

Luke 1: 26-38; Heb. 2; The Heavenly Angels I. Their Identity II. Their Work

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this evening we begin our Advents series on the Characters of Christmas- we will consider who is present and what is their purpose. We will find each of these Characters present as we approach Luke 2 in a few weeks. The first character in our consideration is that of the angels. Who are these heavenly visitors who appear in the sky and bring good tidings of peace on earth? As we begin with the angels, we are aware of much speculation that has been made in the past. Exactly how many angels are there is not answered in Scripture, so we want to limit ourselves to what the Bible say about these messengers. But we should not be afraid to consider their identify and work as we will do this morning. Angels are present all over the place in the pages of Scripture. From the opening pages of Scripture- in Gen. 18- all the way to Rev. 22. Angels are mentioned some 273 times in Scripture. A few weeks back, we saw them surrounding Elisha as a mighty army -a troop on flaming horses- that filled the hills. So today we consider the first of our characters- the angels who were present on the eve of Christmas. With this theme: Jesus Christ sends His angels to be messengers of good news for His people.

I. Their Identity

In our first point, we consider the identity of these beings whom we call angels. Angels are creatures- they are not divine- but they are powerful beings that were created by God. Although not explicitly mentioned in Gen. 1, we do find in Job. 38 that the angels were present and rejoicing during the creation week. So they were made at some point during the opening moments of creations, and they stood by rejoicing in all that God made. They are limited in number, power and in presence. They are not all powerful nor are they all knowing, but they do possess a power greater than man. As a created being, they are not meant to be worshipped. As the angel in the book of Revelation repeated said- do not fall down on your knees to worship me! I am a creature like you- worship God! So the angels are not divine and do not deserve our worship. They are immortal- they had a beginning but they do not die. Nor do they have relationships as we do. Angels do not marry and have children as Jesus clarified in Mt. 22. They are, however, moral beings-

they can obey and even disobey. And even though a great number of these angels fell with Satan in the great rebellion, many more remained faithful and obedient. Those who did not rebel remained in their holy state and continue to be free from sin. Being holy, spiritual beings means that they cannot normally be seen. It is possible for an angel to take on a physical form as in Gen. 18 where angels visited both Abraham and Lot. It is possible- and it did happen- that the saints of old could even entertain angels and welcome these beings into their home. But when they reveal their identity, the response of man is almost always terror. They are resplendent creatures- as Manoah and his wife found out. Awe inspiring. They are called the winds or flames of fire- servants of the LORD God. They have particular names, numbers and ranks. We are introduced to Michael and Gabriel- as well as angels who function as seraphim, cherubim and arch-angels. As servants of God, they are eager to do their creator's will. These angels know and obey the voice of their God, but only as creatures not as children. In other words, angels are not the recipients of the covenant and they do not call upon God as their Father. This is what we found in our reading from Heb. 2. Jesus did not come to help the fallen angels- as Heb. 2:16 says- He helps the offspring of Abraham! Jesus did not take on the nature of the angels- but rather the flesh of fallen mankind! As human beings, we have a unique privilege of being the recipients of a savior who was made like us in every way- one who was born a baby boy of the woman's womb! Born to save a fallen humanity- the children of Adam! This is a privilege that we have- one that fills the angels with awe! Salvation is a unique gift that we alone receive- and one that should fill us with unending joy! Jesus did come to this earth to be born an angel- to save the lost angels. He came to take in our flesh- to save us- the children of Abraham!

II. Their Work

Now that we understand who angels are, we can continue by looking at their work. Specifically, what do angels do in general and what were they doing in our passage and in Luke 2? Well, the work of a holy angel is to do the work that every creature is supposed to do. To glorify God and obey His commands! As the angels in Isaiah 6 were ready to do, crying out that our God is Holy, Holy, Holy all day; every day! But the

work of an angel within the pages of Scripture is usually the work of a messenger. In fact, the word for angel in the Greek- "angelos" is also translated messenger. So when we find angels in the gospel of Luke, we find that these heavenly being are sent by God with a message for man. Angels appear at critical moments of redemptive history- when the flow of history was going to be altered by or entered into by God in a specific way. There is a redemptive moment taking place. Just think for a moment who these angels visited. They were sent by God to the patriarch- to some of the judges and their parents. Often with the promise of a child! The seed of the woman- the line of the church would continue! And now in Luke we find angels visiting to John's parents and to Christ's parents. Zechariah, Mary and Joseph. The message to these soon to be parents is this- you will have a son and your son will be special. Specifically, to Mary, the angels says that she will be birth to a son and this son will be great. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his Kingdom will have no end. This child will be called holy, the Son of God! And in Luke 2- an angel appeared to the shepherd who were keeping watch over their flocks by night. To these shepherds the angel said, to you I bring a message of good news. A savior has been born in the city of David. And suddenly a host of angels joins this lone messenger- together they all cried out- glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased! So the angels arrive as messengers from God with a pronouncement of good news! What a wonderful sight- awe inspiring and fear invoking sight- to see the heavens filled with their fiery messengers of God crying out to glorify God and to proclaim good news of peace for mankind! Next week we plan on considering the shepherds who received this message! But why don't we see or hear angels today? Why doesn't God still send His fiery messengers to deliver messages to His people today? Well, as we learn in Heb. 1 that since we live in these last days, we have the privilege of hearing the word of God directly from the voice of God! In these last days, Heb. 1: 2 says, God speaks to us by His Son! This Son is the her of all things- the radiance of the glory of God! This Savior has become as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs! As awe inspiring as it must have been to hear the message of peace from the lips of angles- how much more inspiring it should

be for us to hear the message of peace from the Prince of Peace! We have a messenger who is better-greater and more glorious than the angels- that speaks to us! Jesus Christ our Lord whose birth we celebrate this time of year!

So then, if angels are no longer the message bringers as they once were, what are they doing now? Well, angels continue to do their work of praising and glorifying God each day. Some angels are tasked with shaping the direction of nations and repelling the attacks of the evil one. In fact as Psalm 91 says, the LORD gives the angels charge over us- angels are charged by God to protect and minister to the saints here on earth and BC art. 12 puts it. Angels also rejoice when a sinner repents as Luke 15 says. They take part in the joy of heaven when a sinner sees His sin and turns to the Lord with a heart of faith! They also join with us in our worship. Heb. 12 says that in our worship we are joined with- surrounded by an innumerable host of angels in festal garments. So the angels are worshipping with us today! And angels are also waiting- they are eagerly desiring to see the day when all battles will be done. They too long for the Saviour of the World to return. And on that day. The angels will be tasked with reaping the world as Mt. 24 says. The wheat will be gathered into God's barn. The elect will be brought into the house of God- the saints brought into the holy city. While those weeds- those wicked rebels who refused to repent- will be gathered for destruction. The angels will throw these into the lake of fire at the Lord's command.

To conclude, as students of Scripture, the presence of angels is not a surprise. They have been present and active since the beginning. But their work is one that reflects the dignity of Christ! Highlighting how great Jesus is- even over angels! Jesus Christ did not take on angelic flesh in order to save! It is Jesus who is the last and perfect messenger of God! As our theme stated, in the past Jesus Christ sent His angels to be messengers of good news for His people. Now He speaks to us directly in His Word! And the name that Jesus has received and the glory He deserves is greater than any angelic name. He is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Prince of Peace! Almighty God! The Son of the Father who makes us children of God as well! It is His birth that filled the sky and our hearts with praise!