



## “NOT FOR ANGELS AND CHILDREN” Christ-mass Day/ Hebrews 1:1-6

A few years back angels became the rage. Their renaissance was part of part of the new age movement. For a while we had angel banners that graced our sanctuary but they’ve served their purpose and are no longer with us. I used to have a concrete cherub in my garden, but alas he too has “bitten the dust.” I had an angel calendar from the *Met*, but that year is long gone. In New Orleans, marble cherubs which once graced tombs have disappeared in the night, only to turn up in antique shops. Our angel *knock-offs*, even the beauties which grace our Christmas trees, don’t compare to the awesomeness eternal nature of the real thing.

### *Angels in scripture*

Angels in reality are nothing like they are portrayed in art and literature. Angels can take on a human form, as they did with Abraham and Sarah, or Mary. But they are normally quite frightening, so that the first word out their mouths is, “do not be afraid.” The cherub God placed at the entrance to Eden carried a flaming sword. Michael the mighty warrior angel is usually dressed in full armor with a sword. Biblical descriptions of angels suggest great power. Ezekiel’s strange vision shows them traveling on wheels within wheels, in every direction simultaneously: God is present everywhere at the same time. His heavenly creatures have the body parts of an eagle, a lion, an ox, and a man! In the Revelation John tries to describe a similar phenomenon, but the angels he sees are covered with hundreds of eyes to suggest omniscience.

You have to understand, the early Christians *were*, as the faithful in every age *are*, fascinated by the invisible creation, the ranks of angels. On Monday, in a very delicate manner, I needed to teach a child that when our loved ones pass away they don’t become angels. Angels are a lower order of creation than man; in Hebrews (1:14) we learn that God sends them out to serve you and me, all who are to inherit salvation. Angels never were, never will be, human.

Perhaps you can recall the line from *Crown Him with Many Crowns* (LSB 525:3), where the angels in the sky are not able to fully comprehend the mystery of God’s love for humanity. They envy us, wondering why would God send his Son to save us. Sadly the angels do not participate in salvation. They are creatures of heaven, spiritual servants of God.

At Hebrews 1:4-9 you have a collection of quotes from Psalms 2 (7) and 45 (6-7)

which ascribe to Jesus divine Sonship. This letter wants to show the recipients that Jesus and Jesus alone is the Son of God. While we might sing about the angels with amazement, they are always a lower order. The rest of Hebrews goes on to make the case that Jesus is superior to Moses, the Levitical priests, the kings and the prophets—and most certainly you and me.

***Jesus is unique as man and as God's servant***

Yes, “to which of the angels did God ever say, “*You are my Son, today I have begotten you?*” Not one. Jesus is superior in every way because he is the heir of creation, he is the Word made flesh. As St. John says, *He was with God “in the beginning.” “All things were made through him,” and “in him [in Jesus] was life.”* You can’t say that about any of the angels. The Son of God is eternal, without beginning and end. Angels are finite, they have a beginning; and if God so wishes they have an end. Like our garden ornaments and our old calendars they must serve their purpose without attracting unnecessary attention to themselves.

Hebrews goes on to insist that the Son (however) reflects the glory of God, even bears the same nature. And when the Son finished his work, the work of salvation by means of a cross, the Father honored him by raising him from the dead, and seating him at the right hand of power and majesty.

***Our problem***

It is not that angels have become too big a deal. Let’s face it, what would Christmas be without angels and cherubs decorating our homes and churches. No, our problem is not the angels, real or representative, they serve to glorify God. Our problem is that our world at Christmas pays homage to a God who never grew up. *They* never get passed the manger. Christmas is more about nostalgia than a prelude to the Passion and the Cross. With some gusto the man on the street can sing the first lines of *Away in a Manger* or *Silent Night*, or *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*. But what about *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* or *At the Name of Jesus* or, *Crown Him with Many Crowns*?

It’s as if all we ever learned about George Washington was that he cut down a cherry tree and never told a lie; but never heard how he became the hero of the American Revolution. The cherry tree is a cute story, but all by itself it doesn’t warrant a painting on the Capitol rotunda.

Of *little Lord Jesus* we must also know that at some point in our future every knee will bow to him, and every tongue on earth will confess his name (Phil. 2). Christmas loses all meaning without the cross. Christmas serves nothing if it is not your personal entrance into the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Christmas is a homecoming for many. Those whose faith might be considered lapsed may in fact meander into the churches of their youth. But if all you want to see is a baby in a manger, he's all grown up now. The baby doesn't need you to nurse him or change his diapers; he needs you to serve him with your gifts of time, your worship, and even your monetary gifts. The Child of the manger wants to give as well as receive. He wants to incorporate you into his family and make you a vital member of his kingdom. He wants to stimulate your thinking through encounters with him in the Word. He wants to feed you with himself by means of bread and wine.

This is Christmas, this is the Christ-mass. And the Lord Jesus *enfleshes* himself still, coming to you through my words, coming to you in bread broken and wine shared. Yes the Child in the Manger is still involved with the world, still giving himself to the world. The One who for a little while made himself lower than the angels is today and forever their Lord king. I don't think of him as cute anymore. I think of him as awesome. I think of him as all powerful, eternal, all knowing. In his power I find peace and joy. In his strong arms my weary soul finds rest.

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