

Advent 4 December 24, 2023

Luke 1:32

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most-High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David.”

Gabriel was a busy angel in the months leading up to Jesus’ birth. First, he was sent to Jerusalem, where he appeared to Zechariah as he offered sacrifice in the temple. He told him the good news that his wife Elizabeth would conceive and bear them a son, despite their advanced age. Next, he was dispatched to Nazareth in the north of Galilee, where he appeared to Mary and announced that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of the Most-High. He may have been among the heavenly host in the sky above Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. Being an archangel who stood the right hand of God, he may have been the angel who announced the Saviour’s birth to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night, saying, *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”* He may even have been the conductor who led the heavenly chorus as they sang, *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.”*

Gabriel was blessed to be the messenger who prepared for the births of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. John prepared for the revealing of Jesus as the Christ and the inauguration of the kingdom of God, by calling people to look at themselves in the mirror of the law, so they would confess their sin and see their need for the Saviour. The kingdom of God, which Jesus would inherit from His human father David, is God’s righteous reign in the world. God’s righteous reign in the world begins in the human heart, when the Holy Spirit creates faith by breaking through the hard rock of our sinful hearts, so we see our need for Jesus and receive Him as our Saviour. Gabriel announced to Mary that the child to be born of her would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, be call the Son of the Most-High and receive the throne of His father David. That throne is first and foremost, the human heart in which He reigns as God and Saviour over all who believe.

We wonder many things about angels, like how many are there? We only know an approximate number, lots! In Revelation their number is described as myriad upon myriad, which is a fancy way of saying a whole bunch. There are so many angels that they can’t be counted. However, we know only a few angel’s names. Gabriel and Michael are named in scripture, but most angels are anonymous. When Samson’s parents asked the name of the angel who told them they would have a son, the angel refused. He said, *“Why do you ask my name since it is marvellous.”* Then he ascended to heaven in a flame. Although generally unnamed, angels have very important roles in the management of the universe, the working of the world and in God’s plan for human salvation.

The prophet Daniel speaks of angels having responsibilities for specific nations. In Revelation, Michael led the charge when the angels cast Satan and his angels from heaven. Jesus speaks of angels watching over little children, saying, *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones who believe in me, for I tell you in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father.”* Peter was released from prison by an angel when King Herod sought to execute him. Angels were bearers of God’s word to Moses and the prophets. Angels worship continuously in the presence of the Lord and always behold His face, something no human can do and live.

In the letter to the Hebrews, angels are described as *“ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.”* The most important thing angels do from our perspective, is to serve us for the sake of our salvation, ministering the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus. In a dream an angel told Joseph the child Mary was carrying was from the Holy Spirit. That he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife and that he should name Him, ‘Jesus,’ *“for He will save His people from their sins.”* The most important thing angels do is proclaim Jesus as our Saviour and announce the eternal kingdom He has received from His Father, the holy Christian Church, into which we receive entrance through faith in His name and baptism into His death and resurrection.

Perhaps the reason we know the names of only a few angels is because their purpose to make the Lord known as the only God and humanity’s only Saviour. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who are to inherit salvation. Most often we see them in service of the message of salvation. An angel brought food to Elijah to sustain him as he journeyed forty days in the wilderness to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai. Angels protected the prophet Elisha from a hostile army. An angel comforted Jesus as He agonized in the garden before His arrest. The angels serve the message of salvation, which the Lord displays fully in the life, death and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus. Angels announced His resurrection to the amazed women who came to anoint His dead body. We don’t know the names of the angels who rolled the stone from Jesus’ tomb. But we do know they told the women

the most important information, “*He is not here. He has risen!*” He rose for our salvation, that believing in Him we would have life in His name.

Luke identified the angel who appeared to Mary as Gabriel, the same angel who appeared to Zechariah in the temple. That’s nice to know, but the most important thing to know is that Gabriel identified Jesus as the Son of the Most-High and heir to the eternal kingship and kingdom God had promised to his ancestor David. People wonder many things about angels. How many there are? How many can dance of the head of a pin? Do they really eat angel food cake? However, the most important thing to know about angels is that they serve our salvation by proclaiming Jesus as Saviour and King.

Angels fascinate us. Jesus saves us! Angels are servants of the King. Jesus is the King. In the book of Revelation, an angel showed St. John mysteries of the last times and the return of Christ. John was so overwhelmed by the majesty of this angelic being that he felt compelled to worship him. The angel said, “*You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.*” The evil angel tempted Jesus to worship him. Jesus said, “*Be gone Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.’*” The devil wants us to worship anyone but Jesus. Jesus is our Saviour and King, we worship Him. Angels worship God. They testify that Jesus is the Son of the Most-High, our Saviour and King. They minister to us, so that through the gospel we would receive Jesus as our Saviour, believe in His name and have life in His kingdom.

God bless us to with faith to believe and sustain is in His grace, until He calls us to rise in Christ that with angels, we may see His face and live. In Jesus’ Name. Amen