



## Angels in the Life of Christ

Everything we believe about Jesus Christ depends on God's integrity and the faithfulness of His messengers.

Two witnesses or messengers in the Bible times were required to authenticate the accuracy and validate the message. The sender expected the messenger to accurately communicate his message with the utmost integrity. Any change in the message would result in criminal charges against the messenger.

God uses human and supernatural messengers. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3 (NASB95)).

The messengers all pointed to the coming of the final ultimate self-revelation of God in the person of His own unique one of a kind Son.

### I. Angels are God's Messengers

#### ***Angels are supernatural celestial spiritual beings.***

The Bible tells us that God has messengers whom He sends forth to communicate His message. The word *aggelos*, angels in English, describes a supernatural order of heavenly beings whose assignment is to act as God's messengers to men, and as agents to carry out His will. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14, NASB95).

Angels have personality, great intelligence, moral will and responsibility. They do not have bodies, but may be seen at times and appear as men. They do not have wings; artists and Hollywood created the wings. The Seraphim have six wings and fly, but they are a special category of supernatural servants. The Bible forbids worship of angels. They belong to the heavenly court praising God and doing His will on earth.

#### ***Three angels are named in the Bible.***

Michael, the archangel is mentioned in the Old Testament only in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1 where he is the champion of Israel, and watchful guardian of God's chosen people. He disputed with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9). In Revelation 12:7-9 he leads the angelic armies in war against Satan, the chief fallen angel (Job 1:6-12; Gen. 3:1ff; Matt. 25:41; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev. 12:9). The early Protestant scholars identified Michael with the preincarnate Christ (Hengstenberg).

Gabriel is found in Daniel 8:15-16; 9:21 where he was sent to explain to Daniel the vision of the ram and the he-goat and to predict the 70 weeks. In the New Testament Gabriel is the messenger who announced the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus in Luke 1:19, 26. He is not called an archangel in the Bible. He is quite prominent in Jewish writings.

## **II. Angels in the Life of Christ**

Gabriel and unnamed angels are sent to announce the coming of Jesus, to encourage Him after the temptations, minister to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, help the grieving disciples at the resurrection of Jesus, announce His coming again in Acts, gather the saints and execute judgment to the wicked in Revelation.

### ***Angel Gabriel announced the coming birth of John the Baptist***

Zacharias was an elderly priest officiating at the altar of incense in the Temple when an angel suddenly appeared to him standing to the right of the altar of incense (Luke 1:10-22). The cloud of incense that rose from the hot altar symbolized the prayers of the people Israel as they gather outside praying (v. 10).

John and his wife Elizabeth had prayed for many years for a son, and no doubt for the coming of the Messiah. The angel was sent by God to give them the good news that a child would be born to them in their old age. "Fear fell on" Zacharias when he saw the angel. "Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped (fell-upon) him" (v. 12).

The message the angel proclaimed was specific. "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'" (Luke 1:13-17, NASB95).

Elizabeth will become pregnant even at her age! You will name your son John ("God is gracious") and he will bring joy and gladness with extreme exultation, and many will rejoice because of his birth. The coming of the last of the Hebrew prophets will indeed be the time for rejoicing. God is visiting His people. This child "will be great in the sight of the Lord" (v. 14a).

### ***Gabriel announced the coming birth of Jesus to Mary***

"And coming in, he said to her, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:28-38, NASB95).

It is significant that the angel Gabriel did not rebuke Mary as he did Zechariah. "She was perplexed" or greatly troubled at the statement." Mary did not doubt the promise, but was just confused about the statement because she was a virgin (cf. Isa. 7:14). She wanted to know how this would be accomplished since she and Joseph were not yet married. The betrothal usually lasted a year and unfaithfulness on the part of the bride was punishable by death. Therefore, Gabriel's response was this will be the work of the Holy Spirit creatively bringing about the miraculous physical conception of Jesus. The apostle Paul understood this grand truth when he wrote: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law" (Galatians 4:4, NASB95).

Mary received special grace for the ministry God chose her to perform. She, like every other individual, was saved by grace through faith in Christ. She had no special merit. She was the object of God's care; she "found

favor with God." She was endowed with grace, enriched with grace. She was full of grace because God graced her.

These majestic words of Gabriel remind us of Yahweh's promise to old king David in 2 Samuel 7:13-16. A future descendent would sit on his throne and rule forever. The only way this prophecy could possibly ever be fulfilled is in the coming of a greater than David, the Messiah. This Son of Mary we are told in this passage will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (cf. Isa. 9:7). This divine title means He will be equal with Yahweh. The phrase "son of" in Semitic thought refers to one who possessed his father's qualities. Jesus is a "carbon copy" of His Father in heaven.

The reason for His coming is He will receive "the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever." The great coronation will take place when He returns and He will reign throughout eternity. This will take place in the Millennium and continue forever and ever.

This sovereign King is unique because "His Kingdom will never end."

### ***An unnamed angel announced Jesus birth to Joseph***

We noted earlier the agitation on the part of Mary regarding her conceiving a bearing a son while still engaged to Joseph. The whole context of the Jewish engagement and marriage customs in the first century must be kept in mind when examining the birth narrative in the Gospels. Marriages were arranged by the parents and contracts were written up and agreed upon. Once the arrangement was confirmed the couple was considered married and were called husband and wife. However, they did not begin to live together for one year. During this time the woman continued to live with her parents and the man with his parents. This waiting period was a demonstration of faithfulness of the promise to be pure until the consummation of the marriage. If she was found to be with child during that year it would be obvious that she was unfaithful and the husband could terminate the marriage contact with a divorce. At the end of the year of betrothal the parents of the couple would have a great celebration of the wedding feast, the couple would then begin to live together, and the marriage was consummated physically.

Now it was plain that Mary had not told Joseph about the angel's visit or that she was pregnant. Therefore, when it obvious to Joseph that Mary was with child he was shocked. He genuinely loved Mary. You can see that love by his actions. He did not want to create a public scandal and planned to divorce Mary privately. That is when the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and revealed to Him that "She was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18).

Matthew fills in the details for us:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.' And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus" (Matthew 1:18-25, NASB95).

Hebrew scholars can debate all they want to about the meaning of the Hebrew word *almah* whether it should be translated "young woman" or "virgin." I think it means a young woman of marriageable age who is a *virgin*. Dr. Luke and Matthew are very clear when they mean "virgin" because they use the word *parthenos* and it has only one meaning, "virgin." Mary's miraculous conception fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, and her son was "Immanuel . . . God with us." The Holy Spirit, not Joseph, not any man, was responsible for the pregnancy of Mary.

### ***At Jesus' birth the angels worshipped Him***

Nine months later Dr. Luke, the beloved physician, and author of the Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was born in the city of David, called Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Angels worshipped Christ and announced the birth of the Savior to some humble shepherds who were watching over their sheep in the night.

"And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.' When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.' So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger" (Luke 2:9-16, NASB95).

### ***An unknown angel warned Joseph of Herod's evil intent to murder the Messiah.***

"Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him'" (Matthew 2:13, NASB95). They stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod. However, because Archelaus was the worst of Herod's living sons and was now reigning over Judea, Joseph and Mary took Jesus and they resided in the city of Nazareth in the regions of Galilee (Matt. 2:13-23).

Dr. Luke tells us that over the next thirty years, "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). Yes, Jesus lived a fully normal human Jewish life in the town of Nazareth. But that is not the end to the visitation of angels in His life.

### ***Angels strengthened Jesus during His ministry***

When Jesus began His ministry about the age of thirty He was severely tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11). After the forty days of temptation "the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him" (Matt. 4:11).

In the Garden of Gethsemane an angel appeared to Jesus and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43).

At His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter was trying to defend Jesus with a sword, Jesus told him that He could call down 72,000 angels (Matt. 26:53). "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53, NASB95). A Roman legion was equal to 6,000 troops. Twelve legions would be 72,000.

### ***Angels attended Jesus' resurrection***

"And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you" (Matthew 28:2-7, NASB95; cf. Mark 16:4-7; Luke 24:4-7).

"But Mary [not Jesus' mother] was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus" (John 20:11-14, NASB95).

Yes Jesus was crucified. He was certified dead by the Roman executioner when he thrust the spear into Jesus' side and out came blood and water (Mark 15:44-47; Matt. 27:57-66; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:30-42). Witnesses who handled His body gave testimony that Jesus died. But behind that death of the sinless Lamb of God is the great truth that He died as a sacrifice for sin. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NASB95). The apostle Paul summarized the meaning of the death of Christ beautifully with these words: "He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB95).

But that is not all; Christ rose from the dead! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most documented event in ancient history. Matthew Arnold said, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested fact in history."

William Lyon Phelps of Yale wrote, "It may be said that the historical evidence for the resurrection is stronger than for any other miracle anywhere narrated."

Some of the best books on the resurrection have been written by lawyers who set out with the goal of disproving it as a historical fact.

Sir Edward Clark wrote, "As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the first Easter. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of men to facts that they were able to substantiate."

### ***Angels reassured disciples at the ascension of Christ***

"And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11, NASB95).

### ***Angels will accompany Jesus when He returns***

Listen to the words of Jesus. "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32, NASB95).

The apostle Paul comforted fellow believers with the desire "to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:7, NASB95; cf. 2 Thess. 4:16-17). Many more passages of Scripture could be cited, but I think you get the idea. Angels were active in ministry during the life of Christ and will be when He returns in glory. The book of Revelation is full of angelic activity in heaven and will be vitally involved in the judgments before and after the coming of Christ.

What will you do with Jesus Christ; neutral you cannot be. What you choose to believe about Him will determine your eternal destiny. One thing is still true. Today angels rejoice when sinners repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Jesus said, "I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

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