

Sermon for Sunday, December 22, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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THOSE PESKY ANGELS

St. Luke 1:26-38

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Text: "And he came to her and said, 'Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!'" St. Luke 1:28

Now this morning I want to talk about angels. Angels do play a very prominent role in the Christmas events and when the angel comes to Mary and says, "Hail O favored one, the Lord is with you", he has just told half the story because he's got a job for Mary to do and that's always the case when the angels come. I want to make some observations about angels. The first having to do with their reality. I was talking to a lady the other day and we were discussing Christmas and all the things about it and I said to her "Do you believe in angels?" and she said, "No, I do not." Do angels, messengers from God, really exist? Now let me make it clear that one is not required to believe in angels to be saved. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the source of our salvation. So in that sense it is not required of one to believe in angels. At the same time, however, it seems to me that we need to raise the question, where does the weight for the evidence about angels lay? And the answer is upon Jesus himself. No serious Bible scholar denies that Jesus teaches of the existence, the reality and the activity of angels. Now that being the case, if we ask ourselves, "do I believe in angels" -- you have three alternatives.

First, we can believe that what Jesus taught was in error because of his human limitations. Now that is a conclusion hard for most of us Christians to take. And I, for one, reject that notion. A second position or alternative we can take is that people of his day believed in angels and Jesus simply accomodated himself. He adjusted to the popular belief about angels knowing they really did not exist. This suggestion imputes a deliberate untruth to Jesus. And again I, for one, cannot accept that. The third alternative is that Jesus' words mean just what they say and guarantee the angelic beings. That's my personal position and for most Christians that will settle the issue for them. As someone said, "Jesus said it, I believe it, that settles it."

Now, the second thing I want to say about angels has to do with what they look like. They look like none of the pictures you see of them in Christmas or in art where they are represented as lovely winged creatures. Actually that representation of the angels is a fairly recent invention going back to the middle ages. According to the Bible angels have human forms, much as ours and in several instances in the Old Testament they are mistaken for men. For example, Abraham entertained angels as guests without being aware of their true identity. Joshua at Jericho saw an angel of the Lord of the Hosts who had pulled a sword and stood before him with drawn sword. So then an angel is a spiritual being who looks very much as we do.

The third thing that we might note about angels is this--the primary function of an angel is to serve as a messenger from God. Actually, the Greek word for messenger is "angelos" and that is transliterated into English and becomes our word angel. And it simply means a messenger. A messenger from God. Now that's not the only function of a messenger for the Old Testament tells us that in some cases an angel was the agent of God's will. For example,

an angel of the Lord was sent to destroy Sodom. The angel was an agent of the will of God. Also, on two different occasions in the life of Jesus -- once at the conclusion of his forty days of temptation and once as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane near the end of his ministry-- the Bible tells us that an angel came and ministered to Jesus. Yet, in all of these things we can still say the primary function of the beings we call angels, is to serve as the messengers of God.

Now the fourth comment (that is related to that) that I would like to make about angels is this. After Pentecost, as nearly as I can determine there are only two other clear cut cases of an angel appearing. One of them was the angel who appeared to Phillip, the evangelist, recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts who tells him to go and attach himself to the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot. The second case of an angelic appearance is when Peter (this is found in the twelfth chapter of Acts) is in prison and the angel comes and sets him free. Thus as the New Testament period comes to a close there's no longer any need for spiritual beings to serve as the messengers of God. The visible activities of angels, as one writer puts it, has come to an end because their mediating work, their messenger service, is no longer needed. That may be why you and I don't see angels as often as they did in the Old Testament and in the New.

Now the reason their messenger service is no longer needed ought to be obvious. Since Pentecost, God's Spirit speaks directly to the spirits of men. Jesus has opened for us a new and living way to the Father. God's Spirit speaks directly to my spirit. And God's Spirit within me helps me speak to the Spirit of my Father. Now angels still watch over the lot of men. And the Bible tells us that when one of us accepts Jesus as Saviour, the angels in heaven rejoice. They are still ministering spirits whom God sends to minister to Christians. The Bible tells us that the angels still join in praise and adoration before the very throne of the Lord. But their role as the messengers of the Lord is completed for a more perfect way is open to man to communicate with God now that the age of the Spirit has come.

There is a fifth comment that I want to make about angels this morning. All over the world today there is a great spiritual renewal going on that is sometimes called the charismatic movement. I rejoice in what God is doing in the world today--in this great renewal movement that is literally sweeping around the world. And yet everytime God makes a move, the devil makes a counter-move. Therefore, anytime there is spiritual renewal the devil is also at hand and if he can he will take some part of that renewal and attempt to divert it or to distort it to his own ends. And therefore, those today who are having their hearts renewed and their spirits warmed need to be careful that they keep their eyes always on Jesus because when you get your eye off of him then you make yourself vulnerable to being manipulated by the devil. As a consequence of people getting misdirected, taking their eyes off of Jesus, we see today a lot about demons. As a child growing up in the church I never heard about demons. As a seminary student, studying the Bible, we were told little or nothing about demons. In the first ten years or so of my ministry I heard nothing about demons. And yet today in the midst of a sort of spiritual renewal where a few begin to get their eyes off of Jesus, the devil takes what God is doing and perverts it and diverts it and today we're hearing a lot about demons. The recent movie on the subject, "The Exorcist", was a big money maker simply because it talked about a subject that people

were interested in it played on their fears and their anxieties and it took into account the occult which is experiencing a rise in our culture and playing on all of these things. It created quite a furor and put a focus on the demonic which is the way of diverting people from Jesus.

Now the point I want to make is this. We Christians need to keep our eye on Jesus. We had better not get so busy counting the demons that we forget about the angels. I heard a story about a dog that was always getting into fights with big dogs and getting the worst of it. A friend remarked to the dogs owner, "Your dog is not much of a fighter." "Oh No", replied the owner, "He's a very good fighter, he's just a poor judge of other dogs." Now the Christian ought never to be guilty of underestimating his foes. He ought never to underestimate his enemies. Because we've got enemies. As Christians we've got enemies. As St. Paul tells us, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood; we are up against the unseen power that controls the dark world and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil." But at the same time we need to remember that we are surrounded by a host of angels. As St. Paul puts it, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts..." (and the Greek word there for "keep" your hearts means, "shall garrison your hearts," "shall put up a fort around your heart") So, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall garrison, shall be a fort around your hearts through Jesus Christ." (Phil. 4:5,7) For the Christian, there is a cordon of angels between him and the demons. We don't have to be afraid. Over in the Old Testament there is a story about Elisha. The King of Syria sent troops and horses and chariots in great number to capture the prophet Elisha. When Elisha's servant looked out, he saw troops everywhere...troops in the front, troops on the left, troops on the right, troops behind them and he cried out in desperation, "What shall we do?" "Well," Elisha said, "What should we do? Our number is greater than they." and he prayed for God to open his servant's eyes and when God opened his eyes the servant saw the very mountains filled with the heavenly hosts of God with the angel of the Lord surrounding Elisha and protecting him. We Christians ought not to get off on a tangent about demons. Our heart is fixed on Jesus and when it is we are surrounded by the heavenly hosts. The very angels in heaven stand between us and them.

Let's think for a moment about Christmas and the angels. It's hard to think of Christmas and not think of angels. Angels played a big role in the Christmas event. For example, at the birth of John the Baptist, who was to be the forerunner of Jesus, his birth was foretold to his father, Zechariah, by an angel of the Lord. Joseph had an angel of the Lord appear to him to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Later on when Herod was attempting to kill the baby Jesus, the Bible tells us that an angel appeared to Joseph and told him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the baby Jesus. Mary, herself, as we read in the Bible this morning had a vision where the angel Gabriel came and told her what God was going to do. The shepherds out in the fields heard the angel of the Lord announce to them the birth of the Messiah and suddenly the whole heavens were filled with the angelic hosts praising God.

Have you ever heard anyone say something like this, "She has a voice like an angel." or, "He sounded like an angel." Have you ever wondered what an angel sounded like? Well, I've always wondered that so I did some research and I've come to some conclusions. I want to share with you this morning what I think an angel sounds like. An angel sounds about like my mother sounded when

I was about ten years old and she was teaching me discipline. Let me illustrate. Peter, in the twelfth chapter of Acts, is in jail, being closely guarded by soldiers, and he is locked in chains. It is night and Peter is asleep. Then the angel appears to Peter and he sounds just like my mother used to sound. Listen to what the angel said. "he struck him on the side and woke him up saying, 'Get up quickly.'" That's just the way my mother sounded. And the Bible says again "And the angel said to him, 'Dress yourself and put on your shoes.'" The Bible goes on to say "And he said to him, 'Wrap your coat around you and follow me.'" "Get up, get dressed and get going" and that's rarely very beautiful, especially at 6:30 on a cold morning. But that's how an angel sounds. If you'll think about it, most of the times recorded in the Bible when an angel speaks to somebody that's what he had to say. When Gideon saw the angel, the angel said, "Gideon, get up and go." When Elijah sat weeping in self pity under the broom tree, the angel came to him and said, "Elijah, get up and eat." The angel said to Peter in jail, "Get up quickly..." Phillip, the evangelist, saw the angel and the angel said to him, "Phillip, arise and go..." And that's how the angels sound - "Get up - hurry - get going." So it was that the angel spoke to Joseph when Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus. The angel said, "Joseph get up - hurry - get going."

My mother had the voice of an angel, believe me. "Get up, get dressed and get going" and that's rarely very beautiful, especially at 6:30 on a cold morning. But that's how an angel sounds. If you'll think about it, most of the times recorded in the Bible when an angel speaks to somebody that's what he had to say. When Gideon saw the angel, the angel said, "Gideon, get up and go." When Elijah sat weeping in self pity under the broom tree, the angel came to him and said, "Elijah, get up and eat." The angel said to Peter in jail, "Get up quickly..." Phillip, the evangelist, saw the angel and the angel said to him, "Phillip, arise and go..." And that's how the angels sound - "Get up - hurry - get going." So it was that the angel spoke to Joseph when Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus. The angel said, "Joseph get up - hurry - get going."

So an angel is a pesky sort of a being. What he has to say is sort of monotonous, actually. They always say the same thing. But let me remind us that Christmas comes because somebody heard the angels and responded. What if Mary had ignored the angel and said - "Lord, I'm too busy right now, come back next year." Or what if Joseph had not responded to the vision and said, "Lord you must be out of your mind. I'm not going to marry that girl." Christmas came because somebody was willing to listen to the message of the angels. Christmas came because somebody was willing to be disturbed from their comfortable lives. Jesus came to the world because somebody was willing for their lives to be interrupted by God - to get up and get going for the Lord.

Now it's Christmas time again as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. God has given to the world a Saviour. There are people, desperate people, who need to know about Jesus, to hear the good news that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. There are people who need to know that God has done something about sin in their lives. There are people who need to know that God loves them and cares about them and that they are important to him. People need desperately to know about that. As we celebrate this holy season I'm sure that the angels of heaven are looking down on you and me. Can you guess what they are saying to us? Can you imagine what words the angels address to us? Surely they are still saying the same, monotonous, pesky, "Get up - hurry - get going."

Did the world need Jesus when a babe was born in Bethlehem. Oh, you know it did. Does that world out there filled with lost people still need Jesus today? You know it does. Where are people who are willing to let their lives be interrupted? Where are people who are willing to be disturbed out of their complacency? Can you hear those pesky angels saying anything to you?