

Angles at Christmastide

by
Dr. Manford George Gutzke

A gift to you
from
Sarah and Manford Gutzke

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Have you ever had any trouble believing in the reality of angels?

Have you ever wondered why there is so much mention of angels at Christmastide? We need to recognize that this is not because we feel that Heaven's doors have now been flung wide open to permit goodwill and grace to be poured out upon men, and so now we can think about angels too. Since we are thinking about Heaven and we are thinking about God, when we think of Bethlehem, we can be thinking about angels also. We can imagine all manner of poetic fantasies about what they must be like and what they would do; but all of this is a matter of getting off on the wrong foot. The truth about angels is not really like that.

Thinking about angels at Christmastide is not a matter of imagination. It is really no poet's dream. At the birth of Jesus of Nazareth angels actually really were active.

"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20).

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt" (Matthew 2:13).

And again we read:

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Matthew 2:19-20).

In the book of Luke the record speaks of Zechariah the priest in these words:

"And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense" (Luke 1:11).

This was not a matter of appearing in a dream. This was actually while Zechariah was in the temple going through the exercises of worship. While he was there with the whole multitude of the people praying outside at the time of incense, there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

"But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zechariah : for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:13).

When Zechariah expressed his bewilderment at this announcement he was told:

"And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings" (Luke 1:19).

By looking at these passages we can understand that this man Zechariah actually had a person come and deal with him, talk to him, and tell him something important about himself, something important about his family, as to what was actually going to happen.

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin 's name was Mary .And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be" (Luke 1:26-29).

This is simply the way it is written in the Bible. We should note the words to realize actually what happened. This young woman is being addressed in person. Someone was talking to her and she saw him. She was troubled at his saying, cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. She did not know who he was.

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man" (Luke 1:30-34)?

Mary was having conversation with a person. She was talking things over with him. He was telling her something drastic and amazing and remarkable was going to happen to her, and she is awake and interested and reasonable but cannot understand it. She discusses it with him.

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:35-38).

What do you personally think of that story? Is it true? A person may say, "Why of course it is true. It is in the Bible." But before we read further, do you believe it? Do you really believe there are angels? And that angels can talk to you? And that you could talk to them? Someone may say "It would not happen to everybody." This may quite possibly be true. It may not happen to everybody, but not everybody is Mary. What we are considering now is this: are angels real? Could such a thing as this happen to anybody? Did it happen here?

In the next chapter the scene is out in the hills, outside Bethlehem where the shepherds are watching their sheep.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us" (Luke 2:8-15).

That is the story .Everyone will recognize this as the Christmas Story. But do we really believe it? Is it real? Matthew and Luke, the two books we have looked at, are the only Gospels that tell of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Each makes it clear that the angels were involved. No account of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth can be accepted as authentic that does not mention Gabriel.

In all of this we may have in mind that angels are not described. Only what they do is told. They bring messages, primarily, though they can be active in other ways. One wrestled with Jacob all night. Gideon prepared a meal for one, and after he had prepared this meal the angel brought fire out of the rock to consume the food. Some may say "That is just fantastic." And they may say "That is just like magic." The event may be like magic but it wasn't. What is it anyway? It was an angel. This means to say that God had given some manifestation in broad open daylight and in actual physical reality. An angel prepared a meal for Elijah. An angel removed the stone from the grave of Joseph of Arimathea where they had put the body of Jesus of Nazareth. In relation to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, which we are thinking about just now, Gabriel appeared to Zechariah as it is written. Later Gabriel appeared to Mary. The angel of the Lord came to the shepherds and with him a multitude of the heavenly hosts. It may be noted in passing there is no mention of the whirring of any wings. There is no mention of angels having wings at all, and there is no mention really of their singing. Believers do the singing but the angels did not. The report was that they were *saying*. Since angels were real then, they are real now. This discussion brings to mind the simple fact that the record of what happened at Bethlehem is not just a picture on the wall. It is not something that can be put in tapestry and hung up for people to look at. The story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth is an account of actual real happenings. God was real then and He is real now. Heaven was real then, and is real now. The birth of Jesus of Nazareth that we are thinking about just at this time was important in Heaven. And the human soul is important in Heaven. Almighty God is prepared to move all the power at His command to save the soul of any person, who will put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.