

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Christmas Day
Monday, December 25th, 2017

Sermon: A Son Superior to Angels

Texts: Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

Focus Statement: Jesus is more important than Christmas angels.

Function Statement: That they would rejoice in God's presence with them by his Son.

Sermon Structure: Text-Application

Doctrinal Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord..." (SC, Explanation of the Second Article of the Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Merry Christmas! *Merry Christmas!* It is impossible to tell the Christmas story without mentioning the angels. It all begins with the angel Gabriel announcing to the virgin Mary that she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38). It continues with the angel announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds on Christmas Eve: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11, ESV).¹ Then there was the heavenly host singing the *Gloria in Excelsis*: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14, KJV).

Our fascination with angels continues today with our angel ornaments, Christmas tree toppers, and innumerable mentions in our Christmas hymns and carols: "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," and "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear." There's nothing wrong with any of this, as long as we keep our focus in the right place.

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

The Bible is clear that some of us have “entertained angels unawares,” as Abraham did with the three visitors (Heb. 13:2; cf. Genesis 18). And which of us has not wished, on occasion, that God would send an angel to deliver an answer to prayer? After all, if an angel spoke to us like Gabriel did to Mary, perhaps we would have a better clue what God wants us to do with our lives.

But there is a danger of excessive interest in angels that borders on idolatry. I have heard of some people actually *praying* to angels as intermediaries, instead of going straight to Jesus. At my previous congregation, I even had a member whose entire home was filled with pictures and statues of angels—she had more angels than crosses!

“My angels are watching over me,” she said matter-of-factly.

True, angels are God’s servants, sent to minister to those who come to faith in Christ (Heb. 1:14). But they are fellow creatures, not gods to be worshiped (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9; Col. 2:18). Even though our imaginations are stirred by the mystical and magical, the angels never wanted the spotlight. They always intended to shine light on the True Light, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In first-century Judaism, there was great interest and speculation about angels. Many of the apocalyptic writings of the Essene community and other extra-Biblical documents found among the Dead Sea Scrolls have vivid descriptions of angels’ activities. But in the so-called Letter to the Hebrews, the author of today’s epistle carefully proves that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is “much superior to angels” (Heb. 1:4). Yes, “for a little while” God made him “lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:7). After all, Jesus hid his divinity when he wrapped himself in human flesh. But his name is still “more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:4).

The Bible mentions millions of angels (Rev. 5:11) of various kinds and class, including cherubim, seraphim, and others that look almost human. Yet only two angels are named in Scripture: Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) and Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Rev. 12:7).

The name of Jesus is the name above every other name, at which every knee will bow (Phil. 2:9-10). The name of Jesus is the only name given unto men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). His name is Jesus because, as the angel told Joseph, “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Christ alone came down from heaven and became incarnate of the Virgin Mary to save you from your sins. No angel ever died for you. No angel ever will. But Jesus died “once for all”—that is, for you and me (Heb. 7:27; 10:10).

God loves the angels, as he does all his creatures. They are part of the creation that, in the very beginning, God called “very good” (Gen. 1:31). But the angels are not like the eternal Son of God by whom “all things were made” (John 1:3). Jesus “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). The angels hide their faces from the light of God’s face (Isa. 6:2). But Jesus Christ *is* the Light (John 1:4-9). “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...” (Heb. 1:3), which means that if we want to see what God is like, we need look no further than Jesus.

For in the little babe of Bethlehem, the Word of God “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “No one has ever seen God,” but Jesus “has made him known” (John 1:18).

“For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’” (Heb. 1:5). The answer, of course, is none. *Jesus* is the Son. The angels serve and worship *him* (Heb. 1:6).

The Good News is that God's angels do watch over us. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11). Christ himself says that every little child has an angel in heaven (Matt. 18:10). And in both Luther's morning and evening prayers, we ask God, "Let your holy angel be with me that the evil foe may have no power over me" (*Small Catechism*).

But the better news is that God is with us. Jesus Christ is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). He is the Word made flesh (John 1:1, 14). He is the one by whom God speaks to us today (Heb. 1:2). And he is the one who was born to die *for you*. Again, there are millions of angels. But there is only one begotten Son of God. So do not be ashamed of your angel tree topper. Gladly join in singing the angel songs on Christmas. But always remember to hearken to the one the herald angels sing: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, Immanuel. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of T the Holy Spirit. Amen. Merry Christmas!