speak of romantic entwinements
 - Earth Angels by the Penguins
 - Angel of the Morning by Julie Newton was a “one hit wonder” in the 70’s

G) Syncretism with other religious and cultural traditions

- 1) Greco-Roman influence
 - * The Greek gods didn’t use angels, they had Hermes / Mercury (god of language too)
 - * Many lesser deities / spirits - dryads, naiads, aethera, etc. simply “spirits”
 - * demigods and celestial beings became part of Christian angelic tradition
- 2) Planetary deities / spirits
 - * For whom are our planets named?
 - * Stars and angels are one and the same in many mythological traditions
 - * Even C.S. Lewis (Space Trilogy) had Oyeresu as planetary rulers
- 3) Germanic / Celtic influence
 - * What is a Christian to do with the Fae (fairies)? Make ‘em into angels!
 - * Angels never depicted as female until Christianity came to Celtic lands
 - * Seen again in post-Renaissance Celtic revivalism (1800’s)
- 4) Other religious traditions
 - * Islam was founded by Jibril (Gabriel) who gave the Qu’ran to Mohammed
 - Djinn (Genie) granting wishes, helping people equated with angels’ work
 - Muslim angelology and demonology generally follows Christian tradition
 - * Zoroastrianism (Persian) gave us dualism
 - Good and evil locked in an eternal struggle (God vs. Satan / Angels vs. demons)
 - These “celestial spirits” often drop down to earth for good or ill
 - * Hinduism / Jainism
 - Yakshas and Yakshis; caretaker (guardian) spirits
 - Avatars; Rama & Vishnu appearing in human form
- 5) Animistic traditions
 - The spirits of the ancestors appear to their progeny in visible form

- So do we become angels when we die? (See Luke 20:34-36)

Conclusion: What are we to do with all this information

- 1) Is it any wonder that there is much confusion about angels and what they do?
- 2) As Christians, and especially as Lutherans, what's the only source we should trust?
- 3) What then are we to do with all these other "angelic" manifestations?
 - Can I still binge watch Supernatural or Lucifer?
 - Can I dance to Sarah McLachlan?
 - Can I hang a picture of a guardian angel helping kids over a bridge in my kid's room?

The Ministering Spirits
Angels - part 2 - physical appearance

Let's talk about it:

- 1) Why are there so few physical descriptions of angels in Scripture?
- 2) With so little to go on, why so many angels in artwork?
- 3) Do you think there may be as many unique creations in the heavenly realm as on earth?

II) *When* angels are visible, what do they look like?

A) "Ordinary" appearances - what do we learn of angels in each of the following:

- 1) Genesis 18:2, 16 / 19:1 _____
- 2) Numbers 22:22-35 _____
- 3) Judges 6:19-24 _____
- 4) Judges 13:2-21 _____
- 5) II Samuel 24:16-17 _____
- 6) Zechariah 1:8-17 _____
- 7) Zechariah 3 _____
- 8) Luke 2:8-14 _____
- 9) Matthew 28:2-7 _____
- 10) Mark 16:5-7 _____
- 11) Luke 24:4-7 _____
- 12) Acts 12:6-11 _____

B) The Cherubim (Raphael got it wrong)

- 1) Genesis 3:24 Cherubim are apparently warrior angels
- 2) I Kings 6:24-27 Solomon's portrayal in Temple decor
- 3) Ezekiel 41:18-19 Cherubim as decor in the new Temple
- 4) Ezekiel 28:11-19 The city of Tyre (and its king) compared to a cherub
- 5) Psalm 80:1, 99:1 God sits enthroned between the cherubim on the Mercy Seat
- 6) Ezekiel 10:1-20 (esp. 8) Seen as men, but winged - also called "Living Creatures"
- 7) MOST references to cherubim are regarding the Tabernacle or Temple

C) Seraphim - Isaiah 6:1-7 the *only* reference in Scripture

- 1) Why six wings?
- 2) What is their role, purpose, function?
- 3) What non-seraphic function do they perform here?

D) The “weird ones”

- 1) Wheels within wheels
 - Ezekiel 1:15-21
 - Ezekiel 10:9-20
- 2) The Living Creatures
 - Ezekiel 1:1-14
 - Ezekiel 10:14 (though called cherubim here)
 - Revelation 4:6-11 (seraphs? Cherubs? Other?)
- 3) Why so many eyes?

E) There *may* be other celestial beings not recorded in Scripture

- If God made the world and all that is in it with such variety, is it unreasonable to think that He would have created heaven with equal variety of beings?

Conclusion:

- 1) Angels usually do not take on a form perceptible to human eyes
 - When they do, they most often appear as men - just “ordinary guys”
- 2) The *numbus* or radiant glory (shining) is what gives them away as heavenly beings
- 3) Only certain classes (species?) of angels have wings
- 4) When they take physical form they can act as human creatures do (kick, eat, walk, etc)
- 5) *Most* of the time, humans are unaware of angels in their midst (Hebrews 13:2)

Next week: “Didn’t you get the memo?” Angels as messengers

THE MINISTERING SPIRITS
Angels part 3 - Messengers

We should talk:

- 1) If there were an EMP burst and the cell phone / internet grid went down, how would you get an important message to someone?
- 2) “Hark! The herald angels sing” is one of the ways we learned about angels, but what is a herald and what did they do?
- 3) In an era of “Fake News”, how do we know we can trust God’s messengers?

III) I’ve got good news and bad news - What kind(s) of messages do God’s heralds bring?

A) In the Old Testament

- 1) Genesis 16:7-16
- 2) Genesis 22:9-19
- 3) Numbers 22:31-35
- 4) Judges 2:1-5
- 5) I Kngs 19:4-8
- 6) Daniel 4:13-18
- 7) Zechariah 6:1-8

B) In the New Testament

- 1) Matthew 1:18-25
- 2) Matthew 28:1-9
- 3) Mark 16:4-8
- 4) Luke 1:8-23
- 5) Luke 2:10-13
- 6) Luke 24:1-9
- 7) Acts 10:3-8
- 8) Acts 12:8
- 9) Revelation 14:6-13

Next Week: THE angel of the LORD