

Gabriel, God's Messenger

I recently read a story of a missionary home on furlough. He was traveling by car from church to church, visiting those who supported him. And one rainy evening he faced a long, lonely, all-night journey. So, he asked the Lord to help him stay awake and make it safely to the next place he would be ministering.

No sooner had he finished his prayer, he came upon a man on the side of the road, thumbing a ride. Although the missionary rarely picked up hitchhikers, he felt sorry for the man out in the rain and offered him a lift. As the two of them began to visit, the missionary was thrilled to discover that the stranger was a believer. And that they had many mutual friends in the Lord's work. Time quickly passed as they laughed and shared stories.

The fellowship was so good that the missionary hated to see dawn come, and hear his new friend say, "Well, here's where I get off." Before saying goodbye, the missionary invited him to have a cup of coffee at a roadside dinner.

Then, as they parted, they promised to pray for each other. But a couple of minutes down the road, the missionary realized that he had failed to get the man's address and phone number. So he quickly turned around and went back to the café, but there was no sign of the man.

When he asked the cook if he'd seen which way the other fella had gone. He was shocked to hear him respond: "What other fella? You came in here alone. I wondered why you ordered two cups of coffee."

The missionary glanced at the table where the two had sat and noticed that the other cup was still full to the brim. Then he remembered that the hitchhiker had been standing in the pouring rain. But when he got in the car, he wasn't wet!"

Intro: Have you ever seen or heard from an angel? Perhaps someone here today has. As we move into the Christmas season, and look once again at the personages involved in the Christmas story, I thought it might be helpful to begin with the angel Gabriel. He was sent from God on several occasions to announce God's message to a number of people who would be involved in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. Most of us are familiar with Mary and Joseph, and of the miraculous birth of God's Son, Immanuel. However, most know very little about the angel Gabriel, and the angelic realm. So, I thought it might be helpful to take a closer look at Gabriel, and angels in general.

I. Accounts Of Gabriel's Appearances

I would like to begin by reading the accounts of Gabriel's appearances to various earthly participants in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Turn with me if you will to Luke 1, verse 11. Gabriel first appears to Zacharias.

1 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

In verse 19 the angel informs Zacharias that his name is Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and he had been sent to speak to him, and to bring him this good news that his wife Elizabeth was going to bear him a son.

The first thing we learn about Gabriel, whose name means "Man of God" or "Messenger of God," is that his dwelling place is in the presence of God. We also learn that Gabriel, as his name implies, "Messenger of God," is dispatched by God to announce His plans to human beings. Gabriel next appears to Mary. Look across the page of your Bible to verse 26 of Luke chapter 1.

Luke 1:26—Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

Mary's response was one of fear, v. 29 But she was greatly troubled at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. **Look at verse 38** And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Hold your place here in Luke and turn back to Matthew 1.

Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which

has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” **Drop down to verse 24** And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Turn with me if you will back to Luke 2, beginning in verse 8. Following the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, I am reading in Luke 2, verse 8,

8 And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Turn back once again to **Matthew chapter 2**. I am attempting to trace Gabriel’s announcements concerning Christ’s birth in sequence, and as you can see, they are not all in one book. That is why we have to turn back and forth from Matthew and Luke’s gospels. I am reading from Matthew chapter 2, verse 1,

2:1—Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”

Herod assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the Jews, and inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea.” The Jewish religious leaders knew from Micah 5:2 that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Herod directed the Magi to Bethlehem, and as they started on their way, the star which they had first seen in the east, went before them and stood over where the Child was. The Magi came into the house and worshipped the Child, and after presenting Him with articles of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they departed. **In verse 12** we read “That having been warned by God in a dream

not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.”

Following the Magi’s departure, Gabriel, again identified simply as “an angel of the Lord,” warns Joseph of Herod’s plan to destroy the Child. I am reading in **Matthew 2, verse 13**,

13 Now when they, the Magi, had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.” 14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt.

Finally, drop down to **verse 19**, But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 20 “Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.” 21 And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

As you can see from these various accounts, the angel Gabriel was dispatched by God to announce the supernatural births of both John and Jesus, and to provide the Magi and Joseph with instructions to protect the baby Jesus’ life on earth.

What do you know about angels? Many in our day and age have a fascination with angels. Personal stories of encounters with angels abound. There is no shortage of individuals and ministries that promise their followers an encounter with the divine, if they will only purchase and prescribe to their materials.

While I disagree with all the angel-mania that goes on, let me just say that angels are ministering all around us. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews reminds his readers in chapter 1, verse 14 that “angels are ministering spirits, sent out [by God] to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.” The writer goes on to exhort his readers in chapter 13, verse 2 “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for in so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

II. A Biblical Survey Of Angels

As you can see from these few examples, the Bible is literally full of information about angels. For example: the word *angel* appears roughly 273 times in the Bible. The Hebrew designation for angel, *mal’ak*, appears 108 times in the Old Testament and it’s Greek equivalent, ἀγγελοῦ/β, is used 165 times in the New Testament.

Angels are mentioned in every book of the Bible except for Nehemiah, Esther, and Ruth in the OT, and the letters of John and James in the NT. The Book of Revelation is filled with references to angels. There are 65 clear usages of the word angel in Revelation. In addition there are 8 usages referring to either angels or human messengers to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

Definition of angels. The word angel means, “Messenger of God.” Angels may be defined as supernatural beings created by God before He created the heavens and earth. The primary purpose for their creation was that they might glorify God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who according to Paul, created them (Col. 1:16).

The nature of angels. Angels are generally presented as immaterial spirit-beings, able to appear in visible form; though as spirit beings, they are usually invisible. While possessing supernatural knowledge and strength, they are nonetheless limited by spatial and temporal limitations. That is, they are not omnipresent, like God, but limited to being in one place at a time, and always somewhere. They are able to appear and disappear from the spirit realm to the physical human dimension with relative ease. They are innumerable in number, they do not age, and they are always referred to by the masculine pronoun. There is no reference to female angels, or baby angels for that matter. Although both have been popularized by artists. When angels do appear to men, they take on the form of a man.

A. Old Testament references to angels

The cherubim angels are introduced as early as Genesis 3. When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He placed cherubim with flaming swords at the garden’s entrance to keep them from returning to eat from the tree of life. The cherubim are mentioned 69 times in the OT, and once in the NT in Hebrews 9:5. Satan is described as “the anointed cherub, who, prior to his attempt to overthrow God, covered or guarded the very presence of God (Ezek. 28:14-16).

Three men appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18:1-8. Two of these men were angels, and the other man was actually the angel of the LORD, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Jacob experienced a dream of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder/staircase to heaven (Gen. 28:12).

The prophet Isaiah describes a class of heavenly angels called seraphim, angels having six wings, who cry out continuously, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts” (Isa. 6:2-3). The prophet Ezekiel provides additional details on the

cherubim. He describes them as having four wings and four faces, and bearing the glorious throne-chariot of God (10:1-22).

Angels intervened to rescue Daniel's companions from a fiery furnace (chap. 3), and Daniel from the lion's den (chap. 6). The angel Gabriel, "God's Messenger," appeared twice to Daniel with a detailed revelation outlining Israel's future (9:20-27). The angel Michael, who is designated the archangel by Jude v. 9, is identified in **Daniel 10:11** as one of the chief princes, or a special guardian over the affairs of Israel. By the way, Daniel chapter 10 provides fascinating insight into the battle that rages continuously between good angels and evil angels.

The Book of Psalms likewise provides several examples of angels protecting and delivering God's people from harm (34:7; 35:5-6; 91:11).

B. New Testament references to angels

The New Testament is likewise filled with references to angels. All four gospel writers describe the significant ministry of angels, connected with the birth, and earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. All four writers tell of angels who appeared at Jesus' tomb, following His resurrection. Matthew speaks of one angel that rolled back the stone from the entrance to Jesus' tomb: "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment was white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). His brilliant face and dazzling clothing were probably an outshining of the glory created in him. When the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb saw the angel's glorious appearance they shook for fear of him, and became like dead men (28:4). Luke tells us about two men in white apparel, who appeared at Christ's ascension back to heaven (Acts 1:10). These two men were angels, who appeared to comfort Christ's disciples.

Luke records many references to angels assisting the apostles in the advancement of the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. When the apostles were cast into prison, angels opened the doors and freed them (5:19; 12:5-11). An angel appeared to Cornelius and directed him to send for the Apostle Peter, who would share the good news about Jesus Christ with him. Peter came and shared Christ resulting in the salvation of Cornelius and his entire household, implying family and servants.

Paul's Epistles abound with teachings about angels. The writer to the Hebrews presented angels as living beings, and as ministering spirits, sent forth by God for the sake of His elect (1:14). In the final book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus to John, angels are presented as administering God's horrific judgments upon a Christ-rejecting world during the last half of future seven-year Tribulation period.

In summary, the Bible presents angels as supernatural personal beings who serve as messengers and ministers of God. He dispatches angels with divine information and warnings, and occasionally for human protection. Their character, position, power, and activity are revealed in detail. These invisible creatures minister all about us and above us. John Calvin writes, "Angels are the dispensers and administrators of the divine beneficence toward us, they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us." Martin Luther writes, "An angel is a spiritual creature without a body created by God for the service of Christendom and the church."

III. Gabriel, The Angel Of The Christmas Story

We are introduced to the angel of the Christmas story in Luke chapter 1. As noted in our introduction, Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias and said to him, Luke 1:13 "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John." **It was he, v. 17,** who would go as a forerunner before God's Son, and **v. 16** His ministry would turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

This elderly couple, who were well advanced in years were going to conceive and give birth to a son. This was a miracle of God.

Gabriel next appeared to Mary in Luke 1, verse 26, and informed her that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of His Son, Jesus. It is to this section of the Christmas Story that we will return next Sunday morning, Lord Willing.

Conclusion:

Permit me to conclude by saying, angels are working all around us to carry-out God's purposes in each of our lives. If we were enabled to see them we would be thrilled to be sure. I want to remind you that as you pray, it is to the Father and not to some guardian angel. As you center your focus on spiritual things, the center should always be on Christ alone. God provides us with peace, joy, and strength through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Closing prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for providing Your angels to minister to our needs. Protect us from Satan's deceitful attempts to get us to worship angels rather than You alone. Thank You our Father for providing Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior. Help us this Christmas season to focus on Him and all He has done for each of us. Help us to reflect on the sacrifice He made to pay the complete

price for all of our sins. I would invite you to receive Christ's gift of life this morning. If you ask Him to forgive you of your sin, and to come into your life, He will forgive you and make you His forever. Wouldn't it be great to become a child of God this Christmas? Pray and ask Christ to come into your heart right now, and He will save you from your sins. Father I commit any among us who have rejected you for far too long. May Your Spirit work in their hearts to bring them to faith in Your Son this morning.

Finally our Father, we pray for those among us who may be facing various difficulties this Christmas, be they spiritual, financial, or physical. Search our hearts, O God, and meet our needs we pray in Jesus blessed name, Amen!

Closing song: **Be Born In Me**