

*The First Day:
Morning*

The Christmas Curiosity of the Angels (1)

To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.

1 Peter 1:12

There has always been a tremendous interest in Christmas, and now there seems to be an equal interest in angels. Angels are on television and in magazines. Angel sales are sky-rocketing. Angel books continue to flood the market. Angel pins and angel figurines are constantly seen.

Polls indicate that most people believe in the existence of angels. One poll showed that forty-six percent of Americans believe they have a guardian angel.

The Bible is also interested in angels, so much so that its authors mention them 273 times (108 in the Old Testament, and 165 in the New).

While there is a constant and ongoing interest in angels, that interest increases each Christmas. The Christmas season inevitably makes us think of angels. The angel Gabriel was given the responsibility of announcing the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner (Luke 1:11-20)

to his father Zacharias, as well as the forthcoming birth of Jesus to his mother Mary (Luke 1:26-33).

A single angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds outside Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-12). No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he was joined by 'a multitude of the heavenly host' who burst into praise of God (Luke 2:13-14).

It is evident, then, that angels were closely associated with Christmas.

The Angels Are Interested in Salvation

The association of angels with Christmas runs far deeper, however, than merely announcing it. In this text, the apostle Peter asserts that the angels are intensely curious about the very matter Christmas was designed to deal with, that is, the salvation of sinners.

Simon Peter could not get over this business of salvation. To him it was the most marvelous and glorious thing imaginable. After addressing his readers (vv.1-2), he immediately launches into a song of praise to God about salvation. He thanks God for the 'abundant mercy' that has given believers 'a living hope' (v.3). He rejoices in the 'inheritance' that is 'reserved in heaven' for believers (v.4). And he freely and gladly acknowledges that all of this is made possible in and through the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.3,7).

From this burst of praise for salvation, the apostle proceeded to make it clear to his readers that it fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament (vv.11-12). This was only one of many evidences that the work of Christ was genuine and could be completely trusted.

Specifically, Peter asserts that the prophets of the Old Testament were enabled by 'the Spirit of Christ' (v.11) to see both 'the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow' (v.11).

Suddenly and unexpectedly Peter brings his discussion of this matter to a close by adding this phrase: 'things which angels desire to look into' (v.12).

The Greek word translated 'look into' is the same word used to describe what Peter himself did when he came to the tomb of the risen Christ. We are told that he stooped down and looked into the tomb (John 20:5). The same word is used of Mary Magdalene when she also looked into the tomb of Christ (John 20:11).

By using this word, Peter portrays the angels bending over, or, as it were, leaning over the balcony rail of heaven to carefully and intently peer down upon the earth so they can see what God has done and is doing in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament depicts the very same thing. On top of the Ark of the Covenant was the mercy seat, where the blood of atonement was sprinkled by the high priest. And on each side of that mercy seat was a golden cherub looking down at the very spot where the blood was sprinkled (Ex. 25:18-22).

Cherubim were also depicted on the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:31). The Most Holy Place was that chamber into which the high priest entered once a year to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. The depiction of the cherubim on

that heavy veil also conveys the desire of the angels to look into salvation through the shedding of blood.

To Think About

- God's salvation plan for people is so significant that it captures the interest of angels! If angels marvel, and are amazed by the work of sending Jesus, how much more should ordinary humans be!
- There is a sense in which we are even more privileged than angels, for we receive a benefit from Christmas that angels can never receive. Jesus died for human beings, not for angels!

*The First Day:
Evening*

The Christmas Curiosity of the Angels (2)

To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.

1 Peter 1:12

Why Angels Are Interested. . .

Why are the angels so interested in the salvation of sinners? We are not surprised to read that the prophets of the Old Testament ‘inquired and searched carefully’ (v.10) regarding this matter of salvation. We can well understand them desiring to understand better those truths which they were prophesying. But what is this about the angels? Why do they marvel at the mercy of God?

We are out of our element here. Perhaps they study salvation out of amazement that God could love those who had so grievously sinned against him and were, therefore, deserving of nothing but his wrath. The book of Jude tells us that there were also angels who fell into sin. These ‘did not keep their proper domain’ because they rebelled against God, but there was no salvation provided for them. They have rather been ‘reserved in everlasting chains under

darkness for the judgment of the great day; ... ' (Jude 6, see also 2 Peter 2:4). The fact there was no salvation offered for the fallen angels must have made salvation for fallen men and women even more amazing to the angels in heaven.

Perhaps the unfallen angels study salvation out of amazement that the Prince of Glory, the eternal Son of God, would stoop so low as to take to himself the humanity of sinners, and in that humanity would suffer the hostility of sinners and die on a Roman cross.

Perhaps they study salvation out of amazement at the peace and joy of those who have received it. Could it be that there is among the angels a bit of envy (sinless envy, of course) for those of us who have been saved? Do the angels in heaven, who have not sinned and never needed mercy, find themselves wishing that they could experience the joy that such mercy brings? The author of this verse seemed to think along these lines:

*When I sing redemption's story,
The angels will fold their wings;
For angels never knew the joy
That my salvation brings.*

There is yet another reason the angels are so keenly interested in salvation. The angels are interested in anything that brings glory to God, and nothing so glorifies God as his wonderful work of salvation. This work displays his grace, his justice and his wisdom in such a way that the angels, who delight in his glory, cannot help but be fascinated by it.

In all likelihood the angels marvel at our salvation for all of these reasons and perhaps for reasons that have never even occurred to us.

The Challenge to Us

It is all well and good to know that the angels are interested in salvation, but what does it have to do with us? The fact is their interest in our redemption speaks a very powerful word to us.

The angels are God's mighty ones who 'excel in strength' (Ps. 103:20). The angels are God's immortal ones who are beyond the reach of death. The angels are God's faithful ones who ceaselessly and perfectly serve the God who made them (Heb. 1:7). And they stand in awe of redemption.

If God's mighty, immortal and faithful ones stand in awe of redemption, how much more should those who are weak, dying, and sinful. If angels, who have never experienced salvation, are so keenly interested in it, how keen an interest should those have who have experienced it!

Is this the case? Is this characteristic of people who profess to know the Lord? Are we keenly interested in our Christ and the salvation he has provided? Is it evident to others that this is the main thing in our lives? Is there among us a keen interest in learning more about our salvation? Do we gobble up opportunities to study the Word of God? Do we have a keen interest in expressing gratitude to God for our salvation? Are we anxious to join in public worship and sing praises to his name? Are we eager to do whatever we

can to advance his kingdom?

Can we take the following words and truthfully say them to ourselves:

*Pause, my soul! adore and wonder!
Ask, 'O why such love to me?'
Grace has put me in the number
Of the Savior's family;
Hallelujah!
Thanks, Eternal Love, to thee!*

To Think About

- ▶ In New Testament times, some Christians began drifting away from the Lord and neglecting their salvation (see Heb. 2:1-4). What would the author say if he could observe us for a while? Would his assessment of us be the same as it was of those to whom he wrote? Would he accuse us of neglecting 'so great a salvation'? (Heb. 2:3).
- ▶ It is such a great salvation that the angels of heaven themselves are intrigued by it. May God help us to see the greatness of it and to rejoice in it. Let's learn from the angels. Let's allow their interest in salvation to rebuke us for our lack of interest and to renew us in fervent desire to worship and to serve the Lord.

The Twenty-fourth Day:
Morning

This King Is a Servant! (1)

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master."

Matthew 10:24-25

It is not too far-fetched to imagine a king who is a stranger to the people over whom he rules. But who can conceive of a king being a servant? It's like talking about a giant pygmy or a square circle. The two simply don't belong together. Everyone knows kings are not to serve, but are to be served.

Jesus Christ is not a typical king, and the Bible makes it clear he came to be a servant. He said it himself: '... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, ...' (Matt. 20:28).

How can such a thing be? Jesus is such a great king that the Scriptures actually call him 'King of kings' (1 Tim. 6:15). If he is the greatest of all kings, how can he be a servant?

Let's stop and think about servants for a moment. What pops into your mind when you hear that word? Do you not think of someone who has work to do? Do you not think of someone who is under authority and who has no will of his

own, but simply does the work assigned to him? Do you not think of someone who has little or none of the world's goods, lives in lowly circumstances, and has no status? Do you not picture someone whose life involves suffering, pain, and sorrow?

Do you agree these are the major characteristics of the servant? You will find, that all of the characteristics of a servant are prominently displayed in King Jesus.

Some Characteristics of a Servant That Jesus Showed

He had work to do

Does the servant have work assigned? So did Jesus. He did not come to this earth just 'to get away from it all' for a little while. He did not come here because he was bored with the glories of heaven. He was not in need of a holiday. He came here because a work had been assigned to him, the work of redemption.

The Bible tells us that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, before the world began, agreed with each other on this work of redemption. God knew people would fall into sin, and his heart of grace compelled him to plan a way to redeem them. The centerpiece of this plan was that God the Son, in the fulness of time, would leave the glories of heaven, and become a man himself. As a man he was to live in perfect obedience to the law of God, and he was to receive the death penalty that rightfully belonged to

guilty sinners. By his life, he was to provide the righteousness we do not have; and by his death he was to receive the penalty our sins deserved. The child of God, then, is one who has no penalty left to pay because Jesus paid it, and one who can stand faultless before a holy God because he is clothed in the righteousness provided by Christ's perfect life.

This is the great work of redemption, and this is what brought the Lord Jesus Christ into this world. And this is why Jesus said he had to come to serve and 'to give His life a ransom for many.' He came to do the work he had been assigned.

And just as the servant has no will of his own so it was with Jesus. In John's Gospel we constantly find Jesus saying he had not come to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 12:49-50; 14:10).

To Think About

- Can you imagine a servant deciding to go fishing because he didn't feel like working? The idea is ludicrous! Servants don't obey at their leisure and according to their pleasure. The master's will is their will.
- We should be thankful that it was the same with Jesus. He had the servant's mentality, the mentality that bowed to authority, and he refused to depart from the work that had been given him. If it were not for this, we would have no salvation.

The Twenty-fourth Day:
Evening

This King Is a Servant! (2)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant...

(Read Philippians 2:5-7)

More Servant-Characteristics That Jesus Showed

Poverty and lowliness

Just as the servant is characterized by poverty and lowliness so was Jesus. He was not born in the capital, Jerusalem, but in tiny Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He was not born in a palace, but in a stable. He was not surrounded by servants, but by animals. He was not attended by royal physicians, but only by humble parents. He was not greeted by other kings and princes, but only by crude shepherds.

And this lowly beginning was not just an unfortunate episode that was quickly corrected. It was the first installment of his whole life. From Bethlehem's stable he went to Nazareth's carpenter shop, and from that humble shop he went into a ministry in which he had no place to lay his head.

Suffering

Just as the servant's life is filled with suffering and sorrow so it was with Jesus. He knew that pain and anguish of rejection. He saw the havoc created by sin and his sensitive spirit agonized over it. Scripture tells us he wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and that he was troubled, groaned in his spirit, and wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33, 35). It also mentions him sighing (Mark 7:34). The sufferings of his short life finally peaked in the terrible agony of the worst kind of all deaths, the death on the cross.

All of these sufferings fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that he would be 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' (Isa. 53:3).

In other words, Jesus' servanthood was not mere pretense. It was not a sham but real in every aspect. If he came to do the work of a servant, he had to be a servant in every respect.

Did the King of Glory stoop so low as to become a servant? What mystery! And did he do this so guilty sinners could be forgiven? What mercy! Charles Wesley captured both the mystery and the mercy of the servant Christ performing the work of redemption:

*'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explain His strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

Being Like Jesus—Being a Servant

Jesus' purpose in calling his servanthood to the attention of his disciples was to indelibly etch on their minds that they were to be like him. His words couldn't be clearer: 'A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master' (Matt. 10:24). And Paul's purpose in calling the servanthood of Jesus to the attention of the Philippians was so he could say: 'Let this mind be in you ...' (Phil. 2:5).

Work to do

What does it mean to us that Jesus was a servant? If there was work for him to do then there must be work for us, his servants, to do. He has provided the work of redemption and there is nothing we can do to add to that, but we do have the responsibility to share the good news of what he has done. And if Christ's servanthood required him to have no will of his own but to live completely for the Father's will, we who claim to be his servants must learn to submit to his authority.

Lifestyle Adjustments

Do we dare go to the next step? The servanthood of Jesus caused him to be deprived of the world's goods and live in lowly circumstances. Does this also apply to us? The Bible commands us to live simply and not ostentatiously. It instructs us to avoid making the accumulation of worldly goods our priority, and to support our Lord's work by giving sacrificially from the wealth we have. Jesus himself said we are not to lay up treasures on earth but rather in heaven

(Matt. 6:19-21). On another occasion he said: 'Beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of things which he possesses.' (Luke 12:15). And Paul added this word: 'And having food and raiment let us be there with content.' (1 Tim. 6:8).

Sharing in His Suffering

Finally, just as Jesus' servanthood involved suffering, so will our service to him. Jesus said: 'Remember the word that I said to you, "a servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you' (John 15:20). Serve the Lord, and sooner or later you will encounter misunderstanding, ridicule and scorn. It is part and parcel of being his servant.

To Think About

- ▶ What is our response to these things? Can we truthfully say we are working for the one who did so much work for us? Do we feel a great debt of gratitude for the whole work of redemption? Do we think in terms of being servants?
- ▶ Christmas is the best of all times for giving ourselves afresh to service, because servanthood is right at the heart of Christmas. This Christmas let's thank God for sending our Servant-King, Jesus, and let's pledge ourselves to follow in his steps.

