

October sermon

Job 1:1, 2:1-10, Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12, Mark 10:2-16

About 15 years ago my friend gave me this little angel pin just before my family and I went back to England for a holiday. The card reads 'A guardian angel to watch over you. Let this be a keepsake of our friendship forever.'

And she wrote a personal note on the back. It was such a lovely thought and as you can see I have kept it.

Now we can buy these angel pins for almost every occasion. And to match nearly every mood.

There is a daisy a day angel, an aunt, that's A-U-N-T angel, an anniversary angel, a be happy not crabby angel, a butterfly kissed my dear friend angel... and they all come with a sprinkling of angel dust to help them on their way.

But of course they are not real. Just a bit of fun really. Or are they? What do we actually know about angels?

Now my dictionary defines angels as spiritual beings, attendant upon God, and although there are numerous ancient stories and myths about angels, they are real beings. 34 of the Bible's 66 books talk about angels in detail, and the word angel appears more than 250 times in the scriptures. Jesus himself referred to angels as being involved in every sphere of human activity.

Douglas Connelly wrote

Angels are fantastic beings, found in the unseen realms of God's universe. They move at the speed of light to carry out their master's will. They are involved in the political affairs of nations and in the smallest concerns of children. They may stand guard over our lives and protect us in countless ways. They watch what goes on in our churches and they engage in cosmic battles that we aren't even aware are happening.

According to the Bible, angels are created by God and under his authority. They have various functions: proclaiming God's messages, offering guidance and encouragement, protecting the helpless, and executing God's judgement, but their main role is to give continuous praise to God himself.

In Rev 5:12 we hear them singing

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive praise and honour and glory and power

And we, ourselves, repeat these words in our 3rd order Communion service.

The Bible makes it clear that angels fall into two distinct groups: the holy angels of God and the evil angels who followed Satan in his rebellion. Most new age angel guides ignore that aspect of God's truth but when Satan was expelled from his exalted position from heaven for showing disobedience and ungratefulness to God, a large group of angels followed him actively pursuing Satan's agenda.

We have an example of this agenda in our Old Testament reading this morning. The angels came to present themselves before God, and Satan, or the accuser as he is also known, was there with them. When God commended virtuous Job, Satan raised the question that Job may be just trying to please God merely for the benefits that God could give him, in other words Job was just religious and good because it paid him to be that way. So Satan, always ready to drive a wedge between God and humans, tempted Job to turn away from God. He caused Job to lose his family, his prestige, his possessions, even his health. But even in the midst of all his suffering Job continued to believe in the ultimate goodness of God. He said

v.10 When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when he sends us trouble?

So Satan was silenced. This was one battle he could not win.

As I said before, Jesus referred to angels many times. In fact their presence was noted at all the key parts of his life. We are all familiar with their appearances around his birth. The angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary to tell her she was to have God's son, (Luke 1:26-38), Joseph was visited by angels in dreams with various instructions (Matt 1:20-24, 2:13, 2:19-20) and of course we have the story of the heavenly host of angels announcing Jesus birth to the shepherds. The resurrection stories in all four gospels tell of angels speaking to the women at the empty tomb (Matt 28:2-7, Mark 16:5-7, Luke 24:4-7, John 20:12-13). And at Jesus ascension two angels came alongside the disciples to tell them that he would return. (*Acts 1:10-11*)

The angels themselves ministered to Jesus as he faced difficult times: after his temptation by Satan in the desert

But angels came and helped him (Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:13)

And before his crucifixion, while he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane
An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him (Luke 22:43).

Later that same evening, just after Jesus was arrested, he said to his disciples
Don't you know that I could call on my Father for help, and at once he would send me more than 12 armies of angels? (Matthew 26:53)

Angels are often mentioned in Jesus parables:

The rich man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19-31*)

The weeds (*Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*)

The sheep and goats (*Matthew 25:31-46*)

In our Gospel today we heard about Jesus placing his hand on little children and blessing them after telling his disciples

Let the children come to me because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Children were very special to Jesus and he used their presence several times to make a point in his teaching.

I assure you that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it

(Mark 10:13-16)

In Matthew's gospel we are told that we have to change and become like children ourselves, to take on their simple trust-like faith in God, to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus went on to say that their angels in heaven are always in God's presence. Perhaps the idea of guardian angels came from this passage of scripture (*Matt 18:3,10*)

The recent rise in the popularity of angels, especially in the new age movement, has led individuals, including Christians, to believe in unbiblical extremes. And this is not new phenomenon. The Jews always believed that angels were exalted beings, especially revered because they were involved with giving the law to Moses at Mount Sinai, and the law was God's supreme revelation. But certain Jewish sects thought that God could only be approached through these angels and would pray to them. This still happens today.

Some people in the early decades after Jesus death and resurrection were having a struggle with the difference between Jesus and the angels of God. Jesus, these people said, was a great prophet, perhaps even a great angel, but the writer of the book of Hebrews was determined to set the record straight. These new Christians needed to be reassured that Christianity was true and that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. In the face of increasing opposition and persecution, these people were in danger of abandoning their faith. The writer encourages them in their faith by showing that Jesus Christ is the true and final revelation of God. So as wonderful as angels are, they can't be compared with Jesus.

In our passage of scripture today from the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is presented as the messiah, the mediator of God's grace, and God's full and final revelation. Jesus is the Father God's appointed heir. He is the creator and the outshining of God's glory. When we look at Jesus we see the invisible God made visible. He is the exact representation of God and sustains the universe by his power. Jesus provides the means for us to be cleansed from sin by his death on the cross, and now he is seated at the father's right hand, crowned with glory and honour. The work of redemption is complete and Jesus now reigns over all as Lord.

Let me read verse 4 again in the Living Bible

Thus he became far greater than the angels, as proved by the fact that his name, Son of God, which was passed on to him from the Father, is far greater than the names and titles of the angels

So...the message is simple. Angels are good but Jesus is better. Jesus is the Christ. He is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation. Jesus is the only way to eternal life and we must give ourselves unreservedly and completely to him. Let us renew our commitment to him today, now.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus we approach you with awe and wonder. In company with the angels we worship you as our saviour, creator and king. We ask you to come and reign in our hearts, to be at the centre of our very lives, not just today but always.