

# Angels

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

O God,  
Lover of humanity, Joy of creation:  
pour out your Spirit on us  
that we may hear your ancient words  
with a new freshness. Along with the angels,  
inspire us to proclaim your praises  
in every land and with every generation,  
through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## Scripture: Luke 2:8-15 (NRSVue)

<sup>8</sup> Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,<sup>[b]</sup> praising God and saying,  
<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – “Angels”

How do *you* make it to Bethlehem each Christmas to see the Christ child? If you’re a character in the Christmas story, the answer would be easy—*angels*. Angels are found throughout the Christmas story. And they give us a heavenly perspective on the earthly events of Bethlehem.

*Think about it:*

Angels appeared three times to Joseph—giving guidance, direction, and protection to the holy family’s harrowing journey to Bethlehem. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Gabriel also appeared to the Virgin Mary.

Angels play an important role in other key moments of Jesus’ life too.

- After Jesus’ baptism, the angels comforted him in the desert after being tempted by Satan.
- An angel in heaven appeared to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and gave him strength to face the cross.
- Angels rolled away the stone when Jesus rose from the dead, and they appeared to several women on Easter morning.
- Angels appear to the disciples after Jesus gave the Great Commission and ascended to the Father—giving them a swift kick in the pants to start sharing the good news.
- And angels will accompany Jesus upon his Second Coming.

But let’s get back to the Christmas story. As we just read, the angels appeared to the shepherds on their graveyard shift. Suddenly the pitch black night was pierced by the light of God’s glory. It was exhilarating and terrifying. The multitude of the heavenly hosts began praising God:

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those he favors.*



Then the angel of the Lord stood with his feet on the ground and assured the shepherds:

*Be not afraid. Let your great fear transform into great joy.*

This is a celebration of good news:

*Salvation has come!*

A new king has come on the scene. The whole earth will be blessed with God’s peace and goodwill through this ruler. This new reign is a *good reign* for all people—especially the forgotten and the lowly—even for shepherds.

**Peace has come. Peace embodied and peace realized  
through this little child, the Prince of Peace.**

Here's the sign to know you've come to the right person:



**A child will be wrapped snugly in swaddling clothes.  
He'll be lying in an animal feeding trough in a stable.**

What an unusual and unlikely sign this is compared to the appearance of the angels. It was common during the Roman Empire for poets, orators, and musicians to be commissioned at the birth of a new emperor. In their speeches and compositions, they would declare that there will be peace and prosperity through this new leader.

*It was only fitting* for the holy child to be announced by angels—the poets and minstrels of heaven to declare the glories of Christ.

But what a contrast between the glories of the angels and Jesus' humble birth. Jesus, the Divine Breakthrough, revealed the living God as a vulnerable baby, *a human being*.

Christ is king, but he's a lowly king, from humble beginnings. It's ironic—we bow before our Savior-Messiah-Lord in an animal feeding trough in a stable!

Our king—is a servant. This is what I *love* about God—God is surprising. And down to earth. In Christ, God is one of the people. He can relate with us. God's glories aren't only experienced in heaven and in the temple.

- God can be known and experienced in the fields and on the farm.
- God can be revealed and worshiped *anywhere*.
- God meets us *where we are—wherever we are*.

I think there is a lot we can learn from the angels.

- First, the point of angels is *not themselves*—but the message they bring.

G. K. Chesterton put it this way:

*"Angels fly because they take themselves lightly."*

*Let's keep laughing at ourselves and always remember we have a message to share of Christ.  
And it's not about us.*

**The joy and the singing of the angels remind us that the gospel is good news of great joy—for *all people*. There's nothing to fear—because Christ is here.**

We can be thankful and praise God because of his good pleasure and the grace we've received from above. This Christmas and always, we're invited to join in with the heavenly chorus of angels. The angels remind us that ***Christ is for us***.

***"To you is born a Savior."***

And not just for us—but *for the whole world*. The angels remind us Jesus is more than a cute little baby.



Three titles are given for Christ in our passage:

- He's our **Savior**—who delivers us from captivity.
- He's our **Messiah**—the Christ, the Anointed One, consecrated to serve and to rule on behalf of God.
- He's our **Lord**—the same word used for God throughout the Greek Bible. Christ is our Master who calls the shots in our lives.

This is our challenge: to *believe*, to *flesh out*, and to *proclaim* in the midst of all the: events, the cooking, the entertaining, the cleaning, the decorating, the shopping, the eating, the joy, and the stress that—

**Christ is our Savior, Messiah, and Lord.**

Christ is the front and center of our lives. All year round.

I'd like to leave you with some questions to mull over along our journey to Bethlehem:

- *Who was the "angel" that first told you about Jesus?*
- *What effect has the news of Christ's birth had on you?*

*Renewed commitment? Sense of joy? Hope for the future? Thankfulness for God's rescue? Confusion?*

- *Who would you like to tell about the good news of joy this Christmas season?*

Amen.

Sermon Art: "Angels Announcing the Birth of Christ to the Shepherds" by Govert Flinck, Rembrandt's Pupil, Dutch Master, c. 1650

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