

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Message		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	Luke 2:8-20; 1 Timothy 3:16		Gary L. W. Johnson
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THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Part 2)

The Bible does have a lot to say about angels. We know, for instance, that there are a lot of them (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11). We discover that they are created beings (Psalm 148:2-5; Colossians 1:16). Some of their number fell from their original state of holiness (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Angels are described as spirits (Hebrews 1:4), although when they appear, they do so in bodily form (Luke 24:4; Matthew 28:2-5). Sometimes their appearance is not accompanied with visual splendors (Hebrews 13:2). Angels are not all-knowing (Matthew 24:36; 1 Peter 1:12) or all-powerful (Psalm 103:20; 2 Peter 2:11), and they are not glorified human beings (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 1:14). They do a number of things. They constantly serve and worship God (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:6). They minister to and protect God's people (Hebrews 1:14; Genesis 19:11; Psalm 91:11; Daniel 3:28; 6:22; Acts 5:19; 27:23), and they have a role in God's judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 15-16). When we turn our attention to the life of Christ, we discover that angels were involved in foretelling His birth to Joseph and Mary (Matthew 1:20-24; Luke 1:26-38), announcing His advent to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) and ministering to Him after His confrontation with Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11).¹ An angel ministered to Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). They were in attendance at the Ascension (Acts 1:9-11) and they will accompany Him at the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 1:7). The idea of worshipping such angels would no doubt have been repugnant to Jews. And yet there is some evidence that at the very least a preoccupation with the activity – heavenly and earthly – of angels was, in Paul's words, almost amounting to the worship of angels (Colossians 2:16-19). There, as here, a cardinal distinction is made between "God's angels" and "the Son" (Hebrews 1:6-8). Angels have the name of messenger; He has the name of the Lord (v. 4). Angels have the name of servant; He has the name of Son (v. 5). Angels exist to worship God; angels are told to worship Jesus (v. 6). Angels run to serve; He sits to rule (vv. 7-8), on the throne of God (v. 8) which is His by right (v. 9) and forever (vv. 10-12). History is not determined or controlled by angels, or for them, but by Christ (v. 13) and for His church, which angels are to serve (v. 14; cf. Ephesians 1:21-23). The angels of heaven are very exalted beings, "but none of them," observes Bruce, "has ever been invited to sit before Him, still less to sit in the place of honor at His right hand." This position the Son assumed through His obedience unto death and as the seal upon His finished, sacrificial work. Here again the reference is not to the Son as the second person of the Trinity, but to the Son as incarnate Mediator, reaching His glory through suffering: He has "become" superior to the angels, having put Himself far beneath them (cf. Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7-9). The phrase "he became" points to a particular, definable and datable event of history – that is, the glorification of Christ in His human nature at the Resurrection and Ascension. At that point He "obtained" in a new way the name of "Son." It was the name He had borne before (Hebrews 1:2), even in the days of His humiliation (Hebrews 5:8), but which was only fully published in respect of His incarnate state and mediatorial office after the Resurrection, when and by which God said publicly, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 5:5). As the name of "Son" is greater than the name of angels, so the place of the Son is greater. He is in the place of God, therefore "Let all God's angels worship him" (Hebrews 1:6). They serve. He rules; and his rule is the rule of God in our nature (vv. 7-9).²

- I. **THE ANGELIC CHOIR.** They are called “a great company of the heavenly host” (v. 13). We learn in v. 15 that they are “angels” and they return to “heaven.” Why are the angels rejoicing at heaven’s humiliation? We are told in Philippians 2:6-8 that the incarnation involved the abasing of the Son of God. Why are the angels behaving so joyfully?
- A. **The Birth of Christ Served to Show Their Humility and Subjection.** Even in His state of humiliation, the angels were subject to Him (Matthew 26:53). He who was made a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:8) is still their Lord. Here they express their great joy over their master’s coming into the world.
- B. **The Birth of Christ Was Absolutely Necessary for Salvation.** The angels in heaven rejoice over the salvation of mankind (cf. Luke 15:10). “The angels present the commentary of heaven on the events of Luke 2:1-7. They identify the child and reflect the heavens’ excitement that this child has come to do God’s work.”³
- II. **THE ANGELIC ANTHEM.** Job 38:4-5 tells us that the angels shouted for joy when God created the world. Here they praise God for sending his Son into the world. After giving the shepherds the good news of the gospel, the angel punctuated his proclamation with praise. But he did not do this alone: “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 among those with whom he is pleased!*” (Luke 2:13-14). This is the third Christmas carol in the gospel of Luke. Like the others, it was spoken rather than sung, yet it was written in a poetic form that has often been set to music. And like the other lyrics, it is commonly known by its first words in Latin: *Gloria in excelsis Deo* – “Glory to God in the highest.” What makes this song different from the others is that it was sung by a chorus of angels. It was not a hymn that rose up from the earth but an anthem that came down from heaven. For this reason, the *Gloria* gives a fuller revelation of the true divine glory of Jesus Christ. God the Son had always enjoyed the adoration of angels. From eternity past, those sinless creatures had worshiped him with perpetual praise. But now God was sending his Son into the world, where he would be despised and rejected unto death for the salvation of a lost and fallen race. This was the most glorious demonstration that God had ever made of his grace. Therefore, it was only right for him to receive the highest praise. In the words of J. C. Ryle, “Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ in the world. He by His life and death on the cross will glorify God’s attributes, -- justice, holiness, mercy, and wisdom, -- as they never were glorified before.”⁴ There are two aspects to this anthem.
- A. **God’s Glory.** Hodge writes, “He who was the brightness of the Father’s glory, took part of flesh and blood.”⁵ Hebrews 1:3 declares that, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory.” In sending His Son into the world, God was manifesting His glory. “Salvation must come from God and not from man. Salvation must come out of the heavens to the earth; it cannot arise out of the earth and climb to the heavens. Therefore, glory to God is a necessity as it is a fact.”⁶
- B. **God’s Peace.** The older translations, like the KJV, fail to capture the real meaning of the text at this point. “Peace, good will toward men” is an inaccurate translation. The NASB rightly renders this, “And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” The last phrase is not a declaration of universal salvation, but refers strictly to those who are objects of God’s grace and mercy. “They are the *saved* or the *elect*, those on whom God has bestowed the favor of his grace.”⁷

CONCLUSION: Three times the Bible alludes to the angels singing: (1) In Job 38:7, we read, “the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” over God’s creation. The expression “morning stars” is a reference to angels (cf. Psalm 148:3, 4 and Psalm 103:21). (2) In Revelation 5:9-11, we read of the angels in heaven “singing a new song of the triumph of the Lamb.” (3) And here, at the birth of Jesus, the Angelic chorus sing at his incarnation. The angels declared to the shepherds that the One who was born that night was Savior, Lord, and Christ. The three major offices of Jesus are all acknowledged. Jesus did not come into the world just to be our example for living. He did not come to meet our felt needs. He did

not come to give us helpful hints for developing better families or to show us how to model leadership and live more productive and successful lives. No, the Son of God made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! He came to seek and to save sinners.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
And gave him the name that is above every name,
That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
In heaven and on earth and under the earth,
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:9-11

ENDNOTES

¹The angels did not assist Christ in His temptation. Thomas Manton, another of the great Puritan divines, asked why the angels did not come to minister to Christ until after the devil was departed and replies: “Partly to show that Christ had not help but his own when he grappled with Satan. When the temptations were ended, then the good angels came, lest the victory should seem to be gotten by their help and assistance. They were admitted to the triumph, but they were not admitted to the fight: they were not spectators only in the conflict (for the battle was certainly fought before God and angels), but partners in the triumph: they were away to give place to the combat, but they came visibly to congratulate the conqueror after the battle was fought and the victory gotten. Our Lord would alone foil the devil, and, when that was done, the angels came and ministered unto him.” *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton I* (rpt. Maranatha Publications, 1976), p. 324.

²Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Moody Press, 1997), p. 131.

³D. L. Bock, *The IVP New Testament Commentary: Luke* (IVP, 1994), p. 56.

⁴Philip G. Ryken in *The Incarnation in The Gospels*, eds., D. M. Doriani, P. G. Ryken, R. D. Phillips (P&R, 2022), p. 108.

⁵C. Hodge, *Conference Papers* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), p. 25.

⁶G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit VI* (Pickering & Inglis, LTD), p. 351.

⁷Bock, op. cit., p. 56.