

Advent 2022 Daily Reflections - Angels

Starting Sunday 27 November

Dear Friends,

I have chosen “Angels” as theme for this year’s reflections. Inspiring Ipswich will again be placing angel-figures and detached wings in prominent places in town over the Advent and Christmas period with a view to inspiring people to think about angels and their role.

There’s a lot of supposition surrounding the form, nature and purpose of angels, much of which has no basis in the Bible. Are angels cute? Do we each have a guardian angel? Do children who die young turn into angels? Do angels need-wings to stay in the air? Do they wear halos? Are they all men? I hope to be able to present as wide a view of angels as I can in the 28 days of Advent this year (this year’s is the longest Advent you can get!). As before, we will present a Bible passage, some thoughts, a prayer and some questions for you to think about. There may be some YouTube videos and some images as well, though I’m not sure we can stretch to serious angel videos every day! Be aware that YouTube is placing short adverts at the start of more videos, so you may have to work through these first.

Using the daily reflection

You may like to open the email in the morning and read through the reflection. Consider the commentary and do feel free to ask questions. My questions that follow are there mainly to prompt your thoughts. If you’d like to download the complete reflections set as a PDF file then click on [this link](#) on our website

Use the download icon (folder and arrow) on the middle right in the title bar of the viewer to take your own copy.

With Blessings,

Paul

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Advent 2022: Sun 27 Nov

Daniel 10:4-9

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz round his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

I chose this passage from Daniel in preference to one from the opening of Ezekiel ([click on this link](#) to see it) as it is a little less surreal than Ezekiel's account of seeing angels. However, neither Ezekiel nor Daniel, as far as we know, had been drinking or taken any mind-bending substances prior to the vision they experienced.

What is the image that comes to mind when you think of angels? We're creating some knitted ones at church, and they may be just a bit cutesy and cuddly. We might think about the [Rafael picture](#) (or at least the little bit at the bottom of it) that was popular a few years back. It depicts two angelic figures leaning as if musing. They look like little children, apart from their underspecified wings.



Daniel sees the form of a man, dressed in normal clothing, but he is simply unable to describe his appearance. A police artist would never get this angel's likeness down on paper from the description above. What we can say is that the person is unearthly, and radiates brilliance, and his voice is terrifying. Although he was dressed in men's clothes, he himself was anything but normal.

Daniel's companions flee away – they didn't even see the angel, but they were filled with terror. He is alone before the angel, physically overcome at his presence, and he falls to the ground.

This is no chubby cherub with stubby wings. He's not come to be looked at or admired. He can't help the fact that Ezekiel is terror struck, for the angel is who the angel is, an amazing creation. He also is on a mission from God, to reveal to Daniel things that will happen in the future. It is a very detailed revelation. It is recorded in this and subsequent chapters of the book. Even though Daniel fell into a sleep, he was able to record the message!

*What's the brightest and/or noisiest experience you have had?
What do you imagine the size of this angel to be?*

Father God, I pray that during this season of Advent I may separate Biblical accounts about angels from popular views and new age vagueness, and so come to a fuller understanding of their nature.

[Unlikely pictures of angels – I'm not entirely convinced](#)

[Because it's Advent Sunday](#)

Advent 2022: Mon 28 Nov

Matthew 28:1-7

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.'

You'll know that there is more than one account of what happened at the tomb of Jesus on that glorious resurrection day. In Matthew's gospel we have a person who is quite frightening in appearance. Mark describes the angel [as a young man](#), toned down in comparison to Matthew's angel, though the onlookers were still filled with alarm. It's interesting to note his posture in Mark's account. For completeness, Luke describes two men and John an empty tomb.

The Matthew angel has come from heaven at God's bidding to release the stone covering the tomb (that would be a superhuman task), thus frightening the daylighters out of hardened soldiers, and announce that Jesus is not inside, as he has already risen. What a task! Do you think that perhaps there was a gaggle of angels all vying with each other for God to choose them to be appointed to this special task?

I'm wondering how long it took for the angel, once sent, to reach the tomb. Can we think in terms of distance and speed, because if we do, we are assuming that heaven is at a measurable distance from earth! The messenger was not reported to have wings – you would mention that, wouldn't you, if he did?

We've had two passages with angels looking like lightning. How does this image compare with stained glass representations in churches?

The angel was described as a man. Could there be female angels?

Was Mark's angel a young angel?

Why didn't God himself come down to make the announcement?

Father God, I wonder how the angel you chose to make this announcement must have felt as the task was given him – to roll away the large stone and sit on it, waiting for the women to arrive. Could he contain his joy? Would you fill me with the same joy that my Lord and Saviour is risen and alive? Amen.

[A stone rolled away](#)

Advent 2022: Tue 29 Nov

Luke 20:27-38

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. 'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?'

Jesus replied, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.'

The Sadducees were a religious group with a particular view of life and death, and their ideas clashed with what Jesus taught. They make up an implausible, though possible story about a woman's duty to her seven husbands. Even the imaginative Noel Coward, in *Blithe Spirit*, stopped at just two wives!

Jesus dismisses the Sadducee's construction by explaining that marriage is not an issue in heaven, where we become like the angels. We do not turn into angels: we take on eternity like them. Angels are not mortal beings - we cannot describe their age or life span because they are made for eternal service.

We know that in heaven our earthly bodies will be transformed for eternal life. Nothing in our new body will wear down or break, nothing will tarnish. Angels already have a form that does not age or decay. Gabriel is the same now as when he visited Mary. We shall be like that when we take on eternity.

What relationship might I be able to expect with angels in eternity?

Do stillborn babies or children who die prematurely turn into angels?

If I've married again, how will those marriage relationships work in heaven?

Father God, I am a child of Christ's resurrection. In his rising I am risen with him into a new creation that will be fully realised at the end of this life. I will see and recognise angels I never saw in this life and rejoice that you placed them at various times to safeguard and protect me. Amen.

Advent 2022: Wed 30 Nov

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.'

'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.



This passage is so well-known that it might just flow past you. Did you ever wonder whether Gabriel appeared to Mary by walking in the doorway of the house, or if he came out of thin air? (I don't think the painting has captured the simplicity of the house Mary was in, but I do like the angel's rainbow wings!)

Did you notice how Mary responded to the angel? She didn't seem that troubled by his arrival or how he looked. She was not prepared, however, to hear that God had looked favourably on her -

she was a very special lady in God's eyes - or could have any inkling of just what God had in store for her.

Rather than respond with amazement or disbelief to this astounding angel-presence and his message of God's favour, of a holy and royal son, an eternal ruler, Mary seems to be more worried by the practical implication of how she was going to get pregnant. That's a reasonable question, because Mary knew of only one way to get pregnant, and she wasn't yet married.

She eventually gives in once the angel has made it clear to her that the process will involve the Holy Spirit and the Most High, and it will happen, and her child will be called the Son of God. I'm not sure, if I were Mary, that I'd feel any easier about it on hearing this information.

Message delivered, the angel heads off home.

Where do you imagine angels living?

How many angels are named in the Bible?

Father God, a young girl was surprised by your messenger-angel. She realised that this was a life-changing encounter for her, and she humbly submitted her life to her part in your plan for our salvation. Let me know your will for my life, I pray. Amen.

[The Angel Gabriel](#)

[Angelus ad virginem](#)

[Is this how you imagined the scene?](#)

[Or this?](#)

Advent 2022: Thu 1 Dec

Genesis 3:22-24

And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.' So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

There are different types of angels, but not that many. The fat-faced cherubs of Rafael hanging around doing not much are nothing like the angels who have been placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to deny access to the tree of life. They are there to guard the place and to fend off anyone who'd dare to approach.

How do you imagine the size of these cherubim? Are they human-size, smaller, or larger?

God placed the cherubim (we do not know how many there were, though a few artists like to show one only) where he wanted them. The story is quite specific about their placement east of the Garden of Eden. Before Adam and Eve were banished there would not have been any need for an entrance/exit point! The angels might still be standing guard today. I don't think they'd necessarily show up on Google Earth, though.

Angels do God's bidding. They are not employees. They do not clock on or keep office hours. If a task needs doing, it will be done, however long it may last. Angels are unsalaried, and they do not have holiday entitlement. There are no angel breakout areas in heaven.

Does the tree of life still exist?

Are the cherubim still there?

Do angels need lunch breaks?

Do angels have freedom to choose?

Father God, I cannot imagine the awfulness of falling from your grace as Adam and Eve did, yet when I fall into sin you forgive my frequent fallings as I confess and repent of them, because you sent Jesus to pay the price of my sin, and allow me to stand before you as an adopted child of grace. Thank you, Father. Amen.



Advent 2022: Fri 2 Dec

Isaiah 6:1–7

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’

Isaiah has a vision of God. Never mind the angels – it is God that Isaiah sees. This is a privilege afforded to very few Old Testament characters. Seeing God is far more significant than seeing angels. God, however, is not easily described. Isaiah tells us that he is high and exalted, and wearing a very long robe. He is in his Temple, and there is a fiery altar.

He has words to describe the angels flying above the throne. They are there because God is there. Isaiah sees an unspecified number of seraphs flying above the throne of God. Did they look like budgerigars flitting around in an aviary, or did they float gently? We do not know, and it is important that we avoid creating fixed pictures in our heads about these things but rather keep an open mind.

Isaiah names them as seraphim. Like cherubim, the collective/plural ends in “im”. The seraphim Isaiah sees all look similar – six wings, two of which gave them flight. The other four will also have been working wings, but in God’s presence they were used to cover their faces and feet. That would be a lot of wings to manage!

I want you to imagine the sound that greeted Isaiah. Angels have voices, big voices, voices that shake the temple of heaven. You might think that God’s temple would be an immovable structure! Was the sound of the angels like that of a trained choir? It doesn’t say that they were singing. Were they calling out in an ordered way, or was each seraph voicing his worship individually? They certainly appeared to be using the same words.

It’s too much for Isaiah. In the presence of God (not of the angels) he is convicted of his sin and uncleanness. A seraph is appointed to perform a symbolic act of cleansing – I wouldn’t think that Isaiah went away with a burned mouth – and Isaiah is able to respond to the call of God.

*How many seraphs would God require to be around his throne?
What do you think angel-wings are made of?*

Father God, we may create little throne-rooms in the way we order and decorate our churches, and especially our cathedrals. Our stained-glass angels tend to stay still and quiet, and the smoke alarm might complain should you turn up. All the same, I pray that you shake me and my fellowship to our foundations with your presence. Amen.

[Sing with the angels](#)

[Six-winged seraphs](#)



Advent 2022: Sat 3 Dec

Hebrews 2:6-9

...there is a place where someone has testified:

'What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet.'

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The words that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes from may be found in [Psalm 8](#). The psalmist considers the vast expanse of God's creation and wonders how mankind could be considered of any worth in relation to that. Could God consider the worth of mere humans? Could he care for them? Well, he placed them just a little bit lower than the angels, and he gave them glory, honour and dominion, so that is quite something.

Jesus, like us, was made a little lower than the angels. There was a time when he, the Word of God, created the angelic hosts. We should not think that being lower than the angels makes us less important to God. Angels were created to serve God and do his bidding. You and I were created that we might, in Jesus, become children of God. We will rise in the hierarchy. See what Paul says about angels.

1 Corinthians 6:1-3

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

I have no idea why or how I will judge angels, but Paul is in no doubt about it.

*Why might there be a need to judge angels?
Are all angels obedient to God?*

Father God, I am only a little lower than the angels, and they are amazing! I rejoice that you have created me, and that there will come a time when I and all your redeemed will stand above the angels, for we shall become family. Amen.

[Angels reduced to cute - the realms of Etsy](#)

Advent 2022: Sun 4 Dec

Hebrews 13:1-2

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

This throwaway line from the writer of Hebrews about entertaining angels is a delight to ponder. God uses angels as messengers. They do not always manifest themselves in their raw brightness - it might not always be appropriate. They might look just like you and me. Artists seldom portray angels plainly dressed!

You might wonder why angels would submit themselves to hospitality. Did Abraham's visitors (we'll discuss them later in these reflections) actually need feeding? Not at all, but Abraham was not going to let them go without offering the hospitality of his home to them. Would you like to discover that you have entertained an angel without knowing it? If you would, then you might need to keep a home that is an open and welcoming to strangers. You will never entertain an angel over lunch if you only ever invite your friends round!

You might also like to turn this round and wonder if you might ever have been in the presence of angels who have been sent to help you. Has a stranger or strangers shown you kindness or helped you in a difficult situation, and you felt that this was a timely and appropriate action beyond coincidence? People have witnessed to angelic interventions in their lives following an encounter with what they thought was a stranger.

If you have a story, why not test it out on someone you trust, and then tell others. I have to say, of course, that there is [higher service](#) we can do than showing hospitality to angels.

Do you have an angel experience to share?

How open is your hospitality?

Have you ever heard or felt the gentle flutter of wings?

Father God, I do not seek to see angels – I can wait until I get to see them all. I do seek, however, to see evidence of your hand at work in my world in freedom, healing and restoration, and I pray that you use me in bringing about your purposes. Amen.

Advent 2022: Mon 5 Dec

Revelation 4:6-8

In the centre, round the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and behind. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all round, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

Revelation 5:11-14

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!’

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!’

The four living creatures said, ‘Amen’, and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Can you imagine the Albert Hall filled with angels? It wouldn't be big enough (only 5272 seats and air space for, at a guess, another 20,000). How about the O2 Arena (20,000 seats plus air-space)? Too small. When God created the angelic hosts, he was extravagant. John, the writer of the book of Revelation, was not able to count the numbers of angels, or even give an estimate. His description of ten thousands of ten thousand is his way of expressing numbers that are beyond counting. There are more angels than you think.

God's throne is surrounded by angels, and they worship him, just like the seraphim were doing in Isaiah's account. They worship the Lamb, our Saviour Jesus and Father God on the throne.

The angels do not sing their songs and then go home for lunch. They stay, and they continue to worship. The "for ever and ever" that is said by the whole created universe goes on literally for ever and ever. Angels were created with understanding to know fully who God is, and to serve and worship in his presence for ever. That's why we initially come a little lower than them in the created order.

The four creatures are, on our first reading of their descriptions, simply weird. They also appear in [Ezekiel's account](#) that we mentioned at the start of Advent. I get a little uncomfortable when I

think of these seraphim-like creatures having eyes under their wings, but I'm responding to the writer's inadequate attempts to describe something way beyond description, and probably gloriously beautiful (and living-daylights frightening!) to behold.

These four creatures have a special place close to the throne. They seem to be a higher order of angels and take on the likeness of an ox, a lion, a man and an eagle. We cannot be sure why they look like this or why. One day we will encounter them and understand who they are, and we will join with them in worshipping our Lord Jesus into eternity.

Why is it we don't bump into angels that often?

Father God, if I only know you without Jesus then I can only see you from afar, for you are too holy and unapproachable for the likes of me. I can never come near because I am unholy. Thank you that you gave me Jesus in loving sacrifice so that I may approach your holiness clothed in him. Amen.

[Holy, holy, holy](#)

[To him that sits on the throne](#)

Advent 2022: Tue 6 Dec

Luke 15:8-10

'...suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Jesus more than once talks about joy in heaven when a sinner repents. There is joy among the angels. Jesus is not talking just about our first turning to God. That will, of course, set heaven ablaze with joy. He is talking, I believe, about someone already in God's hands who has sinned (possibly not for the first time) but has turned away in repentance, returning to God.

The woman in this short parable had not found a stray coin to add to her collection, which might be the cause of joy. She'd lost one and searched until she'd found. Remember that a silver coin is a precious item. I might just not bother searching my house for a lost 10p coin! You would not want to lose a silver coin. Imagine it as one tenth of your total wealth. It would be an occasion for joy should a coin of such high value come back into your hands. In a close society, everyone rejoices along with the woman – there's bound to be a party in the offing!

Heaven rejoices not only when someone comes to Christ but when a child of God, his own, comes back home. We do not deserve forgiveness, but because of Jesus when we make that turn back from sin to Father God his whole household rejoices.

Angels are not just functionaries. They share in the business of heaven. They see and hear what is going on, and they love to party.

How many angels have you caused to be joyful today?

Do angels weep when you fall away?

Are you worth searching out?

What value does Father God place on you?

Do you think that we might have specific angels assigned to us?

Father God, am I really that important to you that you would come after me in Christ Jesus and bring me home? Am I, wretched, lost, the subject of your amazing saving grace? Let me spend at least ten thousand years in heaven figuring it out. Amen.

[When we get there](#)

Advent 2022: Wed 7 Dec

Job 38:1-7

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?

On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Job is getting some come-uppance from God. God asserts his omnipotence, authority and glory. He gives Job a roasting over presumptuousness on his part. Does Job have special knowledge about the way the earth was created? Was he there? No, of course he wasn't, and he knows nothing about these things.

God reveals that the angels were there, rejoicing at the beautiful creation. They were not there at the beginning, so if we take the creation story literally, the rejoicing angels can have been only a few days old! This makes no difference because angels were angels from the moment of their creation. God did not create baby angels and wait for them grow up to maturity. He created fully sentient and cognisant beings. Angels are not flesh and blood, and they do not age or decay. They are eternal spiritual beings.

The writer of Job may have been poetic when he or she described the morning stars as singing together, but this may have been exactly how it was. Who can tell?! There is no doubt, however, that the angels did shout for joy as God laid down the foundations of this earth. It's not until this passage that we discover that angels were there this early on in the creation story.

Do angels always shout their praises, or do they ever sing? Don't assume – check it out!

Do angels play musical instruments? Ditto the above

Father God, when I consider in the Creation story that you “made the stars also”, I am, like the Psalmist, open-mouthed in wonder at the extravagant (but never wasteful) wonder of the starry heavens, and I, crowned with glory and honour, shout out my praise and worship in the night-time at the work of your hands. Amen.

[All creatures of our God and king](#)

[Angels singing?](#)

Advent 2022: Thu 8 Dec

Hebrews 12:18-24

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.' The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear.'

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The writer of Hebrews compares the mountain that Moses climbed when he received the Ten Commandments with Mount Zion, the new Jerusalem. You may recall that heaven is set to have a house-move. It is described in the final chapters of Revelation, which was written a generation later than this passage.

Mount Sinai became a dreadful place when Moses went up to spend time in God's presence. It was the exclusive property of God for that meeting.

Mount Zion, by contrast, is a place of welcome, where we shall meet our Saviour Jesus. There will be thousands upon thousands of rejoicing angels, whose praise is unceasing and whose voices never fade as they proclaim the victory of Jesus.

You might wonder whether this constant rejoicing could get a little tiresome for everyone else. Do you want to go to an eternal place where the praise never ceases, and angels never shut up? Could there be a quiet seaside beach where we can just contemplate as the sun sets? I leave you to discover why that won't happen.

Heaven is a place of rejoicing. The angels understand this, and they rejoice. It's because of what Jesus has done for us. We will not yet understand like the angels because we do not have their perspective, but in eternity the angels will take a seat further back as we rejoice and sing our praises.

*Will we be able to get away from the angels to a quiet place in heaven?
What will be the role of angels in the new heaven and earth?*

Father God, sometimes when I come to prayer it feels like it's just you and me. I'm not sure that I am always present, either. Open my eyes, I pray, to see you, the living God who inhabits Mount Zion in glory with angels and the redeemed, through Jesus, whom you sent to strike a new covenant relationship with me by his sacrificial blood. Amen.

[Come, let us join our cheerful \(bi-lingual\) songs](#)

Advent 2022: Fri 9 Dec

Matthew 16:21-27

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'

Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.'

Who is this Satan?! We will discuss that person on another day. Suffice it to say that Peter, in his desire to see Jesus not suffer, did exactly what Satan did in this attempt to tempt Jesus away from his chosen and obedient path of suffering and death.

When Jesus rebuked Peter with that name he was not delivering an insult – he was revealing Peter's own nature back to him.

To Jesus (and Peter), Satan was a real entity. If Jesus was the Word of God incarnate, then in his pre-incarnation state, before he came to earth in human form, he would have already known Satan, for, as we read in the opening of John's gospel and in the letter to the Colossian church,

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Colossians 1:15-17

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Satan was created – he had not existed in the pre-creation void.

Jesus goes on to talk about the topsy-turvy cost of discipleship – lose your life to find it – revealing that he will return to earth in glory and triumph, accompanied by hosts of angels.

Where do you think Satan came from?

Where do you think he is going?

Have you placed a value on your soul?

What reward do you expect to have when you see Jesus?

What do you think is the purpose and task of the angels coming with Jesus?

Father God, I pray that I will not let the faint-hearted discourage me from the path you have set before me, and that I will encourage others in what you have planned for them. Show me what I must take up and what I must lay down. Amen.

[Lo! He comes with clouds descending.](#) Has this choir captured the scene? What's needed?

Advent 2022: Sat 10 Dec

Judges 6:11-20

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.'

'Pardon me, my lord,' Gideon replied, 'but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, "Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?" But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.' The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?'

'Pardon me, my lord,' Gideon replied, 'but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' The Lord answered, 'I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.'

Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.'

..When Gideon realised that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, 'Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!'

Gideon is living in a land under attack from the Midianites. It was his nation's own fault for disobeying God. Whatever the people planted, the Midianites destroyed. Gideon is a nobody, at least as far as he's concerned. He's threshing his wheat in secret when an angel appears to him, a messenger sent by God for a specific purpose. The angel sits down, presumably on the ground, in the shade of an oak tree. That's a modest entrance!

The angel does not beat around the bush, and hails Gideon with a prophetic greeting. There was no place for polite introductions. He'd been sent by God to announce to Gideon that he was far more than the wimp he thought he was, for he is a warrior, a fighter for God. A mighty warrior in fact, destined to lead an army. In human terms Gideon was nothing like this, but God had chosen him to be part of his plan. When the angel hails Gideon the mighty warrior it is because in God's eyes and in his power Gideon already is, not will become when the time comes.

Gideon is not shocked or frightened at seeing this angel, and he treats the messenger with respect, though he questions his words. He didn't really believe what the angel was saying. As in other instances of angels appearing to people, there is some confusion as to who is speaking. The angel starts a conversation, but sometimes it seems to be the Lord who is conversing.

Gideon can see no further than his situation. His people are under attack because God has abandoned Israel. But Gideon fails to see that God is not one who will turn his back forever on his

people. God will sort out the issue of the Midianites by getting rid of them – he sent them, and he will remove them.

I really want Gideon to stop at this point and not to keep on asking questions or seeking some sort of proof that the angel there in front of him is speaking God's words. It's an angel, for goodness' sake! The talk goes back and forth before Gideon is convinced and obeys. He suffers death threats from his own people before they follow him into the eventual victory over Midian. Read [Judges 6](#), and further if you have time.

Why does God choose the nobody?

When had God made up his mind to choose Gideon?

How do you imagine the appearance of this angel?

Father God, there are times when in my heart I sense your prompting, and I may not always want to heed it. Perhaps I consider myself, like Gideon, the least among my church family. Would you forgive my fears or excuses? Amen.

[The Lord is with you, mighty warrior](#)

[Longer version with moving video](#)

Advent 2022: Sun 11 Dec

Luke 1:5–19

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years.' The angel said to him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

An angel appears to the old man Zechariah. He may have been lost in his thoughts as he performed his Temple duties, and seeing an angel suddenly appear beside the altar at which he was burning incense must have startled and frightened him. Zechariah should have been the only person in the room.

God had heard Zechariah's audacious prayer – that his line would not die out with him and Elizabeth. God had granted them a son. Clearly the aged Zechariah and post-prime Elizabeth would have to play their part in this, but perhaps Zechariah hadn't thought it all through.

The angel goes on to describe their child, who is to be named John. God gets to choose the name. This man John will be a great prophet, as great as Elijah, and a reconciler of people to people, and people to God. An amazing and beautiful ministry.

Zechariah didn't disbelieve – he just needed further assurance from the angel. "I am old", said Zechariah. "I am Gabriel", said the angel. Gabriel stands in the presence of God. Case closed. So was Zechariah's voice, at least until he was able to announce his child's name.

Gabriel may have had a higher angelic role or status than some. The Bible does not name him as an archangel – in fact, only Michael is given that title. Some Roman Catholic traditions may look to the book of Enoch (not in the standard Bible) where seven supposedly high-ranking angel characters are named. While we have read that God is surrounded by hosts of angels Gabriel reveals that he has a standing position before the presence of God. Angels do not get tired of standing.

Don't be surprised when God answers your prayers!

Can you remember what happened after this? If not, [read on](#) in the chapter. Why might the angel have dealt with Zechariah in that way?

Do you pray audacious prayers, or do you think them through first, and then decide not to pray them?

Father God, when angels bring a message, there's usually more to it. You had prepared the gift of a son to Zechariah and Elizabeth, but the child you gave them was not sent to be their comfort for their old age but one who would go before the Lord, whose message still challenges us today. I should have my wits about me should an angel come my way. Amen.

[No angel appears in this video](#)

Advent 2022: Mon 12 Dec

Genesis 18:1-12

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way – now that you have come to your servant.' 'Very well,' they answered, 'do as you say.'

...While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. 'Where is your wife Sarah?' they asked him. 'There, in the tent,' he said. Then one of them said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.'

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'

God has sent messenger angels to Abraham. Again we have the confusion as to whether God has turned up or angels. Our text tells us that the Lord appeared and Abraham saw three men standing by. They turn up in the heat of the day unannounced.

Abraham's response to the men is that of hospitality – you have come on foot without food, water or livestock. You cannot survive in this heat without refreshment. I have plenty of food – come, let me entertain you with a meal. The men may have looked different – were they taller than average, or more handsome or noble in appearance, which may be a reason why Abraham treats them with such humility and respect? He may have had an inkling that they were special, but we don't know. He offers water for the cleansing of their feet. I do wonder how much sand or dirt they'd actually have picked up on their journey to Abraham.

Abraham does not join with them in the meal, but he stands nearby as a servant. I asked earlier whether angels need a lunch break. They don't, but they are able to consume food offered. That does, of course beg questions that I'll leave to your imagination or the works of Milton.

The angels have been given two tasks. The first is to announce to Abraham that his wife Sarah will have a son within a year. "What a joke!", thinks Sarah. The joke was on her in the end.

Their second task - the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah were not far away. Destruction and death lay ahead.

Would God create ugly angels?

Could he send angels on an errand in another guise?

What does Isaac's name mean?

How was God's promise to Abraham severely tested a few years later?

Father God, what can you not do?! I confess that I have prayed within the limits of what I think rather than what you can do. Dare me to pray bigger prayers. Amen.

Sarah laughs

Advent 2022: Tue 13 Dec

Psalm 91:9–13

If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

Do you do what the Psalmist encourages you to do. Why not try it – say those words out loud in expectation of your safety. And who is it that God will send to protect you? Angels!

Angels will lift you so that you do not stumble. They have a supernatural role that intervenes in the natural. If you claim God as your refuge, then you have faith that he cares enough about you to command angels to intervene to stop you tripping over a stone and the consequent bloody toe and hobbling? This is a bold claim! You'll never know if it holds unless you give it a go.

Treading on lions and cobras as a pastime is not to be encouraged, but should one encounter either, an angel will be there to protect you. Some people claim to have experienced or even seen angelic intervention in a life-threatening situation, but we might look to the ordinary things of life, too.

There is a belief among some that each of us is assigned a personal Guardian Angel for life. The Bible does not say this - it is the stuff of folklore. The pictures accompanying today's reflection are more fancy than reality.

There are many testimonies today to the action of angels in protecting people. Angels have intervened to pull people out of danger, or to share a warning message about a potentially unsafe action. None of this can be proved, but we may judge a person's testimony. They may be working in areas of danger, conflict or disaster. Some accounts of angels appearing or intervening in people's lives have been collected in [this book](#) (the link should take you to a short preview of its content, otherwise search Angels, by Hope Price).

How many angels do you imagine might be at work in the world at this moment?

How can you test whether another's story of an angel-encounter is to be trusted?

Have angels been at work in the Russia/Ukraine war?

Do angels guard you at night?

Father God, your angels do not always work in a visible way. I may not know when I have been pulled from danger, but I trust that you send an agent, an angel to be there to keep me safe. Thank you, Father. Amen.

[Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and some angels](#)

[Not coming to a church near you any time soon](#)



Advent 2022: Wed 14 Dec

Acts 12:4-11

After arresting Peter, Herod put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me,' the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.'

Peter is rescued by an angel. This angel appears in the cell and miraculously releases the chains holding Peter to his guards. This angel appears in a physical form, and thumps Peter to wake him.

If we're talking miracles, then we have an angel appearing inside a heavily guarded prison, a bright light apparently emanating from the angel, chains falling from Peter's wrists, barred doors and gates being opened. The guards in the cell were not necessarily asleep, but they had no idea of what was going on. The guards outside were most likely awake and on guard, but Peter and the angel walked right past them without being detected. Then the angel disappears, just like that. Job done.

Yet within all this amazing stuff going on, the angel is very practical. He instructs Peter to get himself up and dressed, and to be quick about it! Peter is in a daze, and in need of clear, firm instructions. It would have speeded things up a bit if the angel had the clothes miraculously placed upon him, but that didn't happen! Peter does as he is told, but he's still not quite sure whether this was real or not.

What we might miss in this story is what happened before the event took place. We read that the church was earnestly praying for him. We already know the outcome but they were concerned that, without divine intervention, Peter's fate was likely to be execution. God responded to the prayers of the faithful friends in a way that could only have been of God.

What would you have prayed for if you were part of that church?

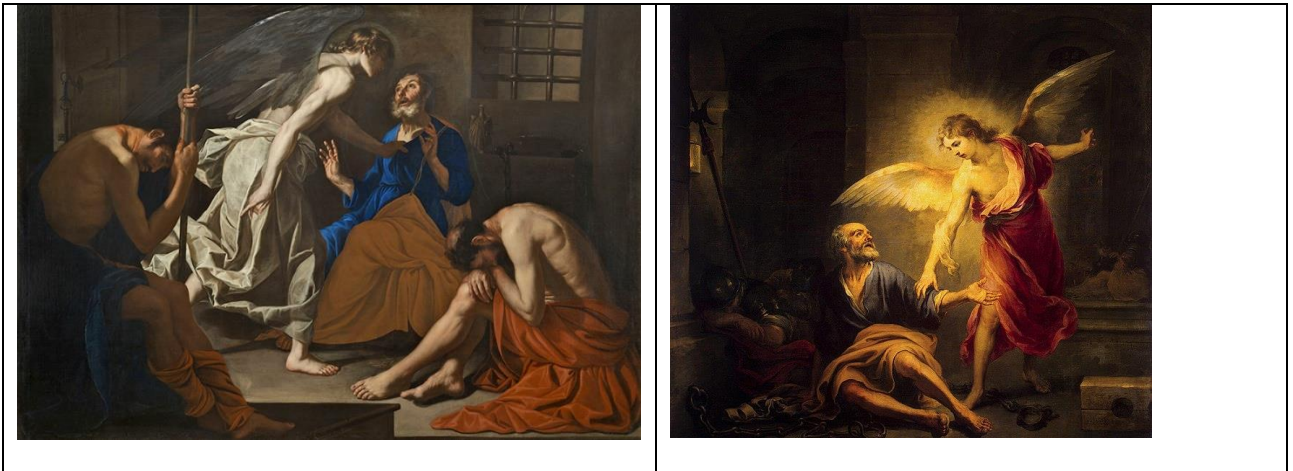
What would you have hoped for?

How does hope affect prayer?

As you look back on your experiences, could there have been some divine intervention at any time?

Father God, I sing of chains figuratively falling off at your eye's quickening ray when I recall my commitment to follow Jesus, but real chains fell off Peter's arms, so I pray that you continue to deploy your angels in miraculous ways in this world. Amen.

[My chains fell off](#)



Advent 2022: Thu 15 Dec

Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.

Angels play a significant part in the Finality – that's my term for the last phases of God's Plan. Paul, Silas and Timothy are named as the writers of this letter, and they have a clear idea of how the last stage of God's plan for the world will develop. The faithful who are still living when Christ returns will be gathered up by angels – now that would require legions of angels.

Before that happens, those who have died will be gathered – the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. That includes those buried, lost at sea, cremated, scattered and those who gave their bodies for scientific research. Nobody is excluded – the raised body is not the same as the physical body. The voice of the archangel, name not specified, will be heard alongside that of Christ Jesus, and those faithful remaining will be taken up.

This is a bold claim. In one sense, it is important that we know what the Bible says and can make informed assessments. In another, we might not need to worry too much about the finer details if we are safe in Christ Jesus now. Our mission is to live in Christ Jesus and bring others to him.

*What will happen to the non-faithful at this time?
Do I have any responsibility for those people now?*

Father God, no-one knows when Christ Jesus will return to earth. Keep me alert and ready, not because I am desperate to be among the saved, but because I want to live each and every day on earth to your glory, and then see you in glory. Amen.

[The trumpet shall sound!](#)

[Ready for the roll-call?](#)

Advent 2022: Fri 16 Dec

Revelation 8:2-11

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

...The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Revelation 11:15-19

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.’

...Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

We return to events in Revelation. Seven angels have been given trumpets. A trumpet is a general name – these could be straight, curved or coiled, metal or animal horn. I imagine the instruments being used for the first time for this particular task. Their fanfares herald phases in God’s plan that leads up to eternity. What happens after each trumpet blast is not always pleasant. There is warfare, pestilence, an overturning of the accepted order. Stuff needs dealing with, things are changing fast and the angels are there to mark each event. These events must take place as the finality of eternity in a new heaven and a new earth approaches.

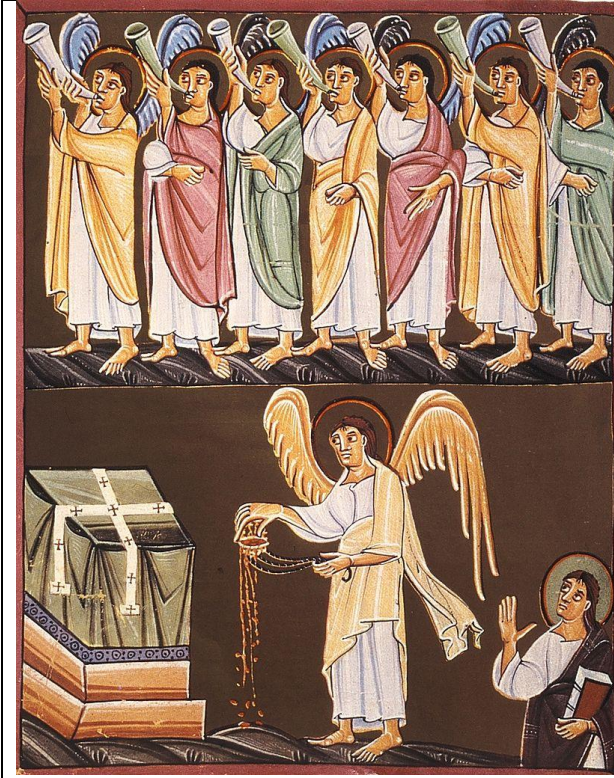
The final victory of heaven is revealed when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. Something new is about to begin.

The seven angels are not described. I’d find it difficult to imagine anyone but a high-ranking angel being assigned these tasks. I fancy that these angels would be unmissable, plain for everyone in heaven and on earth to see. It was not, however, the angels who caused the events to take place – they were under the controlling hand of God.

Were the angels aware of what they were heralding?

What do you think the other angels in heaven were doing as this happened?

Father God, I pray your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven, both today and in the fulfilment of time. Amen.



Advent 2022: Sat 17 Dec

Ezekiel 28:13-17

13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl.

Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you.

You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour.

So I threw you to the earth.

This passage is addressed to the King of Tyre, but its content seems to suggest that the person in question being addressed is hardly an earthly king, but rather Satan. "Light-bearer", or more commonly, Lucifer, may have been another name by which this person was known. Let's treat the passage as if it were addressed to Satan himself.

The prophet Ezekiel is looking back, which is a bit unusual for a prophet. The object of his words was with God in heaven (God's holy mountain). He was there in the Garden of Eden, and lavishly adorned. Remember that the garden of Eden was a place where God came daily to be with Adam and Eve. If God came, then there's no reason why at least some angels would not also be present. Satan must have turned away from God very soon after.

He was a created entity, and he was assigned a high role for service to God. But he made a choice to seek his own future. I can't draw any clearer line than that. There is some discussion about trading, which I won't go into here, but whatever he was doing may have played a part in turning him if it was not already the result of his turning.

Lucifer was a creation of great beauty, and why would God not create all his angels to be beautiful to behold? When sin enters in, then beauty is corrupted into pride, and splendour corrupts wisdom.

Satan was ousted. The serpent in the garden was out on his belly. But there were many who fell with him.

Why did God allow Satan to “trade”?

How do you imagine what Satan looks like?

Would he make himself so obvious as to be recognised immediately?

Father God, you have the situation in hand. I take unto myself the shield of faith with which I may extinguish all the arrows of the evil one. Keep me safe in the full armour until the time when evil will be destroyed. Amen.



St. Michael expelling Lucifer and the Rebel Angels
Peter Paul Rubens (workshop of)
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Advent 2022: Sun 18 Dec

Job 1:6-12

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?'

Satan answered the Lord, 'From roaming throughout the earth, going to and fro on it.'

Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.'

'Does Job fear God for nothing?' Satan replied. 'Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.'

The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.'

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

The elephant in the room, the serpent in the grass cannot be left out when we consider angels. That person is, of course, Satan. He is referred to both by this name and as the devil.

There is a nonchalance in the attitude of Satan – I think I'll go along with the angels and present myself to God! So where was he when he decided to join the angels? Satan was exiled from the presence of God – he was not welcome. He had dared to become independent. He has been roaming the earth, observing what is going on. He still dares to come into God's presence.

We are not told directly how Satan came to be an enemy of God. He was the snake in the Garden of Eden. We presume that he was an angel created by God who went rogue. Angels are not robots – if they were, then they could not express joy, nor worship God. Angels, too, have freedom to respond from the core of their being to the wonders of God.

Lucifer, as he is referred to in some passages, was a high-ranking angel. He would have been given great power, and probably wisdom and discernment. He fell because he turned his eyes onto himself rather than onto his maker.

Yes, he had seen Job on the earth. A man of deep devotion, blameless and upright beyond any other on earth. Satan taunts God with his theory that because Job was so blessed by God he would be a righteous man, wouldn't he?!

God gives the fallen angel specific authority to test his theory, warts, sores, boils and all.

Why did God not destroy Satan when he first rebelled?

Is Job a plaything, a pawn in a game played between God and Satan?

Why would God allow the death of Job's family?

Father God, I know that Satan is ultimately, and his hold over people will be finally destroyed. I am safe in Christ Jesus. Lead me not into temptation, and deliver me from evil. Amen.

[God to Job at the end of it all](#)

Advent 2022: Mon 19 Dec

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'

Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."' "

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' "

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."' "

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

And now Satan has his opportunity, at the start of Jesus' ministry, to tempt Jesus away from his mission. Satan is crafty, deceitful and seductive, though he is not so stupid as to attempt to lie to Jesus. Satan has power. God did not imprison Satan or rein in his potential to do damage. Satan has authority on earth, and has the right to offer Jesus the temporal world (wouldn't Jesus otherwise have rubbished the offer?).

Some denominations argue that Satan was not a real person, or that the battle in the wilderness was simply an internal struggle Jesus went through as he looked ahead to his public ministry. If the encounter with Satan was an internal affair, then we have to ask whether the angels attending Jesus were also an internal affair.

A popular image of Satan is of an ugly red creature with a pointy tail, and horns coming out of his forehead. It probably has its roots in his depiction in the book of Revelation as a dragon with an army of his angels. This image suits him well as he usually turns up in other disguises that people might not so quickly recognise.

Revelation 12:7-9

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong

enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

If you can stomach the imagery, then I recommend [chapters 12 and 13](#) of Revelation. We may learn much about angels from the way this fallen angel behaved.

How do you imagine Satan appeared to Jesus?

How does he appear today?

How does he lead the world astray?

Father God, I thank you for the higher authority of Jesus. Amen.

[When Satan tempts me](#)

Advent 2022: Tue 20 Dec

Luke 10:1-2, 8-9, 17-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!

...When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

...The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Jesus prepares a number of his followers to go into the places that are on his itinerary. He gives them detailed instructions about how they are to be deployed. This is covered essentially in the second paragraph above and it boils down to healing and preaching, and in that order.

The seventy-two also encountered demonic forces - when Kingdom principles are put into action there will be opposition. Demons are not some secondary order of spiritual being after angels, they are associate angels of Satan who fell along with him when he rebelled against God. As angels, they may be able to use the power they have to deceive. St Paul tells us that Satan can masquerade as an angel of light. There's a YouTube channel I came across (I'll not name it), that ascribes to angels the power to heal and to remove negative energy. This is not what the Bible teaches – it is a deception and a twisting of the truth about angels. The Bible also says that angel-worship is wrong.

Jesus talks of Satan falling from heaven. He might be referring to a historic event, or witnessing the damaging (for Satan) result of the work of the seventy-two under Jesus' authority. He reminds us that superiority in spiritual warfare is not to be valued above securing a place in heaven.

Jesus was accused by some Pharisees of performing healing miracles under the authority of Satan (aka "Beelzebub"). We know that Jesus could really annoy the Pharisees, who were learned in the minutiae of the Law, but to suggest that Satan would want to authorise such things is a nonsense.

Are Satan and his associates aware that Jesus has won the victory? If so, why do they continue to lead the world astray?

What's the right order – healing follows preaching, or preaching follows healing?

Father God, I pray for a clear understanding of what is right and what is errant or wrong. I want to turn to Jesus alone as the source of salvation and wholeness. Deliver me from evil. Amen.

[A mighty fortress](#)

Advent 2022: Wed 21 Dec

Numbers 22:21-31

Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face down.

Balaam is blind to the presence of an angel. For some reason God is angry with him, and he had sent an angel to turn Balaam back from the mission he'd given him. No, it doesn't seem to make complete sense.

Only Balaam's donkey can see the form in front of them. The angel stands in the way to block the route, wielding a sword. The donkey suffers at the hand of Balaam for refusing to move forward. It is prepared to put up with beatings from Balaam in preference to being slain by the angel. It tells him so in plain words (I left out that passage).

Balaam was not allowed to see the angel until now. While the angel is a spiritual being, it can still appear to move about on the ground, and this one can hold and wield a sword. The angels who visited Abraham appeared as flesh and blood and were content to eat with him. There are no fixed rules when it comes to angels.

Did Balaam's opened eyes see a form he recognised as an angel? If he did or he didn't, he saw fit, or was compelled, to fall down on his face before it. It would have been dazzling to behold. Remember how Moses looked to others after being in the presence of God to receive the Ten Commandments. Angels may not always tone themselves down when appearing to humans.

Terrifying beauty.

How do you imagine the angel appeared?

Did Balaam's eyes not see it, or was the image held from him?

Father God, dare I pray that you will open my eyes to see your angels at work in my life and my world? I do. Amen.

[Balaam and the angel](#)

Advent 2022: Thu 22 Dec

2 Samuel 24:15–17

So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand.' The angel of the Lord was then at the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.'

I know we are getting close to Christmas, and we want to be happy, but there are aspects of the work God assigns to his angels that we still need to cover. While the angel that brought death in Egypt slaughtered the Egyptian first-born, this angel-action is against God's own people. God was angry with Israel, and he'd tested David by giving him an order to count his subjects. The inference is that David should have questioned God's instructions, because David's strength was not to be found in the numbers of men that he had in his armies, but in the protection that God gave him. Even when one of his wiser officials questioned the order, David did not change it.

The text above describes God sending a plague upon large areas of the nation. This plague was the choice that God had forced David to make in recompense for his mistrust. You might look at this as what might have happened to Israel in battle had God not protected them. Death and destruction wrought by God are not easy issues to come to terms with in the Old Testament.

We read of a plague, but it seems that this is not a pandemic but the killing of thousands at the hands of an angel of God, who'd been sent to do the slaughter at God's bidding. To the angel this was a task to be done – perhaps the angel had some higher understanding of God's purposes than we might, for this wholesale killing is too dreadful for most of us. To my mind, this was not an elite killer-angel - no angel is any better at slaughter than any other. God moves in mysterious, incomprehensible ways.

The angel was on a mission and hadn't yet completed the task. Jerusalem was next on the list, the seat of David, the place where the Temple was to be built. God relented. Araunah the Jebusite didn't know just how lucky he was.

Just like with Balaam, David was allowed to see the destroying angel. He paid a high price for his failure to trust in God's protection. One angel – seventy thousand dead.

Did God have to test David like that?

Have you ever described someone as an angel? Is it time to rethink that?

At what other times did God send an angel on a deathly mission?

Father God, you love me and you care for me – this truth is written into the core of the Bible. I want to live in that truth and to trust you for everything I need. Do not lead me into temptation. Amen.



Advent 2022: Fri 23 Dec

Luke 2:8-12

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Enough of the grim reality of some angel activity. Let's turn to Christmas.

We read that Zechariah was filled with fear at the sight of the angel. It would certainly have been a surprise to him, knowing that he was, and expected to be, the only person in that holy part of the Temple. The sight of the angel would have been terrifying, like nothing he had seen before. But at least there was only one of them. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host..."

The shepherds also witnessed an angel appearing from nowhere. They had absolutely no idea of what was going on or was about to follow shortly after. These men were well into night vision, with only the moon, if it was out, for light. A starry sky gives no light to the earth. There were no luxuries such as candles. The shepherds would only be able to see the sheep they were tending as dark shapes moving against a dark background. They would have to discern the shapes of all of the dangerous animals that might attack the sheep.

And now an angel appears. A radiant, bright angel who had come from the home of brilliant light, and more frightening than forks of lightning hitting the earth. How did the angel appear? Did it creep up and then turn its light on? Hardly! Where did it come from - how can you tell! I expect you are beginning to realise that we know very little about angels' *modi operandi*. A spiritual creature does not have to enter or leave a building by the door. He (could there be female angels?) does not have to obey laws of gravity so can be present in any part of space, not just the ground. Mary's angelic visitor nine months earlier clearly engaged in conversation with her, so does that mean that angels have physical voice boxes? That would be interesting for what the Bible describes as a ministering spirit!

I think we might agree that angels can take on recognisable forms where and as appropriate. Abraham's three visitors did not arrive in their battle gear, with flame-throwers hanging from their shoulders.

Whatever this angel looked like, the message was succinct. Don't be frightened, there's great news - the Messiah has been born. Go and see. The message hasn't changed much over two thousand years. The Saviour is alive. Come and see.

What does the glory of the Lord look like?

Do angels have a default physical makeup, or do they put on whatever is needed for them to achieve a task?

Father God, the sight of the angel must have been more than the shepherds could process. Would you build in me an awareness of the normally covert working of angels around me, and in my world? Amen.

[Angels we have heard on high](#)

[Prone to the earth](#)

[The virgin Mary upstaged by an angel](#)

Advent 2022: Sat 24 Dec

Luke 2:13-15

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’

It was an invasion of the skies. How big was this great company of the heavenly host? How many turned up? You might re-phrase the question by asking how many angels gave that event a miss. Wouldn’t you turn up too, to share in the worship?

Heaven has come to earth, and the Word of God, he whom the angels worshipped, has become a soft, damp human, relying on Mary to feed and nurture him. Angels were amazed at what has happened, and they sang their songs of praise across the night sky. How many? Enough to fill the sky and blot out the moon and stars but shining more brightly than the noonday sun.

The sight is glorious, but the glory goes to Father God, for what has happened tonight is the appearance of God Incarnate on earth, for nine months a secret known only by the close family of Joseph. Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory to God!

The angels know that this is a step in the working out of God’s purposes, which will culminate in the recreation of earth to be a place where all will live in peace. For this moment and this age, let there be peace on this earth, demonstrated through people of peace.

Angels praise God from the heights, and lowly shepherds get to see and hear, and they are the first to visit the Lord Jesus.

Who will you share this good news with?

Father God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to this world. He came with angels announcing his birth, and he will return with his angels. For now I pray that you will keep me mindful of how you use angels today, and enable me to sense the presence of angels in my church’s worship. Amen.

[Of the Father’s love](#)

[Of the Father's love 2](#)

[Hark!](#)

[Alleluia!](#)