

# THE ROLES OF ANGELS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST: A THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

BY

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## Abstract

*Angels were created by God before the world was made. Some of the angels were disloyal to God and were thrown out of heaven down to the earth by the good angels. As spiritual beings the good angels minister to God and carry out his orders every day. However, the roles of these angels of God in the salvation history of human beings are not known by many Christians. The main thrust of this paper, therefore is to theologically look at the roles angels played in the life of Jesus while on earth as recorded in the New Testament. Some recommendations are made for a better understanding of angels and the roles they played in the life of Jesus.*

## Introduction

The existence of angels as spiritual beings created by God almighty is no longer in doubt among many Christians. The holy bible tells us about their existence and the various roles they played, and are still playing, in the salvific history of human kind. In the Old Testament, angels are mentioned at least 108 times and 165 times in the New Testament ([Christian answers.net/abc.too5html](http://Christian.answers.net/abc.too5html)). However, the exact number these spiritual beings are, is not known to us, but they are very many. The book of Daniel asserts that there are multitude of these spiritual beings (angels) waiting on God (Daniel 7:10). Furthermore, Jesus affirms that we have many angels in existence when he states, “Don’t you know that I would call on my father for help, and once he would send me more than twelve armies of angels” (Matthew 26:53). We tend to lean on the views of Strauss that:

In these days of increased demon activity, God’s people need to be acquainted with His good angels and their many ministries. For the most part they are associated with unseen world, but God has told us sufficiently about them to cause us to look up and praise Him for His good angels (100).

The main focus of this paper is to look at some of the roles angels played in the ministry of Jesus, which in turn affected the lives of Christians.

## Angels a Created Beings

An angel is seen as an “agent” or “messenger”. An angel is a pure spirit created by God ([www.catholic.org/saints/angels](http://www.catholic.org/saints/angels)). Angels, as created supernatural beings were in existence before human beings were created (Job 38: 1-7). As spiritual beings (Hebrews 1:14), they are immortal (Luke 20: 36) and innumerable (Hebrews 12: 22). The belief in the existence of angels is found in many religions and mythologies ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/angel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/angel)). In the book of Revelation, we are told that many angels give glory to God daily. “Each one of the four living creatures had six wings, and they were covered with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stop singing: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, who is and who is to come” (Revelation 4:8). We have good and bad angels. The good angels are those loyal to God almighty, and the bad ones are the ones who rebelled against God. The bad angels were led by Lucifer (prince of darkness). He was originally called Luciel (Bearer of light), but became Lucifer when he and his companions were thrown out of heaven in a battle. Angel Michael and other good angels defeated Lucifer and his supporters and were cast down to

earth (Revelation 12: 7-9). These evil angels, their assistants, the demons or unclean spirits are often held responsible for evils in the world (Alexander 133).

There are seven archangels, and their names vary among some Christian denominations. The early Christian tradition gives their names as, “Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Anael, Simiel, Oriphiel and Raguel” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/seven\_archangels). In the copti orthodox tradition the seven archangels are called: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Suriel, Zadakiel, Sarathiel and Ananiel (w.w.w.christadephia/./p-angels.htm). Revelation 8: 2 states, “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets”. The angels comprised 9 (nine) choirs: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Archangels and Angels. The Seven archangels seem to be the most powerful ones (Revelation 8: 1-13; 9: 1-20).

Angels are sinless servants of God. They also minister to human beings (Schmans, 207-210). According to the book of Hebrews, “What are the angels? They are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation” (1: 14). Calvin affirms that, “Angels are the dispensers and administrators of divine beneficence toward us. They regard our safety, undertake our defence, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us” (As quoted in Graham X).

### **Angel Gabriel and Mary**

Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a young lady called Mary in a town in Galilee named Nazareth. The message to her was that she would give birth to a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was still a virgin and already betrothed to Joseph. This is part of the angel’s great message to Mary:

Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you ... Don’t be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1: 28-33).

Mary, the bible tells us, accepted this good tiding by saying, “I am the Lord’s servant ... may it happen to me as you have said” (Luke 1: 38). The same angel advised Joseph, the husband of Mary, in a dream not to divorce her because her pregnancy was by the power of God:

Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus – because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1: 20-21).

Joseph faithfully accepted the message of the angel and did not divorce Mary as he previously planned “to break the engagement privately” (Matthew 1: 19-21). Interestingly, Joseph did not ask for any sign to show how Mary could be pregnant without having any sexual relation with her. Zacharia asked for a sign from the same angel Gabriel when he was told that he and his wife Elizabeth at their old age would have a child (John the Baptist). The sign given to Zacharia was dumbness because of his lack of strong faith in the divine message from God (Luke 1: 5-24). He only regained his power of speech the day his child (John) was circumcised and given a name (Luke 1: 57-66).

### **The Angels and The Shepherds**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of Emperor Augustus, Caesar of Rome. An angel announced the good news to shepherds who were watching the sheep at night. The angel of

the Lord appeared in a flashing dazzling light and glory of the Lord shone over them. They were very much afraid, but the angel said to them:

Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town, your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger (Luke 12).

With this great news to the shepherds there suddenly appeared a great army of heaven's angels singing praises to God. "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2: 13-14). The Shepherds did not doubt the news they heard for they went to Bethlehem to see for themselves what the angels told them. They got there and really saw all that they were told. They went back glorifying and praising God. They too told others what they had seen. This unique role of the angels is edifying for the Shepherds too, humble as they were, have to share the salvific message of God to all. A Saviour of the world born in a humble place and visited by humble Shepherds, speak volume to those who believe in God's plan of redemption. The prophetic expectation, after many centuries, is now fulfilled in the birth of the messiah ([www.therealpresence.org>HomeArchivesIndex>AngelogyIndex](http://www.therealpresence.org>HomeArchivesIndex>AngelogyIndex)).

### **Plans to kill Jesus – An Angel Tells Joseph**

After the three wise men from the east had presented their gifts of gold (for royalty), frankincense (for divinity) and myrrh (humanity of Jesus) to the child Jesus they were warned in "a dream by God not to go back to Herod who planned to kill Jesus" (Matthew 2: 11-12). The wise men returned to their destination through another route. Equally, Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream about Herod's plans to kill the child Jesus. The angel said to Joseph, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to leave" (Matthew 2: 13). Joseph did exactly what the angel told him and escaped to Egypt at night. They stayed there until Herod was dead. When Herod died an angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt saying, "get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead" (Matthew 2: 19-21). Joseph obeyed the angel's message and went back to Israel. But when Joseph learnt that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, he became afraid to go there. However, he got further directives in a dream and so proceeded to stay in the province of Galilee, in a town called Nazareth (Matthew 2: 22-23). The taking of Jesus and the mother to Egypt to escape the death plan of King Herod is very significant. It shows, among other things, that Africa and Africans played significant roles in the salvific history of God. In fact, Africans have played and continue to play great roles in the spreading of the Good News of salvation to mankind (Lokel 267; Adamo 2005).

### **Angels and The Temptation of Jesus**

Immediately after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, he went to a solitary place to pray and fast. He fasted for 40 (forty) days and nights. At the completion of the fast Jesus was hungry and the devil came and tempted him (Matthew 4: 1-11; Luke 4: 1-13; Mark 1: 12-13). At various stages of the temptation, Jesus did not yield to the devil's wishes. After the unsuccessful adventure of the devil, he left Jesus and behold angels came and ministered to him (Matthew 4: 11). The success of Jesus in his temptation shows us that we too can defeat the devil's numerous worldly attractions that could lead us to sin; to make us far away from the love of God. Equally, the good angels of God are always at the services of believers – to help them and protect them from the snares of the devil. 1 Peter 5: 8 advises Christians:

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Be alert, be on the watch! Your enemy, the devil, roams round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him, because you know that your fellow – believers in all the world are going through the same kind of suffering.

This unique defeat of the devil by Jesus does not end devil's future plans to still attack or tempt Jesus.

### **An Angel and Jesus' Agony in Gethsemane**

Jesus went with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 36-46; Mark 14: 32-42). When he came to the Garden he took with him Peter, James and John and left the rest at the entrance of the garden. Jesus was greatly troubled during his prayers. "Father", he said, "if you will take this cup of suffering away from me. Not my will, however, but your will be done" (Luke 22: 41-42). We are told that at this point of great distress "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22: 43). This encouragement by the angel of God gave Jesus more strength to pray harder so as to be able to undergo the persecution ahead of him. The three disciples he took with him to pray disappointed him. They were willing in spirit to pray but too weak physically to endure pains with their master Jesus. Importantly also is the unreserved spirit of submission to the will of God that Jesus displayed during this agony. As children of God we are often faced with pains and disappointments and we need good angels to strengthen, to give us the courage to stand under the will of God almighty. Surely, God's angels are around to minister to us at such unpleasant occasions. This point is supported by Psalm 34:7, "His angel guards those who honour the Lord and rescues them from danger." Infact, angels "are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). There are special angels God has appointed to take care of children. Jesus himself affirms this when he states, "see that you don't despise any of these little ones. Their angels in heaven, I tell you, are always in the presence of my father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

### **Angels and The Resurrection of Jesus**

The rising from death by Jesus through the power of God almighty is a unique event in the history of human salvation. The resurrection of Jesus paved way for the resurrection of believers. According to Saint Paul, "... if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe" (1 Corinthians 15: 14). The devil and many people at that time did not believe the possibility of Jesus rising from the grave after burial. The big stone that covered the tomb was rolled away by an angel. "After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away and sat on it" (Matthew 28: 1-2). It is this angel who told the women that Jesus has risen and gone to Galilee, there they would be able to see him. However, Jesus appeared to them and warned them not to be afraid, but to go and tell his disciples about his resurrection (Matthew 28: 9-10).

In Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus it was "two men in bright shining clothes" who told the women at the tomb that Jesus has been raised (Luke 24: 5-6). The two men were angels in human form. In Mark's account the women who came to the tomb saw a young man sitting on the right, wearing a white robe who told them:

Don't be alarmed, he said, I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here – he has been raised! Look, here is the place where they put him. Now go and give this message to his disciples; including Peter: He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you (Mark 16: 2-5).

Furthermore, John's account of the risen Lord mentioned only one woman, Mary Magdalene, who visited the tomb where Jesus was buried. She saw "two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet" (John 20: 11-18). Jesus himself appeared to her there while she was crying and sent her to his disciples with those words, "... go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my father and their father, my God and their God" (John 20: 18). Observably, one may be right to assert that the climax of the life and teaching of Jesus was not just his death on the cross at Golgotha, but his resurrection. This is so, because the event of his resurrection significantly proved to the world his divine powers over the hands of death and all the forces of evil manifestations in the world. Surely, "he rose not just simply in body like Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus or like the son of the widow of Nain, but also in spirit to a higher and heavenly level of existence" (Olatona 168).

### **Angels at the Ascension of Jesus**

The ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven where he came from in the presence of his followers is, among other things, the manifestation of his divine power and majesty. This great event is foretold in the Old Testament, "He goes up to the heights taking many captives with him; he received gifts from rebellious people. The Lord God will live there. Praise the Lord, who carries our burdens day after day; he is the God who saves us" (Psalm 68:18).

Jesus himself also announced his ascension. "As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind and set out on his way to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of him, who went into a village in Samaria to get everything ready for him" (Luke 9: 51; John 20: 17). Forty days after his resurrection Jesus took his disciples to a place near Bethany and prayed for them. "In course of this, he disappeared from their view and was lifted into heaven" (Luke 24: 48-51; Olatona 168). The book of the Acts of the Apostles gives a vivid description how Jesus was taken to heaven after addressing them. They were still looking at the sky when two men dressed in white appeared beside them and addressed them thus:

Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven. Then the apostles went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is about a kilometer away from the city (Acts 1: 6-12).

Who were those two men dressed in white robes? They were angels of God from heaven, in human form, who talked to the apostles about what had happened. They believed these special messengers of God and quietly went to Jerusalem to await the descent of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus (Acts 1: 7-8). This is the last activity of angels with Jesus while on earth. We are, however, told that the angels will come with Jesus to judge the world (Matthew 24: 29-39; Mark 13: 24-27; Luke 21: 25-28). The gospel of Matthew states, "The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other" (Matthew 24: 31).

Moreover, Jesus told his hearers or audience in the parable of the sower how angels would help on judgement day. According to him, "The field is the world: the good seeds are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels" (Matthew 13: 38-39; see also Luke 12: 8-9). However, angels in heaven, Jesus tells us, rejoice when a sinner repents of his or her sins (Matthew 15: 7; 15: 10). As special messengers of God, angels are still very active in the world daily carrying out God's plans. We strongly believe that we need God's good angels in our daily struggles in the world. This reminds us of a prayer to a "Guardian Angel" and that of "Saint Michael the

Archangel” members of the Roman Catholic faith often pray ([www.cts-online.org.uk](http://www.cts-online.org.uk)). As a young boy I learnt these prayers when preparing for the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. No doubt, these prayers and others have immensely helped me to fight my battles against demonic attacks.

### **Conclusion**

The existence of angels as spiritual being is no longer in doubt in the minds of many Christians. However, not many know and appreciate the tremendous roles good angels played in the life of Jesus. These spiritual beings created by God played unique roles before the birth of Jesus and during his life on earth. In the second coming of Jesus the scripture tells us that angels will accompany him to judge the world. In this era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), we are daily engulfed by all kinds of noise, thereby creating spiritual vacuum in many hearts. This is because many of us no longer have time to quietly pray and allow God to speak to us through his angels. If God’s good angels are special agents of God who faithfully ministered to Jesus during his difficult moments, the world needs them today more than ever. This is because the spiritual battles many are facing from demonic powers are much. We, therefore, need to appeal to God to constantly put his angels on alert to minister to us in our moments of need.

### **Recommendations**

Peeping into our discussion so far, we wish to make the following recommendations. In this era of “noise pollution” church leaders should constantly remind their members to spend more time on private and meditative prayers. In such occasions, we believe, God would speak more to them through his good angels. Composed prayers to angels by some Christian denominations should be prayed by their members on daily basis. This would go a long way in helping them in their battles with spiritual forces – spiritual attacks. Christian scholars should write more books and articles on theological or spiritual activities of good angels in the life of Christians. This would help them know more about their (angels) roles in the salvation history of mankind as they daily journey to their heavenly home. Theological institutions and institutions where religious studies are offered should include in their curricula the study of angels. This would avail the students to know and appreciate the numerous roles angels played in creation history and in the life of Jesus Christ and his followers. If the above recommendations and others are effected, the universal church would be richer in spirit, re-enforced than ever to fight the daily demonic attacks and the sufferings many people are facing today, throughout the world.

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The life of Jesus in the New Testament is primarily outlined in the four canonical gospels, which includes his genealogy and nativity, public ministry, passion, resurrection and ascension. Other parts of the New Testament " such as the Pauline epistles which were likely written within 20"30 years of each other, and which include references to key episodes in Jesus' life, such as the Last Supper, and the Acts of the Apostles, (1:1"11) which includes more references to the Ascension episode than the The eyes of the Lord is upon every born again child of God and sets His Angels incharge of them to encamp all about them(see: psalm 103:20)Elisha was encamped by Angels of God all about him in the face of his enemies(2kings 6:13-18)"..every true child of God that has the word of God indwelling in. his heart has the armies of heaven rallying behind him(Rev.19:11-14),if you have Jesus(word of God)in your heart,you have the armies of heaven about you at the command of the word by faith.beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,do not fear,for greater is He who is in you, than he who is. in the world But the angel calms Zechariah's fears, saying: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your supplication has been favorably heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to name him John." Gabriel adds that John "will be great in the sight of Jehovah" and will "get ready for Jehovah a prepared people." "Luke 1:13-17. To Zechariah, that seems unbelievable. To a young unmarried woman named Mary, who lives up north in the region called Galilee, in the city of Nazareth. What does the angel tell her? He says: "You have found favor with God." Gabriel goes on to tell Mary: "Look! you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus."