

ANGEL OF THE LORD

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"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

- The Gospel according to Saint Luke: Chapter 2, verses 9 and 10.

The angel in the nativity story is a well known character. They are the messenger to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, played by the most adorable child in the nativity play. But, as well as telling Mary that she was pregnant, Joseph to stay with Mary, and the shepherds that the Saviour, Christ the Lord, was born, angels have been God's messengers countless times throughout the Bible.



The first angel mentioned in the bible is in Genesis chapter 16, verse 7. Abram and his wife Sarai, later known as Abraham and Sarah, could not conceive, and Sarai gave Abram her slave, Hagar, to conceive for her. Hagar, once pregnant, mocked Sarai, who drove her away. This is when the first angel appeared, to tell Hagar to go back, and to tell her a vision of her son Ishmael, Isaac's older brother. Another angel went, once again, to Hagar when she was banished, leading the mother and son to great things in Paran. (Genesis 21, verses 9 to 21).



When Lot was living in Sodom, it was the angels who were staying with him that were attacked; this was the final straw that led to the destruction of the city. Presumably, just as God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, angels in the time of Genesis walked among the faithful.

In fact, angels featured many times in Genesis; when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, in a dream Jacob has, and in the blessing Jacob gives Joseph. It is the angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and it was angels who led Moses and the Israelites through the desert, as pillars of cloud and fire, and into new lands.



The story of Balaam and his donkey in Numbers shows an angel with a sense of humour. The angel appears to the donkey, causing it to throw the prophet off, and gives it a voice to answer back when he beats and chastises it, before suddenly appearing to Balaam himself, shouting at him for beating his donkey and telling him what he must do.

Angel messengers spoke to people throughout the Old Testament, appearing in Judges, Kings, Samuel and Chronicles, which meant that Mary, Joseph and the shepherds would have known the stories coming before the angels that spoke to them. Given that so many of these Old Testament angels were destroying cities, it's no wonder they were scared!

And here it is, with the baby that would change the world, that angels changed too. As the Hebrew's sacrifice and ritual was replaced with Christ's communion and message of love and forgiveness, the role of angels changed from the bearer of bad news to the choir bringing good news.

And the nativity isn't the last we hear of God' angels: they helped the Apostles four times in Acts, and are mentioned a few more times after, including in the confusing dream that is revelations.

In fact, many people since Biblical days have claimed to see or have been visited by angels. Some Christians pray via them, just as many pray via saints such as the mother Mary herself. Our love of angels is even shown in the naming of children, with names like Angela, Angelica and Angelo.

