

The Title of my sermon is “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

"**Angels We Have Heard on High**" is a Christmas carol. The song commemorates the story of the birth of Jesus Christ found in the Gospel of Luke, in which shepherds outside Bethlehem encounter a multitude of angels singing and praising the newborn child. From Wikipedia

Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.

Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

See Him in a manger laid,
Whom the choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
While our hearts in love we raise.

At Christmas we think more about angels. We sing Christmas carols about angels. We have angels on our Christmas trees. We send and receive Christmas cards with angels on the front. Ladies wear angel like jewelry. We watch our favorite Christmas movies with angels such as Jimmy Stewart's *It's a Wonderful Life* with Clarence the angel who is trying to win his wings.

Most of us have heard of Angel Stories from our childhood. Billy Graham told this angel story about his wife's grandmother's death: "The room seemed to fill with a heavenly light. She sat up in bed and almost laughingly said, 'I see Jesus. He has his arms outstretched toward me. I see Ben [her husband who had died some years earlier] and I see the angels.' Then she slumped over, absent from the body but present with the Lord."

Now, however, more than ever people are caught up with angels and not just at Christmas time. Some call it angelmania or obsession with the spirit world. Angel stories abound on-line and in many books about angels helping people with life's difficulties such as changing their flat tire to saving them from a burning building.

People have always believed in angels as a study of church history shows:

1. In the 2nd Century church fathers bordered on considering angels divine. Justin Martyr

in his

Apology stated that Christians reverence and worship not only the Son but angels.

2. In the 5th and 6th century pseudonymous Dionysius maintained that man has no direct access to or manifestation of God, but rather we can have a relationship with God only through angels. His book *Celestial Hierarchy* became the source of medieval angelology.
3. The 13th century was the heyday for angelology. University students were required to take courses in angelology. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) was known as The Angelic Doctor.
4. The 16th century John Calvin rejected pseudo-Dionysius and helped put a stop to excessive angelology.
5. Belief in angels dropped to an all time low in 19th and 20th century. Belief in angels was thought to be superstitious nonsense. As late as 1982, Mortimer J. Adler, a prominent American philosopher, wrote in his book *Angels and Us* "It would appear to be a dead subject, of interest only to historians, and of limited interest even to them" (page 17).
6. In the 1990s, however, interest in angels skyrocketed. From 1993 to 2003, *Touched by An Angel* was a prime-time portrayal of angels. By 2000 four out of five people in America believed in angels. Angels are big business in our society which already suffers from angelmania.

There are two oversimplistic reactions to angelmania:

1. Accept all claims concerning angels.

This is a very dangerous reaction. It was alleged angels that communicated revelation which started two false religions. Muhammad started Islam when the angel Gabriel recited to him the Qu'ran which denies the deity of Christ. Twelve centuries later Joseph Smith started Mormonism when he received the golden plates from Moroni that contained the Book of Mormons.

2. Deny the existence of angels.

“Skeptics generally dismiss all accounts about angels as superstitious nonsense, to be

classified along with alleged sightings of Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, alien spacecraft, and Elvis” (*Sense & Nonsense About Angels & Demons*, page 19).

3. The Sadducees of Jesus day also did not believe in angels and to them Jesus said, “You are wrong.” And then Jesus added why they were wrong, “Because you do not know the scriptures” (Matthew 22:29). There is only one reliable source for us on which to base what we believe about angels and that is the scriptures. Not what people claim in their Angel Stories or what angels say to angel enthusiasts?

The two primary purposes of angels are to Serve God and Worship God and both are seen in the Christmas story in Luke 1 and 2.

1. Angels were created to be “ministering spirits” according to Hebrews 1:14.

Let’s go to the Christmas story in Luke 1 and 2 where angels played an important role in the first Christmas. One of the ways angels serve the Lord is by delivering messages which Gabriel does twice in Luke one.

A. Gabriel’s first message was to Zacharias with a message concerning his son John the Baptist in Luke 1:5-25.

John would be born 6 months before Jesus and would be His forerunner. The Hebrew word for angel is *mal’ak* and the Greek word for angel is *angelos* and both mean “messenger.”

1) Angels delivered God’s Word to people (1:13-17). “In fact, major bodies of Scripture are said to have been administered to humans by angels, including the Mosaic Law (Gal 3:19); the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:1) and the visions of Daniel (Dan 7, 8, 9). Sense God’s Word is complete angels no longer perform this ministry. Jude 2 says the Gospel has once and for all been delivered. Angels do not perform the ministries today as they did in Bible times.

2) Angels are spirits which explains how they can be “in the presence of God” (1:19) one minute and the next minute delivering God’s message to someone on earth.

a) Their ministry is seen in the word “angel” or messenger.
b) Their nature is seen in the word “spirit.” Angels have no physical body. Angels never die. That is one reason Jesus became man and not an angel according to Hebrews 2:9, 16, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death....For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”

3) Angels also delivered messages of judgment as in 1:19-20. Also in Gen 19, two angels pronounced judgment on Sodom. In the future angels pour out the judgments of Rev, 8-9, 16). Today alleged angelic appearances never bring messages of judgment. Sophy Burnham in her book *A Book of Angels* says that angels are so popular today “because we created this concept of God as punitive, jealous, judgmental.” Burnham then says that “angels never are. They are utterly compassionate” (Quoted by David Jeremiah, *What the Bible says about Angels*, page 51).

B. Gabriel’s second message was to Mary with the message of the birth of Jesus in Luke 1:26-38.

1) Angels focused their attention on God and not themselves. Gabriel once again is sent from God in heaven to deliver a message to Mary in Nazareth about her virgin birth of Christ. Gabriel delivers his message “and departed from her” (1:38). The study of angels is difficult because the Bible is God centered and not angel centered. “Every reference to angels is incidental to some other topic. They are not treated in themselves. God’s revelation never aims at informing us regarding the nature of angels. When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it” (Erickson, p.434).

2) When Mary visits Elisabeth, both of them make much of Christ not the angel who had visited them 1:39-47). Billy Graham called angels, “God’s secret agents” for a reason.

Angels do not draw attention to themselves when they deliver God’s message. In Luke one Gabriel said little about himself. He appears, delivers God’s message and then disappears. Their appearance is nondescript. Mark 16:5 says the angel was “a young man.” Luke 1:11 says simply “an angel of the Lord appeared.” That is in stark contrast today with angelmania.

John Randolph Price in his book *The Angels within Us* (that is an odd name because the only people who have angels in them are sinners who are demon possessed with a fallen angel. So if you have an angel within you, you are in trouble) described a female angel who had “the face and form of a beautiful woman wearing a flowing white robe trimmed in gold” (page 4). I think angels are embarrassed with so much attention given to them.

C. Angels are watching our ministry according to several verses. In 1 Cor 4:9 Paul says we are a spectacle or theater to the world and angels. Not only are the unsaved watching our lives but God’s angels are observing how we serve God. I wonder if angels are pleased with our service to the God they so willingly serve?

D. Angels model ministry for us. Sometimes Scripture pictures angels with six wings to show the swiftness with which angels obey God’s commands. In His model prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” by angels.

2. God also created angels to Worship Him which is seen in Revelation 22:8-9.

John was forbidden to worship the angel who delivered to him the book of Revelation.

A. Those caught up in angel craze worship angels.

1) Some religions even encourage and teach angel worship. “Did you know that along with worshipping God and Christ, the Catholic Church has promoted the worship (i.e. veneration) of saints and angels for centuries. In his book on Catholic theology, Ludwig Ott writes, ‘The worship of angels by men is justified. That which the council of Trent teaches as to the invoking and worshipping of saints may also be applied to angels.’ And so they worshiped angels---the primary angel is Michael. In fact, in the Catholic calendar there is an event called Michaelmas September 29th. There were even two famous and large churches built to honor him: one by Constantine near Constantinople, and the other in Rome” (*God, Satan and Angels*, MacArthur p.126).

2) The worshipping of angels is forbidden by Paul in Colossians 1:16; 2:18-19 because believers were already being tempted by the Gnostics to worship angels. Worship of angels is a substitute for worshipping God. Joan Webster Anderson writes in her book *Where Angels Walk: True Stories of Heavenly Visitors*, “Angels offer a form of spirituality devoid of Jesus and God....the search is for spirituality, but without God” (quoted from *What the Bible says about Angels*, page 16).

B. The worship of God is one of the chief activities of angels throughout Scripture.

1) The angel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds was joined by an angelic choir who broke out in the worship of God in 2:13-14.

2) There is a special group of angels around God’s throne who always worship. This group is mentioned in Revelation 4:8: “The four living creatures had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” This group of

angels leads you and me in worshiping God for His great creation in 4:9-11.

3) Soon after their creation when God created the heavens, angels shouted for joy when

God next created earth as recorded in Job 38:7.

3) We will join this choir in Heaven one day in Revelation 5.

C. Angels not only watch our service but they observe our worship. According to 1 Cor 11:10

angels are watching if we are submissive to one another in worship.

Conclusion. We believers can please angels who our fellow servants when we serve God as His messengers and worshippers, but the unsaved can also bring delight to angels by trusting Christ. Jesus made this point: "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).