

What should we know about Angels?



Are angels a fad, a trend, or are they real? Angels seem to appear in so many aspects of our lives today – jewelry, postage stamps, stories, television shows, literature, historical anecdotes, art, religious practice, biblical studies. Attention to angels seems ubiquitous. So absorbed in angels is the general population that this current interest borders on angel mania.

Like the commercialization of Christmas and Easter, angel mania can serve to draw our attention to the reality and importance of angels in God's creation. Angels are no myth. They are a very evident and significant part of history and spirituality.

Attention to our Christian prayer-life indicates that we encounter the angels of God not only in popular and vocal prayers in general, but we find them prominent especially in the Church's official, liturgical prayer – the Liturgy of the Hours and the Mass.

**Charles
Lameire,
Angel,
Loreto,
French
Chapel.**

Angels are an obvious reality of religious history and of biblical study. This popular outburst of

interest in angels leads us to learn the role of angels in the Bible and their meaning for us today.

Mention of angels abounds in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Christians do not look to pop news to learn more about the angels.

The word angel comes from the Greek *angelos*, which means messenger. The word is applied to both human and divine messengers. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *mal'ak* is rendered *angelos*, and refers to both human



and heavenly messengers. In several instances in the New Testament angels refers to humans, but the word usually means heavenly beings. Though our focus is on angels as heavenly beings, the Bible itself employs a wider use of the term.

The angels serve as messengers of the Lord and servants of the Lord. They help to bridge the gap between humans and God.

Note that the names often given to angels point away from the angel and back to God. Michael means "Who is like God?", Raphael means "God heals", Gabriel means "God is strong". These angels are representatives of God's active presence in our world.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels." (#331) There is a clear impression that some early Christians gave too much attention to angels, and that some New Testament writers addressed that point. Is this a message for us today?

Last year pollster George Gallup, a devout Episcopalian, reporting the results of his national survey, highlighted concerns among the clergy that angel mania "may be detracting people from proven paths to spiritual development" and that "pop culture visions of angels impede a deeper development of spiritual values to nourish the soul" (*Emerging Trends*).

What does this mean for us today? Here are some conclusions we can glean from the Bible's teaching on angels.

First, we should focus more on God than on angels. The Lord sends the messenger who delivers the message or performs the action. Angels come from God and should direct us back to God.

Second, we need to place great trust in God's active presence in our lives. God's angels remind us that we are not alone. God is always with us. God wants to protect us from harm.

Finally, we can see Jesus as God's messenger and servant. Though not called an angel, Jesus is the one sent by God into our world. He is the presence of God in our daily life, and expresses God's concern for the lowly and the needy. In Jesus, God "has visited and redeemed his people" (Lk 1:68).

We can celebrate angels and the important truth they communicate to us: God wants to be intimately involved in our everyday lives.

While being open to the good news conveyed by the angels, we too are invited to become messengers/angels of that gospel to the world. We are called to participate in the new evangelization. While the Bible does focus more on heavenly figures, it also recognizes that humans can be angels too.



Guardian Angels

Throughout the Old Testament God's messengers/angels guard and protect individuals as well as the people of God. God's providence is exemplified in instances found in Gn 21:17-18; Gn 22:11-18; Ex 14:19-20,23; Dn 12:1.

In the New Testament Jesus advises his disciples not to ignore or despise any of the "little ones" because "their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven (Mt 18:10). God's care extends to the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that "From infancy to death human life is surrounded by the watchful care and intercession..." of the angels (#336, 352).