

Title: Angels – The Call of Light

Text: Hebrews 1.5-14

Theme: The Word of the Lord came through the angels

Series: Advent 2006 #2

Prop Stmt. Angels are fascinating, amazing, wondrous...but they don't hold a match to Jesus!

Read Text:

After the Reformation, the elaborate altars that used to occupy the center of the church platforms were replaced in many of the Protestant churches with pulpits. Some of the pulpits were extremely ornate and immovable. In Scotland, when a man was ordained into the ministry, he was given two keys. One was to the church Bible and the other was to the church pulpit. In some of those same churches, the people would gather into their pews on Sunday awaiting to hear the Word of the Lord. And the service would begin, when a young man from the congregation would carry the Bible in, usually high above his head. As he did, every member of the church would stand for the Word. A young man, even a boy at times was used, and not a minister in formal clothing so that everyone knew that we do not stand for the minister, we stand for the Word. The young man known as the beadle would ascend into the pulpit and place the Word on the sacred desk and then the service would begin. God has revealed Himself through His Word to His people. We have revelation. We have His truth. We have the sacred light.

The first service that we held in this Worship Center was Good Friday night, 2004. On that night we borrowed this old Protestant custom. Customs can have a powerful influence upon a person, which is why I like to use certain customs if, and only if they are effective in communicating a biblical truth and if we recognize that they are only customs and not laws. For the past ten years we have used aspects of the custom of the advent calendar to help us anticipate the birthday of Christ, when the Light of World came into the world. We have done that by using readings, candles, lights and characters to help us understand what happened when Christ was born. Although Christ was born on that night, his birth was announced and anticipated. The Word of the Lord came down through the ages through the Prophets and through them light came into the world. Then the word of the Lord came through the Angels and more light came into the world. The Word of the Lord came to the Shepherds and the word of the Lord was revealed to the Wise Men. But as interesting and intriguing as all of this is, it only sets the stage for the entrance of the King of Kings and Lord of lords. Today, we are looking at the second Sunday of Advent – and celebrating the fact that the word of the Lord came to and through the angels. Remember, it is not the angels we celebrate, but that God has been so gracious to not leave us in darkness. God has given us His Word. He used angels as a vehicle at times to communicate His Word and in the Christmas event angels played a major role. Their part and their example stands as a powerful sermon for us to this day.

1. Angels are fascinating!

Angels are mentioned 273 times (108 – OT; 165 – NT) in over half of the books of the Bible. They were created by God, probably in the opening moments of creation – when time began. They report directly to God and were created to live forever. They are spirit beings able at times to take on a bodily appearance. They are powerful, intelligent and they do not marry. (I do not mean to imply that they are intelligent because they do not marry, only that God created them not to marry, and created them with a high level intelligence.) They are more intelligent than humans, though not omniscient. They are more powerful than humans, though not omnipotent. They are innumerable, though not omnipresent. They are able to speak, able to sing, able to harm and able to help.

They are called sons of God, holy ones, spirits, watchers, authorities and powers, some of them are given ranks that indicate the presence of a highly organized structure of authority. One designation is that of “**cherubim**” who are the ones who guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were removed. Psalm 18.10 says that God rode the cherubim as his chariot. Cherubim were the types of angels that there were cast in gold on the holy of holies where God sat as the King in the midst of his people in the tabernacle. **Seraphim** are another group mentioned in Isaiah 6. While they may have other duties, the seraphim in Isaiah 6 worship God, day and night, forever and ever. That may seem boring to us, because the things that we have looked forward to the most, repeated without end become monotonous. But, not so with the true worship of God. There is no end to knowing Him. These angels are never tired, empty, or short on motivation. God is eternally awe-inspiring because He is beyond the ability of the creation to know Him fully. The seraphim are not tainted by sin. They are not distracted by their own desires. Their hearts are never drawn away in the praise of another. Sin and selfishness never capture the affections of their hearts. Day and night, they worship. Both Ezekiel and Revelation speak of the “**Living Creatures**” whom I would put into the angel category. These heavenly beings which can take on the appearance of certain animals are also, like the seraphim in heaven for the expressed purpose of worship God day and night.

Only 2 of the good angels are named. **Gabriel** always seems to be related to Israel in some sort of way, and **Michael** is actually called an archangel. The Bible does not say if he is the only archangel, or if there are more. But, his ranking and based on some of the other words used for angels does indicate that there is a hierarchical structure they enjoy.

But angels are more than fascinating in a curious sort of way. They are awesome beings. This is obvious from the reactions that most have to angels and by what the angels say in response. Gabriel appeared to Zechariah who was “gripped with fear” and Gabriel said to him, “Do not be afraid.” Mary “was greatly troubled” and Gabriel said, “Do not be afraid.” An angel appeared to the Shepherds who “were terrified” and the angel said, “Do not be afraid.”

When we think of angels we may be tempted to get our theology from paintings. That is dangerous. We need to get our theology from the text. Angels are not cute, little, pudgy, curly-haired cupid like creatures. They are awe-inspiring, fear-filling, sin-awakening, mortal-reminding, knee-knocking, jaw-dropping awesome beings! People who encounter

angels do not make a TV series about it, instead, they think that they are going to die! Which is exactly why so many angels have to be trained in CPR.

Angels are fascinating spirit beings who remind us there is a lot more to this world than what we can see. But human beings do not necessarily do so well with that. Steven Pinker is the Johnstone professor of psychology at Harvard University. He recently wrote an article in the Harvard Crimson, where he was objecting to the possibility of Harvard University offering a core curriculum course on Faith and Reason. Science and technology have made some astounding achievements in the past century. But these advances can obviously have both wonderful and horrendously destructive uses. The same labs that can produce incredible medicines can also produce biological warfare agents. So, how can an institution help advance science and technology with the knowledge that this science and technology can be used for evil? Herein lies the problem. In a pluralistic, morally neutral, open-minded educational setting, how can you define evil? On the other hand, how can you put incredible power into the hands of people without attempting to deal with the morality that obviously must accompany it? Therefore Harvard is attempting to address this problem of scientific and technological discoveries in a context void of ethics. They are recommending that a course be taught on Faith and Reason. Pinker objects. He doesn't mind the reason part, but he thinks that faith is a code word for religion and that religion has nothing to do with reason. He wants a science that has no religion or faith in it, even though he acknowledges that science has revealed some rather unsettling discoveries. In his article he says, "The discoveries of science have cascading effects, many unforeseeable, on how we view ourselves and the world in which we live: for example, **that our planet is an undistinguished speck in an inconceivably vast cosmos; that all the hope and ingenuity in the world can't create energy or use it without loss; that our species has existed for a tiny fraction of the history of the earth; that humans are primates; that the mind is the activity of an organ that runs by physiological processes....**"

His basic argument was that he did not have a reasonable faith in people who had faith. Pinker did not want students to look at the course and assume that faith/religion had anything to do with reason. He only had faith in his ability to reason. Which is highly presumptive, since he was assuming that his ability to reason was perfectly rational and that he did not have any bias at all. And since his faith was not in faith, but was in his own ability to reason, he thought that his faith was actually faithless, and that the reason for our faith was reasonless. Ironically, Christians are often portrayed as being so narrow-minded, and irrational. But when you only present a God-less science, stop complaining when you raise a hopeless generation. I do not believe in God because it makes me feel good. But, to those who have no belief in the supernatural, who think that we are only material beings, you have to wonder, why do people want to have hope? Where did the idea of hope ever come from in the first place? The truth is there is a lot more going on in this world, that most people have any clue of. Those who reject the supernatural are in reality the narrow-minded. But, when you try to construct a life that has no place for God, then discussions and perhaps experiences with deep evil both in society and deep evil that for some on a personal level has a demon-like intensity reveals that your construction of life is missing something really, really big. That is one of the huge, glaring holes in the entire evolutionary construct. No one knows what to do with the

problem of evil. And evil is a huge problem. This was immediately apparent to any person in Scripture who has had an encounter with one of these burning ones.

I think the reasons angels wig people out is because: 1) They are holy beings who by their very presence immediately make humans aware of some of their sinfulness and 2) They reveal that there is so much more to this world than we realize. There is so much more to our worship than we realize. 1 Corinthians 11 is clear that one of the reasons why our manner, appearance and conduct in a worship service is so important is because angels are present. Hebrews 12.22 also speaks about the church gathering for worship and says in essence that when we do this, we “have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.” Our worship right now has an affect on the heavenly Jerusalem. Most of reality is unseen to you. Angels are a little reminder of that.

The bottom line is this: Angels are amazing because God is amazing.

2. Angels are consumed with the worship and obedience of God.

A. Angels love what God loves.

Angels love God. They burn with worship for Him. They marvel at his works. They applauded when he laid the foundation of the earth in place. They were in awe – and still are. So, (and we are getting a little closer to our story line now) when they were involved in the unfolding event of the advent of Christ, they were giving God glory because they were able to watch God’s incredible plan for the salvation of sinners unfold on the stage right before them. How could this holy and righteous God that they knew and worshiped and loved and adored pardon and justify sinners who rejected the very God that had made mortal man and were so unlike these angelic beings? How could this happen? A third of the original angelic host followed Lucifer in an ill-fated mutiny. These fallen angels or demons were never given a chance at redemption. The ones who did not rebel were confirmed in their holiness, while the ones who sinned were confirmed in their condition of being under the just and righteous judgment of God. When the human race plunged itself into sin, God could have treated us like he did the angels. But God, chose to do for us what He did not do for the angels. He provided a way for our forgiveness.

Because angels are consumed with the worship and obedience of God, they love what He loves. And God loves sinners to repent and trust in Him. God loves to declare a sinner to be righteous in His sight. God loves to be known not only as Creator, but also as Savior. The angels did not have it all figured out how it was going to work, but they knew that God had a plan and that God was working His plan. And I think that the angels who knew God as the very God, and for all of their many years had seen Him in his glory and knew who He was, were absolutely fired up with amazement when they found out that God the Son had taken upon himself the form of a human and was conceived in the womb of Mary and was born. The incarnation was the occasion for these angels to worship. They showed up over a bunch of shepherds and had a praise service in the sky! “Glory to God in the Highest!” It is as if they are saying, “Hey guys – you have got to see this! A Savior has been born to you! He is Christ the Lord! They realize how

important God's plan is to save sinners, even though they themselves are sinners, they love God which means that they love God's plan, and Jesus said that they break into joy every single time a sinner repents of his sin and trusts in Him. Luke 15.10. Angels learn about God's grace from us. They know God as Creator, Ruler, King, but we know Him as Savior. Angels can sing Holy, holy, holy with us. They can sing How Great is our God, but when we sing Amazing Grace and I will glory in my Redeemer then, they can applaud or lift their hands, but they have no voice in these songs, for they do not know what it is like to be lost and then to be found, to be blind and then to see, to be dead in transgressions and sins and then by the Spirit of God to be made alive. They do not know what it is like to call upon God to save them from sin and to cry to Jesus to forgive and be declared righteous. These songs, they learn from us. Angels love the gospel because God loves the gospel, but they also protect God's children because God values His own.

B. Angels protect what God values.

At the end of Hebrews 1, we read, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Oh, brother and sister, you are not in this by yourself. You are not on your own. Your heavenly Father has not and will never abandon you. His angels take care of His own. And, if one angel of God could in a single night wipe out 185,000 potty-mouthed, foul-breathing Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19) I think you are in pretty good shape! Angels obey God and worship Him by taking care of God's people.

3. Angels are Main Characters in the Birth of Christ.

Angels were involved it seems in the major events of Christ's life and ministry. Birth, temptation, Garden, Resurrection and Ascension. But we really see their involvement in his birth.

- A. An angel appeared to Zechariah (father of John the Baptist).
- B. An angel appeared to Mary.
- C. An angel appeared to Joseph.
- D. An angel(s) appeared to the Shepherds.
- E. Possibly an angel appeared to the Wise Men (dream).
- F. An angel appeared again to Joseph – to go to Egypt
- G. An angel appeared again to Joseph – return to Israel.

Again, this event was like no other. This was the glory of God being put on display and in truth, the birth of Christ was an event that was really out of this world! But, like the prophets, angels point to Christ.

4. Angels are very clear that Christ is the hero.

In one of the early churches, the worship of angels became a serious doctrinal problem that was addressed by the writing of the book of Colossians. When John was overcome

by a heavenly scene and fell at the feet of an angel to worship him, the angel immediately exhorted him. “Do not do it, I am a fellow servant with and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! (Rev. 19.10)

This is abundantly clear from Hebrews 1.5-14 Angels are fascinating beings. They have been used by God to bring His Word to His people and to accomplish His purposes. But for all of their power, mystery and awe, they still don't hold a candle to the Son of God!

- A. Christ is superior to the angels because He is THE Son (5-6)
- B. Christ is superior to the angels because He is THE King (7-9)
- C. Christ is superior to the angels because He is THE Victor (13-14)

The greater the revelation (Christ over the angels) the greater the responsibility. That is exactly what Hebrews 2.1-4 is addressing. If God held the nation of Israel accountable for what they had received at times from angels, how much more accountable are we who live after the unveiling of the very Son of God? We, who have been given much, had better combine our hearing of the Word, with our doing of the Word. Just having the Word is not enough. Getting a new study Bible, a new commentary, a new prayer diary, and an impressive library only adds to our condemnation if we don't combine our hearing of the Word with our obedience to the Word. If all we do is hear the Word and do not obey the light that we have received then we will drift away even as we think that we are flying close to the light.

Angels ministered to Christ after his time of temptation. An angel ministered to Christ when Christ was in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest. Angels cannot answer prayer, although God has used them to bring answers and to affect change. Angels cannot save sinners. Angels are part of the order of creation. Worship God, not what He has made. Only Christ can rescue us from sin.

Angels give us a fresh sense of awe when we look at all that God has at His disposal. Angels are incredible examples of humility. If beings so powerful and knowledgeable are called upon to do services that for the most part go unnoticed, then we can carry out God's desires for our lives whether or not we ever receive the attention that others get, or the attention that we think we are due. Angels are also a great reminder that we are never alone. That is an encouragement when we are afraid and that is a warning when we think that what we are doing will go unnoticed and without response. Angels also remind us of how precious God's children are to Him. If God will commit the resources of His angelic host to care for His own, we can certainly trust Him.

The Word of the Lord came to the Prophets who told us a Savior would be born someday. The Word of the Lord came to the Angels who said, that Savior is here! And with more revelation, there is always more light.