

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Angels – LEADER’S GUIDE

1. Job Description:

In both Heb. and Gk. the word for “angel” means “messenger.”

Both OT and NT use it to designate human messengers, e.g., *Gn 32:3; Lk 7:24.*

The OT applies it also to prophet and priest (e.g., *Is 42:19; 44:26; Mt 2:7*) with obvious reference to their function as messengers sent by God.

- “Messengers” - Genesis 19:1ff, Genesis 22:11ff, Judges 2:1, Luke 2, Matthew 24:31
- Protectors – Exodus 23:20ff
- Avengers/Destroyers – Numbers 22:22ff, 1 Chronicles 21:15, 30
- Spirits who worship Christ and serve us – Hebrews 1:6-7, 13-14
- Offended by sin! I Corinthians 11:10, I Timothy 5:21

2. The angelic hierarchy:

- Cherubim – Genesis 3:24, Psalm 80:1
 - Pictured in gold on the cover of the Ark (Exodus 25:18, Hebrews 9:5)
- Seraphim (NIV: “seraphs”) – Isaiah 6:1-3, *possibly* Revelation 4:5
- Archangel – I Thessalonians 4:16, Jude 1:9 (Michael)
- The “Angel of the LORD”: Genesis 16, 22:11 & 15, Exodus 3:2, Number 22:22

Commentators are divided in opinions regarding the identity of “the angel of the Lord” in the OT. The formula of earlier dogmatists is still held by some: Whenever the name of Jahweh or divine works and worship are ascribed to the Angel in Scripture, this Angel must be understood as the Son of God. Accordingly, this angel is often referred to as the Logos* or the Angelus increatus, and His appearances are regarded as appearances of the preincarnate Son of God.

Others hold that “the angel of the Lord” is not necessarily to be interpreted as reference to the preincarnate Christ but that manifestations of this “angel of the Lord” are nonetheless theophanies, or manifestations of God. M. Luther does not specifically identify this angel.

Examination of passages cited above reveals that “the angel of the Lord” speaks at times as if He Himself

were the Lord, at times as one who speaks in behalf of the Lord, in some instances appears in both roles interchangeably. OT Scriptures themselves offer no basis for definitive explication of precise nature of relationship bet. “the angel of the Lord” and the Lord Himself. Such NT occurrences of “the angel of the Lord” as *Mt* 1:24 and *Lk* 2:9 suggest that the NT writers did not relate this title to Jesus Christ. WW

3. Satan, the devil:

- Fallen – Isaiah 14:11ff
- A persistent tempter: even Jesus! (Luke 4)
- Has power – the power of death – Hebrews 2:14, 1 Peter 5:8
- Temps to death (literally!) – John 13:27, Acts 5:2-4
- A very capable deceiver – II Corinthians 11:14

4. Does everyone have a “Guardian Angel?”

- Hebrews 1:14, Psalm 91: 11-13, Matthew 18:10

Angel of the Lord.

The expression “the angel of the Lord” or “the angel of God” occurs more than 40 times in the OT. “The angel of the Lord” appears, *e.g.*, to Hagar in the wilderness, *Gn 16:7–14*; later again, *Gn 21:17*; in company with 2 created angels, He visits Abraham in Mamre, *Gn 18*; appears to Abraham as he is about to sacrifice Isaac, *Gn 22:11*; to Jacob at Bethel, *Gn 31:11–13*; *cf.* *28:10–15*; Jacob wrestles with Him at Peniel, *Gn 32:24–32* (*cf.* *Hos 12:3–5*); Jacob asks Him to bless the sons of Joseph, *Gn 48:16*; He appears to Moses in burning bush, *Ex 3*; goes before camp of Israel, *Ex 14:19*; God warns Israel not to provoke Him, *Ex 23:20–25*; He is again promised to Israel after they committed idolatry with the golden calf, *Ex 32:34*; *33:1–11*; He leads them to Kadesh, *Nm 20:16*; appears to Balaam, *Nm 22:22–35*; to Joshua as Captain of the Lord's host, *Jos 5:13–6:5*; comes to Bochim, *Ju 2:1–4*; tells Israel to curse Meroz, *Ju 5:23*; appears to Gideon, *Ju 6:11*; to Manoah and his wife, *Ju 13:2–5*; His name is used in a proverbial expression, *1 Sm 29:9*; *2 Sm 14:17, 20*; *19:27*; when David had numbered Israel, “the angel of the Lord” stretched His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, *2 Sm 24:16, 17*; *1 Ch 21:15–30*; He appears to Elijah under juniper tree, *1 K 19:5–7*; sends Elijah to Ahaziah, *2 K 1:1–3*; smites 185,000 Assyrians, *1 K 19:35*; *2 Ch 32:21*; *Is 37:36*; David mentions Him, *Ps 34:7*; *35:5–6*; Isaiah calls Him angel of God's presence, *Is 63:9*; He appears to Zechariah, who mentions His name, *Zch 1:8–21*; *3*; *12:8*; and Malachi calls Him the Messenger, or Angel, of the covenant, *Ml 3:1*.

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Angels, Good.

1. In both *Heb.* and *Gk.* the word for “angel” means “messenger.” Both OT and NT use it to designate human messengers, *e.g.*, *Gn 32:3*; *Lk 7:24*. The OT applies it also to prophet and priest (*e.g.*, *Is 42:19*; *44:26*; *Ml 2:7*) with obvious reference to their function as messengers sent by God. This may also be the import of term “the angels of the seven churches” (*Rv 1:20*), where reference is evidently to the pastors of the 7 *chs.* But in most passages the term “angels” designates those spiritual beings that were created in infinite numbers (*cf.* *Dt 33:2*; *Dn 7:10*; *Heb 12:22*) to serve God in various ways as messengers. See also [Angel of the Lord](#).

2. The *OT* creation accounts make no explicit reference to origin of angels. On basis of *Gn* 2:1–3; *Ex* 20:11; *Jn* 1:3; *Cl* 1:16, Christian interpreters have concluded that the angels were created at an unspecified time in the 6 days of creation. *Jb* 38:4–7 refers to the presence of angels (“the sons of God”) when God “laid the foundation of the earth.” The title “sons of God” (*e.g.*, *Jb* 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; *Ps* 29:1 and 89:6 in *Heb.*) may also be seen as pointing to the angels’ origin from God as well as their close relationship to Him.

3. Scriptures speak of angels as spiritual beings and portray these noncorporeal beings as appearing in human form when, in their capacity as divine messengers, they manifest themselves to human beings. They appear as men (*e.g.*, *Gn* 19:1–22; *Mt* 28:2–4). The 2 referred to by proper names have masculine names: *Gabriel** (*Dn* 8:16; *Lk* 1:19, 26) and Michael (*Dn* 10:13; *Jude* 9; *Rv* 12:7). Excluding references to cherubim and seraphim (see 6–7 below), the Biblical statements lend no direct support to the popular view that ascribes wings to angels.

4. Angels are described as possessing more than merely human attributes. In 3 passages speakers are quoted who refer to angels as “blameless” (*1 Sm* 29:9 *RSV*), as possessing ability “to discern good and evil” (*2 Sm* 14:17 *RSV*), and as having knowledge of “all things that are on the earth” (*2 Sm* 14:20 *RSV*). *Ps* 103:20 speaks of angels as “mighty men of strength” (*Heb.*). The moral perfection of angels is reflected in the designation “holy ones,” often used in the *OT* (*e.g.*, *RSV* in *Jb* 5:1; *Ps* 89:5, 7; *Dn* 4:13; *Zch* 14:5). The *NT* reinforces the *OT* portrait of angels as creatures of holiness (*Lk* 9:26) and superhuman strength (*2 Ptr* 2:11). Immortality, implicit in *OT* writings, is explicitly ascribed in *Lk* 20:36.

5. Ranking of angels has been a subject of much speculation. Pseudo-Dionysius (see *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 2) invented 27 ranks in an angelic hierarchy allegedly consisting of 3 major orders, each with 9 subdivisions. Later writers imitated or adapter this speculative ranking of angels, based to some extent on apocryphal and pseudepigraphal documents such as Tobit, Enoch, 2 Esdras, and the Testament of Levi. Bible distinguishes only *bet.* “angel” and “archangel” (the latter occurring only *2 Th* 4:16; *Jude* 9 and meaning “chief angel”). *Dn* 12:1 calls archangel Michael “the great prince” (*cf.* *Rv* 12:7); *Jos* 5:14 (*RSV*) mentions a “commander of the army of the Lord.” Some hold that such terms as principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, and thrones (*cf.* *Ro* 8:38; *Eph* 1:21; 3:10; *Cl* 1:16; *1 Ptr* 3:22) are names of various angelic ranks.

6. The titles cherubim and seraphim (both are *Heb.* plurals), on the other hand, appear not to designate angelic ranks but rather special kinds of angelic beings. In the *OT* the Lord is portrayed as enthroned above (or upon) the cherubim (*e.g.*, *RSV* in *1 Sm* 4:4; *2 K* 19:15; *Ps* 80:1; 99:1), or as riding on a cherub or cherubim (*e.g.*, *2 Sm* 22:11; *Ps* 18:10; *Eze* 1; 10). The cover (mercy seat) of the ark of the covenant, where the Lord promised to be present with His people, was embellished with figures of 2 cherubim with wings stretched out above the ark (*cf.* *Ex* 25:10–22). Embroidered representations of cherubim adorned the curtains of the tabernacle and the veil that enclosed the most holy place (*Ex* 26:1, 31; *2 Ch* 3:14). Figures of cherubim with outspread wings stood in the most holy place in Solomon’s temple (*1 K* 6:23–28), and carved figures of cherubim embellished the temple walls and doors (*1 K* 6:29–35). Cherubim may be regarded as guardians of a sacred place (*Gn* 3:24; *Eze* 28:16) or as symbols of God’s presence. Archaeological evidence suggests that cherubim were represented pictorially as winged creatures having a human head and a lion’s body. Except *Heb* 9:5, the word *cherubim* occurs in the Bible only in the *OT*.

7. Seraphim are mentioned by name only in *Is* 6:2–6, where they are described as 6-winged creatures who fly above the Lord’s throne as they chant His praises. The winged “living

creatures" ([RSV](#)) in the description of the heavenly throne room in *Rv* 4:5 appear to be [NT](#) counterparts of the cherubim and seraphim of the [OT](#).

8. The function of angels as God's messengers may be seen as (1) conveying messages from God to men ([e.g.](#), *Gn* 31:11; *Mt* 2:13, 19–20; *Acts* 27:23–24); (2) foretelling special acts of God ([e.g.](#), *Gn* 16:11; *Ju* 13:3–5; *Lk* 1:11–20, 26–37; 2:9–12); (3) serving as agents of divine judgment ([e.g.](#), *Gn* 19:1–29; *2 Sm* 24:15–17; *Mt* 13:41–42, 49–50; *Acts* 12:23); (4) serving as agents of divine providence ([e.g.](#), *1 K* 19:5–8; *Ps* 91:11–12; *Dn* 6:22; *Acts* 5:19–20; 12:7–10). While the Scriptures do not answer the question whether each believer, [esp.](#) each believing child ([cf.](#) *Mt* 18:10), has one or more specially assigned guardian angels, they clearly assure God's people of the constant guardianship of His angelic messengers (*Ps* 91:11–12; *Heb* 1:14). A further service rendered to God's people is recognized by the [Luth.](#) Confessions: "that the angels pray for us" (*Ap* XXI 8; [cf.](#) *SA-II* II 26); [cf.](#) *Zch* 1:12. The invoking angels is forbidden *try* 22:8–9; *Mt* 4:10; [cf.](#) *SA-II* II 26; see also [Angels, Veneration of](#). Angels praise and worship God (*Ps* 29:1–2; 103:20–21; *Is* 6:1–3; *Lk* 2:13–14; *Rv* 7:11–12).

9. Some angels sinned (see [Devil](#)). The angels who faithfully served God are referred to in Scripture as "holy angels" and dogmaticians speak of them as angels who "persevered in holiness" and are now "confirmed in holiness."; [cf.](#) *Mt* 18:10; 25:31; *Mk* 8:38.

10. In the [NT](#), where Jesus Christ is portrayed as "the Head over all things," including the angels ([cf.](#) *Eph* 1:20–22; *1 Ptr* 3:22), the ministry of the holy angels is given Christocentric emphasis. Angels announce Jesus' birth (*Lk* 1:26–35; 2:9–14), mediate providential guidance for infant Jesus (*Mt* 2:13, 19–20), minister to Him as He performs redemptive work (*Mt* 4:11; *Lk* 22:43), are instantaneously available for His service (*Mt* 26:53); are heralds of His resurrection (*Mt* 28:2–7) and ascension (*Acts* 1:10–11). Angels give attention to ministers of Christ's newly [est. ch.](#) (*Acts* 5:19–20; 8:26; 12:7–10; 27:23–24) even as they continue to watch over and rejoice in the progress of His [ch.](#) on earth (*Lk* 15:7, 10; *1 Ptr* 1:12). Angels praise the ascended Christ before His throne (*Rv* 7:11–12), will accompany Him and assist Him at final judgment (*Mt* 24:31; 25:31; *1 Th* 4:16). It is in their relationship to Jesus Christ that all Christians become beneficiaries of Scriptural promises concerning attendant angels, who are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation." (*Heb.* 1:14 [RSV](#)). WW.

[Devil.](#)

Term meaning literally "accuser," *1 Ptr* 5:8; in Scripture usually a descriptive name of Satan; also used in the plural for the fallen angels (demons [see [Demon](#)], evil spirits, unclean spirits), the chief of whom is called Satan by way of eminence (*Mt* 12:24–26). Satan himself, for whose subjugation Christ came, is the originator of all wickedness (*Eph* 2:2), an opponent of the kingdom of God. He is the tempter of the faithful (*1 Ptr* 5:8–9); he led Eve into sin and so became the originator and king of death (*Heb* 2:14). Originally created good, the evil spirits fell through their own fault (*2 Ptr* 2:4). That the devil is a personal being is clear from the Gospels and Epistles. Jesus calls him "evil one" and "enemy" (*Mt* 13:19, 28; *1 Ti* 5:14). Other terms: "Adversary" (*1 Ptr* 5:8), "Satan" (*Lk* 22:31), "Beelzebub" or "Beelzebul" (*Mt* 10:25; 12:24; *Mk* 3:22; *Lk* 11:15, 18, 19), "prince" of devils and demons (*Mt* 12:24), "ruler of this world" (*Jn* 12:31; [cf.](#) *Eph* 6:12). Everlasting punishment was prepared for the devil and his angels (*Mt* 25:41). See also [Demonology](#); [Demonic Possession](#).