

“The Day the Angels Wept” (Matthew 1:18–25)

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ANGELS? Not a lot, but we do know some things that the Bible teaches us about them. For example...

- o There are a lot of them—millions, in fact
- o They are very powerful—more so than us
- o They are mighty warriors—like Michael (see Daniel and Revelation)
- o They were created by God
- o They sometimes take on human form
- o They spend a great deal of time worshiping God
- o They deliver messages—in fact, that’s what the word “angel” means—a messenger
- o Some of them rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven—we call them evil spirits or demons or fallen angels
- o They have a ministry of protection and deliverance among believers
- o According to psalm 34:7, they encamp all around those who fear God and deliver them. This means that they “linger” and “keep vigilant watch” over us.
- o They sometimes brought judgment to this earth at the command of the Lord, as in the case of Sodom and Gommorah.

Did you ever think about the role that angels played in the life and ministry of Jesus? It would take an entire book to spell out in detail how the life of Jesus was intertwined with the attending ministry of angels.

Let me share briefly some of the episodes from the New Testament.

1. To prepare for the birth of Christ, an angel appeared to Zacharias to inform him of that his wife would be the mother of John the Baptist, the cousin and forerunner of Jesus.
2. Gabriel, one of the mighty angels of God, announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah.
3. A multitude of angels appeared to the Shepherds in the fields to announce His birth.
4. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream three times: to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife for she was with child of the Holy Spirit; to warn him to take the child Jesus to Egypt so that Herod would not kill Him; after the death of Herod, an angel told Joseph to return with his family to Israel.
5. Angels assisted Jesus when He was being tempted of the devil in the wilderness.
6. In the Garden of Gethsemane, an angel came and strengthened Jesus as He agonized over the cross that awaited Him.
7. Angels were poised at Calvary, just waiting for Jesus to give the word for them to deliver Him.
8. After our Lord’s resurrection, angels rolled back the stone in front of the tomb so that His disciples and the whole world could see that He was gone!
9. At Jesus’ ascension, angel’s appeared to those assembled and declared, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

10. And then, of course, angels will accompany Him as He returns one day to bring judgment and to usher in His glorious kingdom.

As Jesus was ascending back to His Father, He was escorted by the holy angels, to be seated at the Father's right hand. Then even the morning stars ascribed honor, glory, and praise to Him as the Son of the Living God.

On the other hand, some angels remained behind to assure those early disciples that they would always be near---ready to help God's people throughout the ages to come---until Christ returns in person.

With all of this as background, let's use our imaginations for a few moments and picture a scene in heaven that could well have taken ... place on a special night long ago.

There was sorrow in heaven. Can you imagine that? Sorrow in heaven! It seemed strange to the angels who were given the task of carrying the messages for the Master from one end of heaven to the other. A report was out that Gabriel had those things called "tears" in his eyes. Something terrible must have happened to have caused it. The only other time tears were shed in heaven was back when the earth was first created and two humans fell prey to Lucifer. It broke the Master's heart.

The conclusion was that Gabriel's tears must have something to do with those beings on earth. A rumor was spreading throughout the Crystal Sea that the Lord Himself was going down to earth to live among them. It was hard to believe but was confirmed by Gabriel. The Master was going to leave the Ivory Palaces and the Rainbow Throne and take up residence on that rebellious planet.

Confused angels began to ask the question that crossed everyone's mind. "What will He do down there? The answer given by the archangel was, "He's going to be born." The angels answered, "Born? What's born?" Gabriel: "I don't know; it's something that happens to earth creatures."

There was a great deal of commotion in the celestial city. Angels had massed from the four corners of heaven. Row upon row, rank upon rank---angels and archangels were there before the Great Throne of God Almighty. Then they saw it. Something made their hearts sink---the seat at the right of the throne was empty! The Bright and Morning Star was gone!

Gabriel raised his hand and there was complete silence. Then in clear tones as sweet as the sound of many waters, he spoke: "You've been called together to hear the most wonderful pronouncement ever made in the eternal ages. Our beloved Lord, the only begotten of the Father, has left us!"

The voice of the great angel trembled and sobs burst from the lips of the gathered host. In a moment, Gabriel continued: "Our Lord has gone to earth to be born as a babe that He might take upon Himself the fashion of a man. Only in this way, the Father believes, can the earth people know of His love for them. He will take away the sin of all earth creatures who receive His offer of salvation."

A gasp of astonishment rose from the angels. They couldn't imagine the Lord of Glory living in a place of such darkness. In a moment, Gabriel continued: "On earth tonight in a little town called Bethlehem, His incarnation will be accomplished.

Several of the best singing angels were selected to accompany Gabriel as he made the announcement. By the thousands and tens of thousands they swept through the heavens. Down through the belt of Orion, on past the Milky Way---down, down, they went through the still night air, leaving the stars twinkling far behind them.

At a signal from Gabriel they stopped, poised above the earth. Below them, by the light of a camp fire, they could see shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. Suddenly, Gabriel broke through the clouds and stood before the men. They gazed at him and the attending hosts in awe and then fell in terror to the ground. The Gabriel spoke: "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

As Gabriel finished these words, the light of the glory of God fell from heaven and the hosts began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to men of good will."

The song floated out upon the still night air. It enraptured the shepherds who heard it. The night breeze that blows over the fields of Bethlehem caught it up and bore it heavenward, where it echoed around the Throne of God and was lost among the stars. Then, at a signal from Gabriel the heavenly host moved upward.

One of the angels asked Gabriel how long the Master would be gone. "Thirty three years, I am told. It will take that long for Him to provide for mankind's redemption. Heaven will be a lonely place without Him but earth will one day rejoice greatly. They will write songs and books that will praise His glorious name from age to age. He will become the fountainhead of life for all who embrace Him." And with that, the angels broke out in a song of praise as they continued on their journey toward home.

Some 33 years passed and again we listen in as some angels are engaged in conversation. "I can't believe it. They killed our Lord! He went to love them and to show them the way to the Father and they ridiculed Him and mocked Him and tortured Him and finally nailed Him to a cross. Why doesn't the Father punish them? Why doesn't He destroy that sick and wretched planet?" Then one of the other angels said, "I guess it's because He loves them. In fact, I heard one of the archangel's say that the Master knew all along that they would do all of these horrendous things to Him and He willingly laid down His life to redeem them. Remember when Michael led a group of 10,000 angels to Calvary? They stood poised for action with swords drawn. Just one word from our Lord and they would have destroyed the entire city of Jerusalem. And yet He didn't give the command.

Just then, there was a stirring in the city. The news was out. The Master had returned two days ago. All heaven was rejoicing. It was just like the old days. It was so good to have Him back. His glory filled the entire city—with one difference—this glory shone through an earth creature's body—a body with scars on hands and feet.

And the angels had again come from the far corners of the universe to sing a new song. But when they approached the Great Throne, they saw that it was impossible to get near it for it was surrounded by thousands and millions of human souls singing with perfect harmony:

Salvation belongs to our God,
Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks
and honor and power and strength be to
our god for ever and ever. Amen!

Scripture References

Matthew 1:18–25

Luke 2:1–14

Luke 2:15–24

Luke 2:25–40

Psalm 34:7

Isaiah 7:14; 8:10; 9:6–7

Romans 1:2–4

Study Questions

Notes