

I. Advent in Biblical Perspective
Life Portraits from the Nativity
“Angel from the Realms of Glory”
Hebrews 1; Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38, 2:8–21
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
December 1, 2019 • Morning Sermon

This is the first study in the Advent series which is titled the Life Portraits from the Nativity. Let’s look now at Hebrews 1:1–14 says [1] *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

[5] For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? [6] And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.” [7] Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” [8] But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” [10] And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

[13] And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? [14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

A number of months ago I was sitting with some of the pastors on staff and our worship team and we were praying through how the Lord might bless our advent services and He has so wonderfully each year. Please take advantage of using this advent season as an evangelistic time of inviting your family and friends to, but for me there is such a challenge in preaching at Advent because you know what you’re going to preach on but how do it differently each year as I am approaching my 20th year of doing this? Obviously you have to repeat because there is only one nativity story but I have to do it in a way where no one thinks I’m repeating. As I looked at our worship leader’s subtitle ‘Live portraits of exquisite beauty in the nativity’ I thought ‘why not bring the Biblical beauty of the characters of the nativity to you?’ – like Mary, Joseph and the ones who initiate everything, the angels.

Do you believe in angels? We certainly do a lot of singing about them around the Advent season in our Christmas hymns and carols. Who are they? This is a second blessing for me that came out of this for I got so involved in preparing for this study today that I have decided to do three more studies on angels after the first of the year due to the fact I had to cut so much out of this one. This study on the angelic ministry has absolutely intrigued me and I will give you a

little taste of it as we focus particularly on the angels of the nativity in this study. The angels are clustered right here, at the nativity.

They show up to Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds and they are on mission, on message and in their ministry. They show up all throughout the Bible. Here is the problem and this is so true of whatever Biblical doctrine you study from the Bible. You want to stay on the road and almost always there are two ditches. Here are the two ditches you need to avoid concerning the angels. The one ditch is to get so fascinated with them that you don't properly understand them. After studying the cherubim I have no idea why we call children's choirs cherub choirs. Sometimes we deal with the subject so superficially or almost like whether we really believe it. In the Bible the Sadducees were the ones who did not believe in angels.

Then there is the other problem that some get so absorbed in them that they get more fascinated with the angels than the One who the angels tell you about which is Jesus. We find this in the book of Colossians. It is called the Colossian heresy where they began to worship angels and the Bible is constantly talking about them. We are told that our war is not with flesh and blood but against principalities and powers – fallen angels, Godly angels. Even the best intentioned people can get this wrong or at best imbalanced.

The book of Hebrews and Revelation give us a lot of information about the angelic world, mission, message and ministry. In the book of Revelation we find John interacting with an angel constantly. In Revelation 19 John gets so overwhelmed with what is being said to him in the presence of the angel that John falls down and begins to worship the angel. Immediately the angel says to John in Revelation 19:10, *"You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God."* Then John does it again in Revelation 22. Within three chapters John does it two times. Can you believe he repeated his sin two times?! You have probably never done that, right? In both cases the angel responds the same way. Both, us and the angels are on mission, on message and in ministry for we're fellow servants. The angels are united with all those who hold fast to the testimony of Jesus.

So who are these angels? Also what about them and what are they doing? Let's start by looking at who they are. From the reading in Hebrews 1 and in Revelation they are created spiritual beings made to glorify God. We were created beings made to glorify God as well. Angels were made for a mission, to take a message and do ministry. From both these books we also find out that we're from the same family of God. God's family has two segments to it. It has the angelic hosts – angels from the realms of glory. They are heavenly hosts. They come to earth to bring a message and go back into heaven. Angels are there to by the Lord to be united with God's people. By the time we get to the new heavens and the new earth we are all together in the Lord.

We are not the same though. We are physical with a spiritual element. Angels are spiritual but periodically can make appearances physically. They are heavenly. We are earthly. Angels are in the presence of God. We bear the image of God. They are without gender. We are male and female as we bear the image of God. Angels are without marriage. We marry, not only with conjugal, covenantal, heterosexual covenant of marriage but also the elect of God are married to Christ as He is the Groom and we are His bride. Angels don't reproduce. We are fruitful and multiply. Angels have no blood lines but we do. They have no family in the sense of family as we do. Angels do have structure. They have archangels, the cherubim and seraphim. They have orders and principalities. This is who they are but we also find out that in the new heavens and the new earth we are joined together as one family to give praise and glory

to the Lord and to be with Him forever and ever. The angelic segment of His family and the elect of God from humanity as His family, there will be joined together.

So what do we know about them? The Bible tells us the angels are in the dwelling place of the heavens. They are invisible and we are visible. They dwell in the heavens and we dwell upon the earth. When were the angels made? We don't really know. My best shot is Job 38 where it says the angels sang praise to God when He laid the pillars of the foundations of the heavens and the earth in the creation. So really there are only two possibilities. Not long after the Creation week we see a fallen angel, Satan, which means the angels had been created. So one possibility is that the angels were created at or alongside of Genesis 1:1 or right before Genesis 1:1 which says *[1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

My reasoning is that because they dwell in the heavens they can't exist until the heavens are created for them to inhabit. Or they could have been made after the second day of Creation when God made the heavens and then He inhabited it with the angels but that's not the focus of the Creation narrative. The focus of the Creation narrative is humanity which He made in His image to inhabit the earth and to be fruitful, multiply and fill it. So I really have no idea when other than the information I just gave you. Perhaps when I do the series I will have a better more insightful presentation but that's where I am right now.

God has made them to be one family with us for all eternity with their distinctives from us and yet we are now made lower than them but one day we'll be over them. I'll take you back to my younger days for I would say the angels are the authentic "E.T.s" They are extra-terrestrial. We are terrestrial. One preacher told a story about a man who was a lawyer, who came to talk to him and this man was involved with communication with extra-terrestrials. The man wanted to ask the preacher some questions about some angels. The man said 'You believe angels are extra-terrestrial, right?' The preacher answered 'yes.' The man said 'I'm with an organization who is preparing how we are going to talk to extra-terrestrial aliens when they come.' Isn't that interesting that we have this kind of organization?

Another man said to this preacher 'Do you believe in extra-terrestrials?' The preacher said 'Oh yeah, they're in my family.' As we are united together, created by God, to the glory of God with our distinctives but with our union in the presence of God, is our relationship with the angels of God.

So what do angels do? The best way for me to tell you this is to tell you what they are called to do in the Bible. God saved us to be on mission, on message and in ministry and the same thing is true of the angels. They were made for mission, message and ministry and they have seven ministries which are identified in the Bible.

One, angels are called sons and they are faithful to the Father. They are called sons of light, sons of the light, and sons of God. Secondly, they are called ministers (ministers of flaming fire). Thirdly, they are called messengers. They bear the messages of God and we see this constantly in the Old and New Testament. Fourthly, they are called worshippers. They surround the throne of God giving praise and glory to Him which we see in Revelation. Their names and titles tell us what their ministries are. The angelic hosts are here to reveal God the Father. They are not related to Him as we are as sons of God but they are called sons of God, which means they have an office to reveal the Father.

Fifthly, they are warriors. The angel Michael wages war in the book of Daniel and in the book of Jude. We know there is spiritual warfare. There was a time Dr. Schaffer was speaking on the book of Job and its references to the angels and he asked everyone in the room, 'What do you see now?' People responded with things like a chair, a table, a curtain and he said 'take a

closer look.’ They said ‘stitches, buttons, glassware.’ He said ‘No, no, I see myriads of angels. There are fallen angels wanting to pluck the Seed that is being spoken to your heart right now. There are angels that are calling for your attention to the message of the Word of God. There is spiritual warfare going on in this room and I feel it every Sunday that I preach, right here right now. There is an angelic war that is going on.’

The Bible tells us that we might entertain angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2 says [2] *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* In other words, you go to the Bible and see the appearances of angels as recorded there but that’s infinitesimal to what the angels are doing every day, every hour and every moment. They are there constantly and you are unaware. This is one of the reasons I want to do this study on angels so that you become Biblically aware and not just Christian bookstore aware. An angel is not something to buy and stick in your pocket. There is something very extraordinary about the angelic presence and ministry that we need to know. Most of us are unaware unless we’re Biblically aware so we can see it but periodically the Bible say that the angels make appearances and you become aware.

It’s interesting to see how the angels cluster together in the patriarchs of the Bible – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. Then all of a sudden 400 years later you see the angels again in the times of the Exodus in ministry. Then we see the angels clustered in ministry in the conquest of the Promised Land in Joshua and Judges. We don’t see much of them then until we get to the Prophets – Elijah, Jeremiah and the angels in the book of Daniel chapters 8 and 9.

There is the angelic ministry in the days of Elisha where it speaks of our angels as warriors. Elisha’s servant comes back to Elisha as he was encamped with fear after seeing all the enemies encamped around the city and Elisha took him back out to the battlefield and prayed to the Lord that the Lord would open the servant’s eyes that he could see what was also there. God allowed that servant to see the myriads of angels that were surrounding the people of God and were ready to do battle for them against the enemies of God (II Kings 6:15–17). We also see the angels clustered 400 years later in the advent of Jesus. Then we see them clustered in the apostolic ministry in the completion of the Scriptures. They always show up at significant points in redemptive history and in the completion of the Word of God.

So why don’t we see so many now? It is because God’s history of redemption has come to its apex in the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. The next time you will see them is when He is coming again. He will come with the angels and the shout and the trumpet of the arch angel. I’m not saying they don’t show up in between then and when He comes again, but we do see this glorious message that is given to us about these angels.

Their ministry is not spasmodic or seasonal. It is consistent always, all the time, but they are also sixthly, defenders and guardians. I’m sure someone is thinking ‘Pastor, do you think everyone has a guardian angel.’ I plan to go into this more in the series I will be doing on angels but I do know that the angels have a guardian ministry for God’s people. They are defenders of God’s people. I remember visiting my relatives during the holidays in Augusta, Georgia and every time we would get ready to leave, we would get in the car and my granddaddy would always pray “Lord, give our loved ones traveling mercies – give Your angels charge over them and protect them by the wings of Your mercy” which in part was a quote from Psalm 91:11.

My dad was not a sentimental guy at all and certainly not esoteric in any sense. I remember when he was in a traveling baseball league and he was leaving a two week stand in Knoxville to go to a two week stand in Asheville. He was traveling through the mountains in North Carolina before there were interstates. There were these two lane roads that had these

long two lane bridges over these valleys. My dad told me about the time he was coming down the hill on a two lane road getting ready to go across this long bridge over a valley that was a deep chasm. He said ‘Son, I never heard a word but someone said to me ‘stop!’ and for no reason at all I stopped. As soon as I stopped I saw an 18 wheeler coming down the summit toward me on the same road and when he got to the bridge he had a blowout. Then he went sideways and careened all the way across the bridge tearing it apart. If I had been on that bridge my life would have been over. I immediately remembered my dad’s prayer of ‘give Your angels charge over you.’”

I don’t know what you are planning on doing when you get to heave but I suggest you look up some angels and ask them about what you thought were coincidences because you may be absolutely astounded. Angels have the ministry of being guardians and defenders.

The seventh ministry of the angels is that they are inquirers. They are learners. Peter has something to do with angels. They long to understand what you and I are singing and speaking of today. I Peter 1:12 says *[12] It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*

So as we take a closer view of the nativity we see that the angels show up four times in the nativity. The very first appearance of an angel in the New Testament was at the temple with Zachariah. Luke 1:5–7 says *[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

Zachariah was from the tribe of Levi. There were 24 divisions of the priests who served in the temple. Abijah was the eighth division. We know that Elizabeth was either a second or fourth cousin to Mary. There are five accounts in the Bible of older people without children where God intervenes for a special redemptive purpose. This is the fifth one. As we read further realize the fact that Zachariah is chosen to burn incense in the holy of holies and that may only happen to a priest once in their lifetime. This would have been his one time so what happens? Let’s continue in the passage.

Luke 1:8–23 says *[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. [11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him (Fear is a common response when an angel shows up in the Bible, because they bring all of the resplendent glory of the presence of God to bear upon that moment). [13] But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared.”*

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." [19] And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. [20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." [21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. [23] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Realize that when the angels visit Mary, Joseph and the shepherds the first words out of the angels' mouths are 'Do not fear...' Now when the angel tells Zachariah his prayer has been heard he would have had at least two petitions. One would have been for the people and two he likely was praying for his wife who wanted a child and they did not have one.

I don't want you to miss this. There is a reason I read this passage and that is God has been silent for 400 years until now when He speaks through Gabriel to Zachariah. The last book in the Old Testament is the book of Malachi and the last prophecy in that book says 'before the Messiah I will send the one who prepares the way who will come in the spirit of Elijah' (Malachi 4). The message being sent is that Elizabeth will be the one who will bear the one who fulfills that prophecy. John the Baptist will come in the spirit and power of the Elijah. So the angel brings the message but sadly Zachariah does not believe. God has been silent for 400 years, now Zachariah by the hand of God's redemptive discipline will be silenced until John the Baptist is born.

Six months later there is Mary and Gabriel now shows up in Nazareth as he ministers to Mary. She is also troubled but Gabriel says 'Do not fear' and she does not fear. Luke 1:30-33, 38 says *[30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

[38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Mary believes and her fear is displaced by her faith and she surrenders.

Now go from there to Joseph. We don't know if Gabriel shows up to Joseph because when the angel appears to him the Bible doesn't give us their name. Matthew 1:20-21 says *[20] But as he (Joseph) considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

God assures Joseph through the angel that Mary has not been unfaithful. The angel gives his message on his mission to Joseph and Joseph's fear is displaced, even though he had intended to divorce Mary privately so as not to put her to shame because of his righteousness and the Scripture would demand it and now he is told the truth and believes. Joseph keeps her a virgin and cares for her until the birth of the Child.

Then we find the angels coming to the shepherds in the plains of Bethlehem. Luke 2:8-14 says *[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear*

not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Zachariah received good news but he didn't believe it. The shepherds received good news and they believed it and had great joy. Then that angel is backed up with a heavenly host from the realms of glory, not all the angels but a select choir had been put together for this appearance. They are praising God and then the angels go back into heaven and then the shepherds go to Bethlehem, praising and glorifying God. All four of them – Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds – heard 'Don't fear' on mission, on message and in ministry and all four made a response. Three of them made a response by faith and one without faith (Zachariah).

Here is the takeaway from this study. The nativity angels were sent from the heavenly Host created by God for His glory. They had a mission, a message and they came in ministry. They are heavenly and they came to the earthly. They made themselves visible to come to the visible. They came from the presence of God to those who bear the image of God. These without gender came to male and female. These without marriage came to the married and unmarried. These who have no reproduction came to those who make disciples of all the nations. These who we have made lower and they are higher come to us to tell us of Jesus because in Jesus we will be higher than them in the new heavens and the new earth.

So what do they do? Here is the second part of the takeaway. The angels announce and attend the moment when the One (Jesus) who created them (the angels) becomes lower than them to be one of us to save us, whom will one day because of Him, be over them with Him. One day we will rule over the angels. The message the angels bring to Zachariah is being said to us too – 'Don't fear.' Two of them heard 'Don't fear' in regards to the presence of the angel but to two of them the angel said 'Don't fear' because of the message. Joseph and Mary were told not to fear because of the message for they were going to be ridiculed a lot and this would cost Joseph at least three years of his profession/vocation. Praise God for the gold, frankincense and myrrh because they were going to need it, but be filled with faith for I (the angel) speak the truth. So it happened.

Joseph obeyed. Mary surrendered. The shepherds believed and worshipped. Zachariah did not until God silenced him and then he believed. I want to be like Mary for I want to surrender to the Lord. I want to be like Joseph for I want to obey the Lord. I want to be like the shepherds for I want to worship and praise the Lord but I find myself very much like Zachariah. In fact, for 21 years I heard the Message and then God brought me to the silence and emptiness of my sin and all was vanity. By His grace I believed, so where are you today?

You might be thinking 'You couldn't think I'm Zachariah if I'm in church?' Where was Zachariah? You can't get more church than the holy of holies. I'm not asking you about your location, I'm asking you your vocation. Do you believe Him who banishes all fear so that you obey, you worship, you glorify and you surrender? Who are you? The angels not only show us ourselves but they show us who we worship. That is what Hebrews 1 is all about. Angels are worshippers. Jesus is worshipped. Angels are messengers. Jesus is the Message. Angels are ministers. Jesus is Lord. Angels are created. Jesus is the Creator. Angels are servants. Jesus is Master. Angels are warriors. Jesus is Captain of the Lord's hosts. Angels appear multiple times. Jesus came once to be one of us, to save us so that we might be with Him forever.

Then He told us, ‘I’m coming again!’ Titus 2:11–13 says *[11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* Come quickly Lord! Are you like Zachariah or do you believe? Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Holy Spirit speak to the hearts of those reading this. Perhaps there was a time you were like Zachariah but now you believe and you want to be more and more like Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. I thank God for the ever present permeating ministry of the angels of which I’m Biblically aware and I thank You for the time You have made them visibly aware but keep my eyes on Jesus for that’s their mission and message to me. Today you may say that you have been to the holy of holies but you have not been to the Holy One and you want to do that today. For those of you who are seeking the Holy One please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we are available to pray with you personally and confidentially. What a joy it is to hear a Savior has come! The angels on their mission have brought the Message and in their ministry have called us. Come, surrender, obey and worship, I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

An Overview on Angels

- I. WHO?
- II. WHERE?
- III. WHAT?

A Closer View of Nativity Angels

- I. Zechariah
- II. Mary
- III. Joseph
- IV. Shepherds

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

The Nativity Angels were sent from the Heavenly Host created by God for His glory.

On Mission – On Message – In Ministry

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