

**Text:** Various

**Title:** The Angels' Perspective on the Birth of Jesus

**Truth:** We can be like angels: inquisitive messengers full of God's praise.

**Date/Location:** December 24, 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

### I. Messengers, Particularly Gabriel

The key role of angels regarding Jesus's birth is that God assigned them to deliver messages to various people. This is not surprising, given that the word "angel" can mean "messenger." In fact, human beings are sometimes called "angels" because they are messengers, not because they are particularly "angelic" in their appearance or behavior. As messengers, it is their message that most impacts history. Their perspective *as such* does not change the story. But it is interesting to imagine yourself in their shoes as participants and observers and wonder what they were thinking, as difficult as that would be because of how different they are than human beings.

A. **Luke 1:11-20** Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Zacharias], standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup> For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

<sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,'* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

<sup>19</sup> And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. <sup>20</sup> But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

B. **Luke 1:26** Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!"

<sup>29</sup> But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup> Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* <sup>36</sup> Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God nothing will be impossible."

<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

What comes to mind when reading this is that the angels *believed* what they were saying. It was not a case that they were unwilling participants in this drama. They knew from their time in Heaven, their interactions with God, and their observation of God's

character over thousands of years that what God planned was going to happen just as sure as if it already had happened.

- C. **Matthew 1:20-21** But while he [Joseph] thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

It is interesting here that an angel can appear to a person in that person’s dream. How that works—physically and mentally—is beyond my ability to understand. But it is not that much more difficult than trying to explain how an angel appeared during Mary’s waking hours.

I had a dream recently in which I was studying the Bible and had an “ah ha!” moment. That much I can remember clearly. The problem is, when I awoke, I could not remember *what* I learned! But there was no angel in that dream. An angelic dream visitation is so extremely rare that only a handful of people in world history have experienced it.

Thankfully, Joseph remembered the dream and most certainly shared it with Mary, and perhaps to Jesus when Jesus was older, and that information got to Matthew. Matthew recorded this detail, along with the genealogy and all the other details in his book. (He was ideal for this job. Having been a tax collector, he probably kept meticulous records and/or had a good memory for these sorts of things.)

- D. **Matthew 2:13** Now when they [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”

In the OT era, *the* angel of the LORD was often if not always the Lord Christ Himself making a preincarnate appearance. We know this because often that person did not refuse worship, which

means only one thing: it was a divine person (Exodus 3:2, Judges 6:21-22). Here, it is *an* angel of the Lord, not preincarnate Jesus.

E. **Matthew 2:19** Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.”

Indeed, angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who are heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). They do protect God’s people lest they dash their foot against a stone (Psalm 92:11-12)—or they become the victims of attempted murder. They were in the role of a heavenly secret service detail, protecting the Lord His entire life, and even serving him at times of extreme difficulty—in the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 4:11, Luke 22:43).

F. **Luke 2:8** Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup> Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

The angelic message and perspective here recognizes blessings and benefits of the Lord’s birth in two directions. The **first** is glory to God. That God could come in a manger, and did, and did so to save humanity from eternal destruction, is a marvel and astonishment to us and to the angels. It points out the absolute honor and glory of God who would do such a thing. He is not obligated to do so, though you might try to make an argument that He is obligated to care for his creatures. After humans rebelled against Him, a good

bit of that obligation vanished. He was not morally required to keep sinners alive indefinitely with His care. But angels see Him to that toward His human creation. Note that the glory of God is “implemented” through the birth of the Savior-King. God is glorified in His Son Jesus, and in His life and work of redemption, and in His future reign over the kingdoms of the earth.

The **second** aspect of blessing brought by the angels from heaven is peace toward men. Whether the goodwill is from God toward men, or God is favorably disposed toward men of goodwill or men with whom God is pleased—that whole debate does not bother me very much. God has been *good* to mankind, and in that goodness, He has extended an offer of peace to all people—who otherwise are not inclined toward peace with God (Acts 10:36, Romans 5:1, Phil. 1:2, 4:7 and 20 other verses of Scripture). Note that peace comes through Jesus Christ in all these passages. People talk about peace through diplomacy, and peace through negotiation, peace through meditation, peace through basic human kindness, and peace through strength. But real peace comes *through Jesus Christ*.

## II. Inquisitive Observers

- A. **1 Peter 1:10-12** <sup>10</sup> Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the *grace that would come* to you, <sup>11</sup> searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.
- B. Angels know the information, the history, the theology. But they do not know the experience of sin and distance from God and disobedience and rebellion, nor do they know the feeling of restoration, of forgiveness, of grace, of redemption from slavery to sin. The depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God

and the love of Christ blow the angels away similar to how we are mind-boggled by what God has done.

- C. The angels long to figure these things out. There is a strong interest, not just simple curiosity on their part. “Just what is *that* all about? I cannot experience it, nor would I really want to because of the pain that sin has caused all of creation. But it is fascinating. I see what has happened to my ‘relatives’ the demons and how they are fixed in their evil, but there is no help for them, so just how is it that God can help humans who have sinned?” And to that point...

### III. Outsiders—and Unholy Angels

- A. Angels who sinned are not recipients of Jesus’s help. They are reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4). Good angels are ministers to those who are heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14), but the angels themselves do not experience salvation. It is people—whose nature Jesus took upon Himself that He could save them.

**Hebrews 2:14** Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,<sup>15</sup> and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.<sup>16</sup> For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

- B. Holy angels are not concerned with death and are not subject to death. They are not in bondage to sin either. So, there is no need for them to be jealous, as if God is giving something to humans that they too would like to have. They have no need for our salvation and have everything that they need already.
- C. Fallen angels, also known as demons, are subject to sin and are in bondage to it, but there is no redemption for them. They made their choice to follow Lucifer, and they are confirmed in that choice. I presume that they were well-informed in advance that such was the case. The offer from Satan was in one direction only, and there is no release from him as a taskmaster for the angels who followed Him.
- D. I have focused on the holy angels and their perspective on the birth of Jesus, and by extension the larger situation of His service to

mankind. What about the unholy angels? Their perspective was and is one of dread and doom. They saw the baby born, and despite all their machinations through Herod, they could not kill the Holy Child. They watched helplessly as He grew and prepared to defeat their master and the sin that they used to blind and bind humanity in our pitiful condition.

They were subject to Jesus every time that they encountered him in the gospels, they had to obey his command to leave the people they were possessing. They had to stop shouting about the real identity of the Son of Man.

They face certain judgment, incarceration during the millennial kingdom and then unending fire in Hell as God's people experience the blessings of the eternal kingdom of God (2 Peter 2:4).

## Conclusion

Over the years, I have done a series of “perspectives” messages on Christmas—Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, now the angels. This has helped us to have a wholistic and Biblical perspective on the birth of Jesus.

We should not be like **Caesar Augustus**, unaware of the birth of the king of kings. Or like the **chief priests and scribes**, who seemed unmoved that certain individuals from the east traveled over a thousand miles compelled by the belief that the time for Messiah's birth had come—and saw a guiding star as well! We should not be like **Herod**, threatened and violent about a baby in Bethlehem.

We should be like **Mary**, who though troubled and amazed, was very willing to serve the Lord. She understood her Hebrew Scriptures and used them to magnify the Lord and rejoice in Him. And we should be like **Joseph**, a just man who was immediately obedient to the word of God. And like devout **Simeon**, who was eagerly anticipating the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. And like **Anna**, who was looking for redemption in Jerusalem. And like **Zacharias**, who, although initially disbelieving, came around and recognized that God has visited and redeemed His people and was keeping His covenant promises.

I wonder about wise old **Elizabeth**, six months pregnant, who blessed Mary for her belief in the Lord and for the baby she carried. And what about **John the Baptist**—only 3 months old when the Savior arrived? He was the forerunner. But we cannot know their perspective because Scripture does not mention it.

But we can be like the **shepherds**, who quickly found the baby Messiah and worshipped Him and glorified God. And like the **wise men**, who gave time and treasure to seek the Lord, and found Him—and did not aid the persecutor Herod. And we can be more like the **angels**, who inquisitively participated in the birth narrative by bringing news and guidance from Heaven to men, and who praised God. Like them, we ought to have a desire to look more into the things of Jesus. We ought to share the message of His birth. We ought to praise God!

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