

The Angels
from Eden

THE ECHO OF EDEN



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The Angels

INTRODUCTION

IN THE WORD

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

A MESSENGER SENT TO ZECHARIAH

A MESSENGER SENT TO MARY

A MESSENGER SENT TO JOSEPH

MESSENGERS SENT TO THE SHEPHERDS

JOURNAL PROMPTS

CONCLUSION

The Angels

INTRODUCTION

The angelic messengers in the story of Jesus' birth were not just mere figures; they were the fervent heralds of a divine proclamation, igniting the profound significance of the nativity. These celestial beings, appearing to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, reaffirmed the miraculous unfolding of events and fulfilled the long-awaited prophecies with electrifying clarity. Their messages resonated with reassurance, calming the hearts of those engulfed in fear or doubt, while illuminating the sacred roles they were destined to assume in God's magnificent redemptive plan for humanity. By imparting specific instructions and powerful announcements, the angels boldly ushered in a transformative era, unequivocally validating Jesus as the promised Messiah and ensuring that this was not merely an ordinary occurrence, but a breathtaking supernatural event that would forever alter the fabric of existence.

The messengers in the nativity narrative burst forth with divine purpose, including the archangel Gabriel, who was majestically sent to herald the miraculous births of both John the Baptist and Jesus! Unnamed angels, radiant with celestial light, appeared to a troubled Joseph in dreams, soothing his fears about Mary's sacred pregnancy, and later urged him to take flight to Egypt, escaping the wrath of King Herod. Imagine the awe as a single angel proclaimed the glorious news of Christ's birth to humble shepherds in a field, a proclamation met by a breathtaking "multitude of the heavenly host" joyfully praising God! From these angelic encounters, we glean profound lessons of faithfulness, courage, and unwavering obedience. Their jubilant messages of "good news of great joy" and "peace on earth" resonate deeply, reminding us that God's grand design encompasses not just a chosen few, but all of humanity! The recipients of these divine tidings – a devoted priest, a pure young virgin, a humble carpenter, and simple shepherds – illustrate that God delights in selecting ordinary souls to play extraordinary roles in His magnificent story!

The Angels

IN THE WORD

The following is all scriptural references to the angelic messengers mentioned in the New Testament account of the birth of Jesus. As you read through the scripture, make any notes about their character, who they were, major events that happen, and anything that reveals the character of God or His work through their lives.

11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. 16 He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

18 “How can I know this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

19 The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. 20 Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

Luke 1:11-20

Notes:

The Angels

IN THE WORD

The following is all scriptural references to the Shepherds mentioned in the New Testament account of the birth of Jesus. As you read through the scripture, make any notes about their character, who they were, major events that happen, and anything that reveals the character of God or His work through their lives.

26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And the angel came to her and said "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. 30 Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

34 Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"

35 The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

38 "See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen

Notes:

The Angels

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to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38

20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name him Immanuel,
which is translated “God is with us.”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her 25 but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:20-24

Notes:

The Angels

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8 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

14 Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

Luke 2:8-14

Notes:

The Angels

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13 After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him."

Matthew 2:13

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee. 23 Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:19-23

Notes:

The Angels

**THE NAMED AND UNNAMED
MESSENGERS OF GOD**



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The Angels

In God's Word, angels are defined as spiritual beings created by God to serve as his messengers and ministers. The original Hebrew word for angel (*malak*) and the Greek word (*angelos*) both mean "messenger". As creatures created by and for Christ, angels are distinct from humans and possess superhuman characteristics, immense power, and great wisdom, but their power and knowledge are finite and subordinate to God's.

Scripture provides further details on the nature and activities of angels:

- **They are created beings:** Nehemiah 9:6 mentions "all their host," or the armies of heaven, which worship God. Colossians 1:16 states that "all things were created through him and for him," including "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities," which refers to the angelic world.
- **They are spiritual and immortal:** Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as "ministering spirits." Jesus noted that, unlike humans, angels do not marry or die (Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35–36).
- **They can appear in physical form:** Angels are normally invisible, but can assume a bodily form to carry out God's will. Angels appeared to Abraham and Lot as men (Genesis 18–19) and appeared to Mary and the shepherds as glorious beings (Luke 1–2).
- **Their numbers are immense:** The Bible describes their number as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11), and "innumerable" (Hebrews 12:22).
- **They were tested and divided:** After some angels, led by Satan, rebelled against God, they were cast out of heaven and became demons. The holy angels, in contrast, remain righteous and blameless.
- **They are not to be worshiped:** The Bible warns against the worship of angels, emphasizing that they are created beings and fellow servants of God (Colossians 2:18, Revelation 22:8–9).

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, angels are shown to be active participants in God's plan. Their roles include:

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

- **Delivering messages:** This is their primary function. Angels announced Jesus's birth to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds (Luke 1-2).
- **Ministering to believers:** Angels are "sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). This can include protecting, rescuing, strengthening, and guiding God's people (Psalm 91:11-12, Acts 5:19-20).
- **Worshipping and praising God:** The heavenly hosts give glory to God (Luke 2:13-14) and are present with countless others worshipping at God's throne (Revelation 5:11).
- **Rejoicing over repentance:** The angels celebrate when a sinner turns to God (Luke 15:10).
- **Executing judgment:** Angels are used to carry out God's will in judgment, such as striking Herod (Acts 12:23) and pouring out bowls of wrath (Revelation 16).
- **Accompanying Jesus:** Angels will come with Jesus at his second coming (Matthew 25:31) and will participate in the final judgment (Matthew 13:41, 49).

What does God's Word mean when it says an "angel of the Lord"?

In God's Word, the phrase "**the angel of the Lord**" most often refers to a mysterious divine figure in the Old Testament, frequently interpreted by Christian theologians as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. This figure is distinct from, yet often speaks and acts interchangeably with, God himself. While the Hebrew word for "angel" (*malakh*) simply means "messenger," the use of the definite article "the" points to a unique being with divine authority and attributes. This contrasts with other instances where the Bible refers to "an angel of the Lord," signifying a regular, created angelic messenger.

The Angel of the Lord as a divine figure (Old Testament)

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

"The Angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament is often identified by encounters where this figure seems to be equated with God. The narrative attributes actions and reverence appropriate for God alone.

Instances include:

- **The burning bush (Exodus 3:2–6):** The Angel appears to Moses, but the text identifies the speaker as "the Lord" and "God".
- **Encountering Gideon (Judges 6:11–23):** Gideon fears for his life after seeing "the Angel of the Lord face to face," acknowledging the divine nature of the encounter.
- **Speaking with Hagar (Genesis 16:7–13):** After the Angel makes divine promises to Hagar, she identifies him as "the God who sees me".
- **Interacting with Jacob (Genesis 32:24–30; Hosea 12:3–4):** Hosea clarifies that Jacob wrestled with "the angel," an event described in Genesis as wrestling with a "man" and "God," which suggests the Angel's divine identity.
- **Calling to Abraham (Genesis 22:11–12):** When the Angel tells Abraham not to harm his son, he states that Abraham has not withheld his son "from Me," implying divine identity.

"An angel of the Lord" in the New Testament

The New Testament uses "an angel of the Lord" to refer to created angelic beings, unlike the unique divine figure in the Old Testament. Appearances of the Old Testament figure are not seen after Jesus's birth.

Examples include:

- **Appearing to Joseph (Matthew 1:20):** An angel appears to Joseph in a dream to announce Jesus's birth. This angel is distinct from the divine figure because Jesus is already a separate person.
- **Addressing the shepherds (Luke 2:9):** An angel appears to announce Jesus's birth. This is a heavenly angel speaking *about* the Lord, not as the

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

Lord.

- **Freeing Peter (Acts 12:7):** An angel releases Peter from prison, and is referred to as "an angel," distinguishing him from the unique Old Testament figure.

Who is Gabriel?

Based on God's Word, Gabriel is a powerful messenger angel who stands in the immediate presence of God and is chosen to deliver messages of the highest importance. His name, which means "God is my strength," reflects his role as a messenger who brings words of strength and hope from God. Gabriel is one of only two angels mentioned by name in the Protestant biblical, the other being Michael.

Appearances in the Old Testament (Book of Daniel)

In the book of Daniel, Gabriel helps the prophet understand his visions of the future regarding Israel. Gabriel appears to Daniel at least twice.

- **Daniel 8:15-26:** After Daniel has a vision about a ram and a goat, he sees "one having the appearance of a man" and hears a voice telling that figure to help Daniel understand the vision. This "man" identifies himself as Gabriel and explains that the vision concerns the "end of the times". The encounter leaves Daniel physically sick for several days.
- **Daniel 9:20-27:** After Daniel prays for his people and Jerusalem, "the man Gabriel... came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice". Gabriel informs Daniel that he was sent to give him "insight and understanding" and reveals the prophecy of the "seventy sevens," which points to the coming of the Messiah.

Appearances in the New Testament (Gospel of Luke)

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

Gabriel's most well-known biblical appearances involve announcing the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

- **Luke 1:11–20:** Gabriel appears to the priest Zechariah while serving in the temple. Zechariah is "startled and was gripped with fear". Gabriel identifies himself as "Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God," and announces that Zechariah's elderly wife, Elizabeth, will have a son named John. Because Zechariah doubts, Gabriel temporarily makes him unable to speak.
- **Luke 1:26–38:** Six months later, God sends Gabriel to a virgin named Mary in Nazareth. Gabriel greets her by saying, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!". He then reveals that she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit and that she is to name him Jesus. Mary submits to God's will, and Gabriel departs.

Is Gabriel an archangel?

The Bible does not explicitly call Gabriel an archangel. The only angel given that title in the biblical canon is Michael (Jude 1:9). The tradition of referring to Gabriel as an archangel comes from extra-biblical writings, such as the Book of Enoch. However, Gabriel's statement in Luke 1:19 – "I stand in the presence of God" – indicates a position of very high status and close proximity to God.

What can I learn from understanding who and what angels are in God's Word?

Understanding what God's Word says about angels teaches several key lessons about God's character, our relationship with him, and our role as his followers. By examining the nature and activities of these heavenly beings, we can gain insights into proper worship, God's providence, and the seriousness of sin.

Worship and obedience

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

- **Awe-filled worship of God:** Angels provide a powerful model for worship. Descriptions of heavenly creatures in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 show angels constantly praising God's holiness. This reveals that even magnificent, supernatural beings find their greatest purpose in glorifying God, a practice humans are called to mirror.
- **Perfect and joyful obedience:** Angels perfectly and joyfully carry out God's will without hesitation. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). The obedience of angels is the standard for how humans should seek to obey God.
- **God's power and sovereignty:** Angels are incredibly powerful and numerous, yet they are still created, limited beings who are subject to God's authority. An understanding of their might underscores the immeasurable power and sovereignty of the God who created and commands them. Their existence and activities confirm God's active involvement in his creation.
- **God's plan for humanity:** Angels desire to understand God's plan for human salvation and rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10, 1 Peter 1:12). Their enthusiasm reminds believers of the immense value of God's redemptive work.

Our identity and service

- **God's love and care for his people:** Angels are "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). This ministry includes providing physical needs, strengthening, guidance, protection, and deliverance. Understanding this provides comfort in knowing that God actively cares for his people, even in unseen ways.
- **The seriousness of sin and judgment:** The existence of fallen angels serves as a sober reminder of the gravity of rebellion against God. The judgment against them reinforces the biblical truth that no one, not even powerful spiritual beings, is above God's judgment (Jude 1:6).
- **Proper perspective in worship:** While angels are fascinating, the Bible cau-

THE NAMED AND UNNAMED MESSENGERS OF GOD

tions against worshipping them, as they are fellow servants of God. This reinforces that worship is reserved for God alone. Encounters with angels should draw us closer to God, not to the angels themselves.

The Angels

AN ANGEL VISITS ZECHARIAH



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What can we learn from the angel appearing to Zechariah?

The appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah in Luke 1 offers several important lessons about faith, God's timing, and the nature of God's promises. The story contrasts Zechariah's doubt with God's unwavering faithfulness and provides insight into how we should respond to God's word, even when it seems impossible.

The consequences of doubt versus true faith

Zechariah was a righteous priest. However, when he was told by Gabriel that he and his elderly, barren wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, his faith faltered. His question, "How shall I know this?" (Luke 1:18), showed a demand for proof, unlike Mary's sincere question of "How can this be?" when she believed the angel.

- **Doubt can hinder the full experience of God's work:** Zechariah was struck mute until the promise was fulfilled because of his unbelief. This temporary muteness was not an act of vengeance but divine discipline. It prevented him from speaking words of doubt and led him into silent contemplation. It shows that while doubt does not stop God's plan, it can impede the ability to fully participate in and enjoy it.
- **True faith enables joyful praise:** When Zechariah's voice was restored after the birth of his son, John, he immediately praised God and prophesied about the fulfillment of God's promises. His period of silence transformed his heart, allowing him to praise God freely once he fully believed.

God's faithfulness despite human frailty

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth demonstrates that God's plans do not depend on human reliability or perfect faith.

AN ANGEL VISITS ZECHARIAH

- **God remembers and answers prayers:** The story reminds that God hears the prayers of his people, even after long periods of waiting. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and had likely given up hope for a child, but God remembered their righteous faithfulness and answered their long-held prayers.
- **Divine purpose transcends human limitations:** Zechariah and Elizabeth were beyond the age of childbearing, a circumstance considered a sign of disgrace in their culture, like Abraham and Sarah before them. God deliberately chose this situation to prove that he is a God of miracles who can do what is humanly impossible.

The importance of God's timing

Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel shows that God's timing is not always what is expected, but it is always perfect.

- **A long-awaited promise unfolds:** The Israelites had experienced 400 years of prophetic silence. Gabriel's appearance to Zechariah was a sign that God was again intervening in history at the precisely appointed time.
- **Patience brings miraculous results:** Zechariah's story encourages believers to remain faithful and patient during waiting, trusting that God is always working behind the scenes to fulfill his purposes.

What does this event show us about God?

From the awe-inspiring story of the angel appearing to Zechariah, we uncover extraordinary truths about the magnificent nature and character of God. This incredible account powerfully illustrates that God is an unstoppable sovereign and a faithful promise-keeper, answering heartfelt prayers at the most opportune moments and in ways that defy our imagination. Even after centuries of prophetic silence and in the face of the couple's advanced age, God never lost sight of His people, nor did He overlook the earnest prayers offered by Zecha-

AN ANGEL VISITS ZECHARIAH

riah and his beloved wife, Elizabeth. His unwavering faithfulness transcends human frailty and doubt; even when Zechariah's faith faltered, God's divine purpose shone through brilliantly. The discipline of muteness for Zechariah was not a harsh punishment, but a profound period of reflection, expertly designed to prepare him to ultimately proclaim the boundless goodness of God.

Furthermore, the narrative profoundly shows that God takes immense joy in choosing ordinary people to achieve extraordinary feats. Zechariah and Elizabeth, though described as righteous, faced an insurmountable challenge — childlessness. By selecting this elderly, barren couple to fulfill His divine plan, God powerfully illustrates that His purposes transcend human logic or earthly limitations. The story ultimately ignites a flame of hope, teaching us that God never forgets His people, listens to their heartfelt prayers, and acts in His perfect timing to manifest His glorious design. Zechariah's eventual praise, the *Benedictus*, stands as a stirring testament to God's boundless mercy and unwavering faithfulness in bringing His promises to fruition.

The Angels

AN ANGEL VISITS MARY



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What Lessons can we learn from the angel's visit to Mary?

The angel Gabriel's awe-inspiring visit to Mary, a pivotal moment celebrated as the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38), offers profound lessons immersed in the themes of faith, humility, and surrender. In stark contrast to Zechariah's tale, which reveals the dire repercussions of doubt, Mary's narrative radiates the exhilarating power of unwavering trust in God's promises, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Trust in the unknown

The first lesson is Mary's unwavering trust in God, despite the startling and confusing nature of the message.

- **Embracing the impossible:** Mary's question to Gabriel, "How shall this be, since I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34), was an inquiry born of wonder. The promise was logically impossible, yet she did not resist.
- **Faith over fear:** The angel's news presented a significant social and personal risk for Mary. As an unwed, pregnant virgin, she could have faced public disgrace, abandonment by Joseph, and even severe punishment. However, her faith in God's promises overcame her fear of the unknown.

Humility and surrender

Another central lesson is Mary's humble and willing surrender to God's plan, which serves as a model for all believers.

- **The spirit of a servant:** Mary's response, "I am the Lord's servant; may your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38), demonstrates her complete submission to God's will. Her desire to serve God was greater than her concerns about her own life.
- **Prioritizing God's will:** Mary's "yes" shows that true empowerment and

AN ANGEL VISITS MARY

freedom come from aligning one's will with God's. This surrender is an act of trust and obedience, recognizing God's plan is greater than our own.

Divine purpose for the humble

Mary's story reminds that God can use anyone, regardless of their social standing or apparent limitations.

- **God chooses the humble:** Mary was not of high status or great wealth; she was a simple virgin from the obscure town of Nazareth. This shows that God often chooses those who are humble and faithful, not those who seem most qualified.
- **Favor through grace, not merit:** Gabriel's greeting, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28), affirms that Mary's favor was an unmerited gift from God. This teaches that God's grace and purpose are based on his sovereign will, not on human achievement.

The angel Gabriel's visit to Mary reveals several lessons about faith and God's favor

- **Be a faithful and humble servant.** Mary's response to the angel — "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" — is a powerful example of humble submission to God's will. Her faithfulness is a testament to trusting God even when his plans seem incomprehensible.
- **Don't be afraid.** Gabriel's first words to Mary were "Do not be afraid". Mary was troubled by the news, but the angel reassured her that God was with her. This reminds that when God calls someone to a new path, He also provides comfort and support.
- **Nothing is impossible with God.** When Mary questioned how she could conceive as a virgin, Gabriel explained that with God, nothing is impossible. The lesson is that no matter how improbable a situation seems, God can and

AN ANGEL VISITS MARY

will make a way for his purpose to be fulfilled.

The Angels

AN ANGEL VISITS JOSPEH



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What can we learn about the angelic visit to Joseph before and after the birth of Jesus?

The angelic visits to Joseph, both before and after Jesus' birth, burst forth with profound lessons on faithful obedience, humble trust, and the unwavering nature of God's protection. While Mary's encounter with an angel is dazzlingly public, Joseph's divine experiences unfold in the serene realm of dreams, showcasing God's personal and tender guidance. His resolute response to these heavenly messages powerfully illustrates that serving God's purpose often demands not just quiet, courageous action, but an unwavering heart that thrives in the shadows, far from the glare of public recognition.

The visit before Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:19-25)

- **Kindness and mercy:** The first lesson comes from Joseph's character before the angel's visit. When he discovers Mary's unexpected pregnancy, his first instinct is not to condemn her but to protect her from public shame. Being a "just man," he plans to divorce her quietly, demonstrating his kind and merciful nature.
- **Guidance through dreams:** Instead of a dramatic, face-to-face meeting like Mary's, God communicates with Joseph through a dream. This shows that God speaks to his servants in different, and sometimes more subtle, ways. Joseph's receptiveness to divine communication, even while he sleeps, is a model for listening to God's direction.
- **Obedience over public opinion:** After the angel explains that Mary's pregnancy is of the Holy Spirit, Joseph wakes up and immediately obeys. He chooses to move forward with the marriage, despite the inevitable gossip and public suspicion. This demonstrates putting God's will above human reputation and comfort.

AN ANGEL VISITS JOSEPH

The visits after Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:13–23)

- **Active protection of God's purpose:** An angel appears to Joseph in another dream after the Magi's visit, warning him that Herod seeks to kill Jesus. Joseph is instructed to flee to Egypt with his family. Joseph's immediate departure, under the cover of night, shows his role as a decisive protector and underscores God's commitment to preserving his plan.
- **Reliance on ongoing guidance:** The family remains in Egypt "until the death of Herod". An angel appears again after Herod's death, directing Joseph to return to Israel, but with further guidance to avoid Herod's son. This shows that following God's will is often a journey of multiple steps, requiring continual listening and trust.
- **Steadfastness and humility:** Throughout these dangerous and uncertain travels, Joseph demonstrates unwavering faithfulness and courage. He performs his crucial duty to protect and provide for his family without seeking recognition. His humility teaches that true greatness in God's service is often found in quiet, faithful service.

What do we learn about God in sending His messenger to Joseph?

In sending his messenger to Joseph, God passionately unveils Himself as a compassionate, protective, and profoundly personal God, one who fervently intervenes in the lives of ordinary people to fulfill His divine purpose. The angelic encounters before and after Jesus' birth powerfully illustrate the remarkable facets of God's character.

God is merciful and kind

God's mercy is evident in how he addressed Joseph's dilemma regarding Mary's unexpected pregnancy. Rather than allowing Joseph to suffer in confu-

AN ANGEL VISITS JOSEPH

sion or publicly shame Mary, God compassionately intervened. He sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to explain the miraculous conception, providing reassurance and peace during a time of great distress. This intervention prevented a painful separation and protected Mary from public scandal, showing God's kindness to a righteous and merciful man who intended to "put her away quietly" rather than expose her.

God works through the humble and submissive

Joseph was a simple carpenter, not a prominent figure, yet God entrusted him with the vital role of being Jesus' earthly father and protector. God's choice of Joseph, a descendant of King David (Matthew 1:20), and a man of faith, demonstrates that he uses ordinary people who are willing to submit to his will, regardless of the personal cost or inconvenience. This shows that God's great plans are not dependent on human power or status, but on a humble and obedient heart.

God is personally involved and protective

The recurring angelic visits in dreams demonstrate God's ongoing, personal guidance and protection over the Holy Family. He sent messengers to:

- **Prevent a misunderstanding** before Jesus' birth.
- **Instruct a flight to Egypt** to escape Herod's murderous plan.
- **Guide the family's safe return** after Herod's death.

These precise and timely instructions show that God is actively engaged in protecting his purpose from worldly evil. He orchestrated events, from the Magi's star to the angel's warnings, to ensure that his Son would be safe and that the prophecies concerning his life would be fulfilled.

AN ANGEL VISITS JOSEPH

God's purpose prevails over all opposition

The angelic messages to Joseph reveal a divine plan that is unshakeable, even in the face of immense human and demonic opposition. Herod, the most powerful man in the region, was filled with fear and anger and tried to destroy the newborn king. Yet, God's intervention through dreams completely foiled his attempts. This teaches that God's sovereign will cannot be thwarted by any earthly ruler or scheme; his redemptive plan will be carried out to completion, no matter the circumstances.

The Angels

AN ANGEL VISITS THE SHEPHERDS



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What can we learn about the angelic visit to the shepherds?

The angels' breathtaking visit to the shepherds in Luke 2 illuminates several profound lessons about God's messengers. In stark contrast to the serene, intimate communications shared with Mary and Joseph, this encounter with the shepherds bursts forth in a magnificent display, vibrant and spirited, surrounded by a multitude of celestial beings! This grand spectacle powerfully underscores the magnificent and universal essence of the good news of Jesus' miraculous birth, igniting a flame of hope and joy that resonates for all humanity.

The messengers' demeanor and purpose

- **A message of comfort:** The first words out of the angel's mouth to the terrified shepherds are "Do not be afraid". This shows that while God's power can be overwhelming, his messengers are sent to bring comfort, not fear.
- **Bearers of good news:** The angel's purpose was to bring "good news of great joy for all the people," not judgment. The message is one of grace and peace, reflecting God's nature.
- **Clear and verifiable communication:** The angel provided a specific sign: "You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger". This detail allowed the shepherds to verify the message, confirming that God's communication is trustworthy and clear.

The nature of God's angelic host

- **Organized and purposeful:** The term "heavenly host" (Luke 2:13) is a military term, suggesting that angels are a disciplined and organized army under God's command. This detail points to their functional purpose of carrying out God's will.
- **Worshippers of God:** The angels' primary response was to praise God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven". This demonstrates that the ulti-

AN ANGEL VISITS THE SHEPHERDS

mate goal of the heavenly messengers is to glorify God, with the news of Jesus' birth being a cause for immense praise.

The messengers' relationship with humanity

- **Serve believers:** Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation". The angels' role in announcing the birth of the Savior to the shepherds directly fulfills this purpose.
- **Rejoice with humans:** The angels' proclamation of "peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests" shows their interest in humanity's salvation. They were celebrating God's act of grace and redemption for humanity, a reminder that angels share in the joy of God's redemptive work.

What is a Heavenly Host?

In the Bible, a **Heavenly Host** refers to a multitude or army of spiritual beings, primarily angels, that serve and worship God. The word "host" in Hebrew (*šəḇā'ōt*) means "army" or "multitude," portraying a large, organized force under God's command.

In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the term has a dual meaning, often referring to both celestial bodies (the sun, moon, and stars) and God's angelic army.

- **Celestial bodies:** The "host of heaven" sometimes refers to the sun, moon, and stars, emphasizing God's sovereignty as their Creator and Commander (Genesis 2:1, Psalm 33:6). When the Israelites worshipped these bodies, they were rebuked for idolatry (2 Kings 17:16, Deuteronomy 4:19).
- **Angelic army:** When referring to angels, the phrase emphasizes God's supreme command over these spiritual beings. He is often called the "LORD

AN ANGEL VISITS THE SHEPHERDS

of Hosts" (1 Samuel 1:11, Isaiah 6:3), signifying his role as the ultimate military commander. In 1 Kings 22:19, the prophet Micaiah sees a vision of the Lord sitting on his throne with the entire host of heaven standing around him.

In the New Testament

The New Testament usage of "heavenly host" specifically refers to angelic beings.

- **Announcing Jesus' birth:** The most famous instance is in Luke 2:13–14, where a multitude of the heavenly host appears to the shepherds, praising God and proclaiming the birth of Jesus.
- **Worship and service:** The angelic hosts are continuously engaged in worship of God, declaring his glory and holiness (Isaiah 6:3).
- **Carrying out God's will:** As "ministering spirits," they execute God's commands, sometimes bringing judgment and other times offering protection and assistance to believers (Psalm 103:20–21, Hebrews 1:14).

The heavenly host's existence reflects God's majesty and power over all realms, both physical and spiritual. Their unwavering obedience and worship serve as a model for believers, reminding us of God's authority and our call to align our lives with his purposes.

The Angels Time for Prayer

JOURNAL PROMPTS



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The Angels

Here are some thought-provoking questions you can use as journal prompts concerning the angelic messengers in the story of Jesus' birth.

On humility and obedience

- **Regarding Zechariah:** Zechariah was a devout priest serving in the temple, yet he doubted Gabriel's word. Consider times when a lack of faith was felt while facing a seemingly impossible promise from God, despite feeling most spiritual.
- **Regarding Mary:** As a young, unknown woman, Mary was given an incredible, world-altering task. Does God use humble and ordinary lives to accomplish extraordinary things for his kingdom? What would the response be if faced with a similar, overwhelming request from God?
- **Regarding Joseph:** The angel communicated with Joseph through dreams. This might suggest God's gentleness and his desire to communicate in a personal way, even in the subconscious. How can one become more receptive to God's guidance, even when it's quiet and unconventional?

On God's character and providence

- **Regarding the heavenly host:** A multitude of angels announced the Savior's birth to lowly shepherds, not to kings or religious leaders. What does this reveal about God's priorities and whom he favors? How does this challenge assumptions about who is "worthy" to receive divine messages?
- **Regarding the multiple visits:** Angels visited Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph at different times and in different ways to unfold God's plan. What does this slow, deliberate process teach about God's patience and detailed planning? How can this be applied to feel less impatient for God to reveal his plan?
- **Regarding the message:** The angels consistently brought messages of peace, reassurance, and glory to God. How does the focus on these themes stand in stark contrast to the fear and chaos in the world? How can the angelic

The Angels

message of peace and glory be carried and lived out intentionally?

On our response to God's call

- **Regarding the shepherds' reaction:** After the angelic vision, the shepherds went immediately to find Jesus, then spread the news. What steps can be taken today to act on God's truth with the same urgency and joyful proclamation as the shepherds?
- **Regarding Mary's reflection:** Luke notes that Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). What "impossible" or miraculous moments has God brought into one's life that should be treasured and reflected on more? How can thoughtful contemplation be practiced in a spiritual walk?
- **Regarding the role of angels:** While there are no personal angelic visits announcing major life events, the angelic ministry to believers is ongoing (Hebrews 1:14). In what ways might God be ministering through unseen messengers? What might a grateful and responsive heart look like in that understanding?

The Angels

CONCLUSION



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The study of the angelic messengers in the nativity narrative offers profound encouragement and a powerful challenge to every believer. These celestial heralds, from Gabriel to the heavenly host, acted as a divine bridge between heaven and earth, delivering messages that initiated the most significant event in human history. Their interactions with Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph demonstrate that God reveals His purposes not just to the powerful, but to ordinary people who are attentive and receptive. By trusting in God's promises, despite fear, doubt, or social implications, these humble individuals played a pivotal role in His redemptive plan. Their faithful obedience reminds us that God is personally invested in our lives and that even our quiet, everyday responses can carry eternal significance.

The story of the angelic messengers challenges individuals to move beyond simply hearing the divine message to actively answering God's call. The shepherds, after receiving the good news, immediately sought the newborn King and shared the word. Mary's response, "I am the Lord's servant; may your word to me be fulfilled," exemplifies radical surrender. God uses individuals to advance His kingdom, just as messengers prepared for Jesus' first coming. The encouragement is clear: God continues to speak and seeks hearts ready to listen, trust, and act as active participants in His divine story.



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