

Date: December 19, 2021

Series: *Christmas Through the Eyes...*

Title: *What the Angels Saw*

Text: 1 Timothy 3:16

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As many of you know, when I was about six years old, I met an angel of God face to face. I've shared this story before, but I felt led to share it again this morning---so here goes.

At the time, my family lived in Seaford, Delaware where my dad pastored Grace Baptist Church. The parsonage provided for us was actually a farmhouse owned by a church member. We Adams' children were permitted to go anywhere on the farm we wished--except inside the BARN because the farmer stored his equipment there and he was afraid we might be injured.

Of course, being told NOT to do something makes you want to do it and we couldn't resist the lure of that barn, so we broke that rule all the time. It was such a fun place to explore and there was no better place to play hide-and-seek!

One day some friends from out of town came to visit. They had two sons about the same age of my brother Jon and I, and we thought it would be a great adventure to show these boys the inside of THE FORBIDDEN BARN. So, when our parents weren't looking, we headed off and had great fun showing our guests around the loft and all the barn's various hiding places. We also showed them all the tractors and harvesting equipment on the main floor.

There was one piece of equipment stored there that was made up of several huge rectangles, each of which had dozens of 10" curved steel spikes. When these panels were down, the farmer would pull this thing with a tractor and it would tear up the ground to make it ready for plowing and/or planting. When it was not in use, each of these rectangles of spikes would be folded up with the spikes protruding out, horizontal to the ground with their steel fingers curved upward toward the sky.

Well, I was showing off for our guests, walking along the "hitch" like on a tight-rope or balance beam, when for some reason, the hitch suddenly sprang upward, throwing me through the air like a projectile from a catapult. I landed impaled on one of those spikes. It entered my right side just below my rib cage. I was dangling in midair with my feet about 6 feet above the ground.

My brother and the other boys ran immediately into the house to get help. And even though it's been a little over 60 years, I distinctly remember what happened next. I hung there disoriented for a few moments. Then when I realized what had happened I became very afraid and at that moment, an angel appeared and hovered in midair to my right. The first thing he did was calm me down. I don't know if he used the words "*Do not be afraid*" but when I saw him all my fear just evaporated and I went from fear to experiencing that peace that passes understanding.

Then the angel told me very specifically---step-by-step---how to get down. You see, I was stuck in the middle of row after row of these steel fingers. I remember wanting to get down to my left because it was closest to the exit. But the angel told me not to do that. Instead, he helped lift me off the spike and told me step-by-step how to get through all the spikes on that panel and then the other spike panels that were to the right. Then he helped me down to the ground. I stumbled through the exit and across the yard. My dad came running from the house and picked me up. When he saw the wound in my side, he rushed me to the hospital. These were the days before 911.

I obviously survived. After a week in the hospital I came home as good as new. Later, my father told me that when the doctors examined me they were amazed. The spike that entered my chest missed my heart by about a quarter inch but somehow my lung had not been pierced. It had just miraculously "moved over."

Of course, I'm much closer to Heaven than I was back then and when I get there, I'm going to find that angel because I want to hear more about what happened that day. I want to get HIS perspective on this particular crisis I faced early on

in my life. I share this story because in essence that's what we are doing this morning. We are looking at the angels' perspective; on not A crisis, but THE crisis of sin; the crises that is faced by all humanity. I want to try and see what the angels saw that Christmas night when Jesus was born--born to SAVE us from our sin.

But, we're going to look at MORE than that night. Similar to what we did with Mary, we're going to use the Bible to look at all the times the Angels saw Jesus--from the beginning of time until the end.

Our text is just one verse, too short for me to ask you to stand. It's 1st Timothy 3:16 where it says:

1 Timothy 3:16

**16 - "Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He [JESUS] appeared in the flesh was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, [and] was taken up in glory."**

Now, most scholars think this verse was part of a hymn sung by the first Christian believers. And since the third line of this hymn is a statement about the birth and the coming of our Lord, I think it would be okay for us to think of it as a Christmas carol, probably one of the earliest Christmas carols ever written. I want us to focus on one verse of this old carol the words that say Jesus, "**was seen by angels.**"

I mean, that brings a question to mind--namely: what did they see when they SAW Jesus? Before we answer that question, let's look to the Bible for some basic information about angels.

I want us to do this because to fully understand their perspective on Jesus' coming we need to have the right perspective on these heavenly beings--a Biblically-based perspective. And the sad fact is many people don't have that. I mean, there is a lot of nonsense out there in regards to angels. And without an accurate, authoritative, understanding of angels, we can become susceptible to the influence of the FALLEN ANGEL. Remember in His Word God warns us of this saying, "**Satan himself MASQUERADES as an angel of light.**" (2nd Corinthians 11:14)

And our adversary has done this often. Down through the ages the Devil has scored some of his greatest triumphs in the guise of angels.

For example:

In the year 610 the religion of Islam was born when Muhammad received the contents of the Koran in a series of visions from someone he believed to be the angel Gabriel.

Twelve centuries later the deceptive sect known as Mormonism arose when a supposed angel called "Moroni" led Joseph Smith to write the Book of Mormon.

I think it was this particular danger that motivated Paul to caution the Galatian believers against "**even an angel from Heaven**" coming to preach another "**gospel.**" (Galatians 1:8)

My point is, not all that purports to be angelic is Christian. Some people actually teach that we should worship angels and that is completely contrary to the Bible's teaching. In Colossians 2:18 Paul speaks against "**anyone who delights in...the worship of angels.**" In the next verse he warned that people who do this are no longer spiritually whole for they have "**...lost connection with [Christ, Who is] the Head.**" (Colossians 2:19)

Of course, the sight of angels IS awe-inspiring beyond what we can imagine but we must be careful because it is easy for that awe to lead us down the road to worship. Even the Apostle John failed in this area. Late in his life, while in exile on the island of Patmos, he was given the visions recorded in the book of Revelation — visions filled with angels. After one ecstatic scene of heavenly worship at the wedding supper of the Lamb recorded in Revelation 19, an angel turned to John and asked him to write these words:

***“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” The angel then added, “These are the true words of God.”*** At once, John ***“fell at his feet to worship”*** this angel and the angel’s rebuke was quick. In Revelation 19:10 he says, ***“Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus...do not worship me. Worship God!”***

So, here’s a few things the Bible tells us about angels.

- They have the ability to change their appearance and shuttle in a flash from the capital glory of Heaven to Earth and back again.
- According to the Bible, angels are a CREATED class of beings.

They are not spiritually progressed humans, as some false teachers have said. People don’t “evolve” or transform into angels when they die. One popular children’s book on angels includes this quote: *“Heaven is a place where girls get turned into angels...and then God tries to do the best He can with the boys.”* Well, that’s cute but the Bible never says anything like this. In fact, Romans 8:29 says, it is the destiny of Christians not to turn into angels but to be ***“conformed to the likeness of God’s Son.”*** (Romans 8:29)

Here’s some more basic info:

- Angels are non-material. Hebrews 1:14 calls them ***“ministering SPIRITS.”*** Angels don’t possess physical bodies although they may take them on when God appoints them to special tasks, as He did when He sent the three angels to speak with Abraham in Genesis 18.
- The Bible also teaches that angels have no ability to reproduce and neither marry, nor are given in marriage, and that makes sense because in the Bible angels are always male.
- Angels are very powerful beings which is why, as the shepherds learned, ***“Fear not”*** is what they usually say when they reveal themselves to people. But these beings are incredibly powerful as these examples in Scripture show. Three angels had the God-given ability to blind ALL the men of Sodom. Another was strong enough to move a four-ton stone from the entrance to the tomb of Jesus. Exodus 14 records that an angel held off the entire army of the Pharaoh of Egypt at bay. Another killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. So they are powerful---but not ALL-powerful.
- Nor are they ALL-KNOWING. 1st Peter 1:12 says that ***“angels long to look into these things.”*** ---which tells us that angels don’t know all things. Only God is all-knowing and all-powerful and that leads to something else to point out:
- Angels are not omni-present. God is--angels aren’t. We know this because God had to SEND them to certain places to do His will—like He sent that angel to help me years ago.
- We also know that some angels rebelled against God. They followed Satan and fell--they lost their position in Heaven.

But these fallen angels are not our focus. Today we are looking at the angels who did not rebel; that’s who our question refers to, What did THOSE angels see? And as I seek to share answers to this question, I want you to know that I am indebted to a pastor named Colin Smith in a message he posted on Preaching Today.

One thing Smith rightly points out is that:

#### 1.) **The angels saw Jesus in HEAVEN.**

As we remember this time every year, Jesus was born in a stable that first Christmas night, but that was not the beginning of His existence. No, Jesus has always existed. Of course, that’s not true of us---we didn’t exist until we were conceived in our mother’s womb. For each of us, there was a time when we were not. I counted back nine months from my birthday and figured that my existence started sometime in mid-December in the year 1953. But not Jesus. He existed BEFORE He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. John 1:1 says, ***“In the beginning (that had no beginning) was the WORD [JESUS] and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God.”*** Then referring to shortly after Gabriel’s visit to Mary--- it says, ***“The WORD became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”***

But even before that, before He became flesh, we see Jesus in the Scriptures. He appeared to Joshua before the battle of Jericho. He appeared in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego. Many people believe Jesus was Melchizedek, the priest Abraham met.

My point is before time began, Jesus existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is eternal. In fact, in Colossians 1:16 it says, ***“In Him all things were created: things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. Jesus is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”***

Note that Jesus’ creative power includes, ***“things in Heaven.”*** So Jesus created the angels which tells us that like you and me angels had a beginning. The Bible doesn’t tell us about the creation of angels but we know this: for angels the first moments of their consciousness would have been moments when they were aware of the presence and glory of the Son of God. He brought them into being. Just as He said, ***“Let there be light”*** ---at some point He said, ***“Let there be angels.”***

Do you remember what the prophet Isaiah saw in his vision of Heaven? In Isaiah 6 he says, ***“This is what I saw. I saw the Lord, and He was seated on a throne.” (vs 1)*** And in his gospel John tells us a little more about Isaiah’s vision. In John 12:41 he says, ***“What Isaiah saw was Jesus and His glory.”*** Isaiah also describes the angelic activity around the throne as they cry out to one another, ***“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.”*** (Verse 3)

So, before the Son of God entered our world nine months prior to that Christmas night, He was the very center of the adoration and worship of angels. This part of the angels’ perspective is a reminder that Jesus has always existed. If you’re thinking, ***“Cool---but so what?”*** Here’s the ***“so what.”***

Since Jesus has always existed, He has always known and loved you and me. Jesus has loved us since before we were born, as David puts it, ***“before He formed us in our mother’s womb.”*** (Psalm 139)

Here’s something else the angels saw:

## 2.) **The angels saw Jesus in the MANGER.**

Now, try and imagine how that must have looked to the angels. In Heaven, about 9-months B.C., this same Jesus, Whom Isaiah saw seated on His throne in Heaven, rises from His throne, and then He disappears from view. Then, to the angels’ utter amazement---the eternal Son of God, Who was God and Was with God, and IS God---is found conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and then is born as a tiny helpless human infant.

Do you remember how Yancey words it?

***“God, Who came to earth, came not in a raging whirlwind nor in a devouring fire. Unimaginably, the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down---so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg, barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape---enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager.”***

The words of an old Charles Wesley hymn come to mind: ***“Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.”*** Jesus---The Word---became flesh and dwelt among us for a little while. The angels saw what we could not--they saw the glory of God and our human flesh united in such a way that the two became one. No wonder the angels appeared in a multitude and praised God and said,

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”*** (Luke 2:14)

It was as if they were saying to the shepherds and to all humanity:

***“Do you realize Who has come to you? Do you realize the Gift you’ve been given? We’ve been worshiping the Christ in the glory of Heaven, and now He’s taken your flesh! Do you realize the favor of God that rests upon you in the coming of His Son? Glory to God in the highest!”***

Perhaps this angelic perspective will help us do that--help us realize the INDESCRIBABLE GIFT Jesus was and is?

The next time the angels saw Jesus was...

### 3.) The angels saw Jesus in the DESERT.

After His baptism the Bible tells us that Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. While there He fasted forty days and forty nights, and just like us when we miss a meal, He was hungry.

At this point Satan came to Him and began his tempting. First, he said, *“You are the Son of God, aren’t You? So why should You have to deal with hunger? You’ve taken this human flesh, and human beings are hungry when they go without food, but why should You have to deal with that? You’ve got the power to turn these stones into fresh-baked bread. Doesn’t that make Your mouth water? Hey---You could even conjure up some fresh butter to slather all over that hot bread. So why don’t You do it? Why be hungry? Why be so serious about this incarnation thing? You don’t have to experience ALL these humans experience. Go ahead. Turn the stones into bread.”*

As you know, Satan went on to other temptations, each suggesting that our Lord avoid aspects of the incarnation. Like panic attacks so often do--these temptations came in waves. My point is we must not make the mistake of underestimating how hard it was for our Lord to go through these forty days. I mean, this was not easy for Jesus--in no way was it a cake walk for our Lord.

We know by experience that temptation is hard to resist, especially in those times when we are exhausted physically or emotionally. Most of our temptations come from our sinful nature, our fallen flesh. But for Jesus it was far worse. He was tempted by Satan himself---for nearly six weeks---at every point as we are, and Jesus never gave in. He never crossed the line into sin; not in thought, not in deed. Our Lord encountered the full force of all that the enemy could throw at Him and emerged the victor; a tired victor but a victor.

And then, as Matthew 4:11 says when the Devil left Him, ***“the angels came and attended Him.”***

Think of it, the Son of God Who created all things, Who can overthrow all evil by the breath of His mouth—which He will do when He returns in the Second Coming---Almighty God made flesh limited Himself to facing evil like we do, as a man, such that He was reduced to complete exhaustion to the point that Angels came and ministered to Him. Doesn’t that help you to know that Jesus really DOES understand what life is like for us?

This week I read that during the 2018 Soccer World Cup in Russia there was a dramatic spike in the use of the app: Google Translate. Fans needed to strike up conversations with their hosts and fellow fans from around the world, so they used this popular app on their smartphones. It looks like those old traditional printed phrasebooks are on the way out. In fact, a recent survey found that nearly two-thirds of 16 to 34-year-olds now rely on translation apps to help communicate with people who speak other languages.

But while such apps are getting better, they’re still not totally reliable. One-fifth of those surveyed said they experienced misunderstandings while on vacation because of mistranslations on their phone. For example, the people who live in Wales complained when a sign that said “Blasting in Progress” was rendered as “Workers Exploding.” Apparently, our smart phones aren’t as smart as they claim to be.

Well, thanks to His incarnation---which angels saw better than us---we can know that Jesus speaks our language. We can know that He understands, He “gets us” for, ***“We do not have a high priest Who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses---but we have One Who has been tempted in every way---just as we are---yet he did not sin.”*** Knowing this we can, ***“approach God’s throne of grace with confidence and receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** (Hebrews 4:15ff)

Isn’t it wonderful to know that our Savior has “been there, done that, bought the T-shirt” so to speak? The next time we read about an appearance of angels in the life of our Lord was when they...

### 4.) The angels saw Jesus in the GARDEN.

Remember? The Gospel writers tell us that on the night of His arrest Jesus wrestled with what He was about to endure. The flesh that had been born of Mary was to be pierced, torn, and He Who had no sin was about to become SIN for us. Jesus knew He was about to endure the wrath of God that WE deserved.

On my first trip to the Holy Land, I visited the Chapel of All Nations. As you can see in this picture, it is built over the rock that tradition says Jesus leaned on as He prayed that night. I remember standing there and suddenly becoming overwhelmed with emotion as I recalled Jesus' words: ***"Father, if You are willing---if it is possible---take this cup from Me..."*** (Luke 22:42) I could easily imagine Jesus kneeling there---agonizing over the Cross---to the point that ***"His sweat became as drops of blood."*** (Luke 22:44)

Listen, this image SHOULD move us because no greater pain has ever been experienced on any level than the hell of Christ suffering as He knelt there. Tim Keller illustrates it this way:

*"If after a service some Sunday morning one of the members of my church comes to me and says, 'I never want to see you or talk to you again,' I will feel pretty bad. But if today my wife comes up to me and says, 'I never want to see you or talk to you again,' that's a lot worse. The longer the love, the deeper the love, the greater the torment of its loss. But in the Garden this forsakenness, this loss, was between the Father and the Son, Who had loved each other from all eternity. Jesus, the Maker of the world, was being unmade. Why? Jesus was experiencing Judgment Day. 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' wasn't a rhetorical question. And the answer is: For you, for me, for us. Jesus was forsaken by God so that we would never have to be. The judgment that should have fallen on us fell instead on Jesus."*

Luke tells us that, knowing there was no other way for us to be saved---loving us to the very end---Jesus prayed, ***"Yet not My will, but Yours be done."*** And when He prayed, ***"An angel from Heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him."*** (Luke 22:43)

Think of that. As God Jesus did not need the strength of angels; angels worshiped Him for His unlimited power. But now in these moments of His agony once again---as in the desert---roles are in essence reversed as an angel strengthens his Creator. Think of it, what was it like for that angel to hear the voice of God say, ***"Go, strengthen My Son,"*** and then for that angel to gaze into the eyes of the One He had worshiped in eternity past and to see in those eyes the agony of Gethsemane?

The next Biblical reference to the angels seeing Jesus was shortly thereafter when...

##### 5.) **The angels saw Jesus on the CROSS.**

We know they watched because when He was arrested Jesus said as much. Remember, He said, ***"Don't you know I could call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"*** (Matthew 26:53) What did the angels think as they heard Jesus say that? What did they think when they saw Jesus being accused by that crowd in front of Pilate? What must have gone through their minds as they saw the mocking worship of the soldiers as they put a purple cloth on His back, and a reed in His hands as a scepter and said, ***"Hail the King of the Jews!"***

When they saw that crown of thorns being weaved, they must have thought, ***"Surely they won't put that on His head!"*** What did they think when they did and blood began to flow down Jesus' head? What did those powerful beings think about humanity as they watched us nail Jesus to a cross? I'm thinking they must have been straining to leave Heaven and intervene but they were not given permission to do so because the cross was the plan. Jesus is ***"the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world."*** (Revelation 13:8) That's why Jesus was born that first Christmas night. He was born to take away the sin of the world, He was born to be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for my iniquity, He came into this world knowing that only His punishment would bring all of us peace.

And remember, angels understand punishment. They had seen it firsthand when some of their own rebelled against God. They saw that these fallen angels were immediately judged, cast out of Heaven, thrown into outer darkness where they await their final destruction. I mean, when the angels sinned, there was no mercy; but they saw---see---that to us God's mercies are new every morning.

My point is that on the cross these Heavenly beings saw firsthand how much God loves you and me, they saw God demonstrate His love in that, ***“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Romans 5:8)

The Angels also saw...

#### 6.) **The angels saw Jesus at the RESURRECTION.**

The Bible tells us that after His death Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb of a believer named Joseph of Arimathea. Then three days later the angels were there again, watching as Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, they had a better view of it than anybody else. Matthew 28 says that there was a violent earthquake. ***“For an angel of the Lord came down from Heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.”***

Isn't that a cool image. In my mind the angel sitting there is a picture of defiant victory. The angel is saying, *“Look what just happened to death. This stone that made death like a sealed tomb is now an open door. Christ has come to you. Christ has defeated death for you, and through faith in Jesus, men and women like you, will defeat death and rise.”*

The Bible tells us that forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus ascended back into Heaven.

And once again angels appeared. They said to the apostles: ***“Why are you gazing up into Heaven in this way? This Jesus will come back in the same way in which you have seen Him go.”*** (Acts 1)

That leads us to the final time the Bible records angels seeing Jesus---when...

#### 7.) **The angels will see Jesus at the SECOND COMING.**

The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes back His holy angels will be with Him. I love the vision God gave the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, that peek into what Heaven will be like when all is said and done. John says, ***“I looked and I heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne. And with a loud voice they sang, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor and power and wisdom and strength and glory and praise.’”*** (Revelation 5:11ff)

Here's a little Bible Trivia, did you know that of all the songs in the Book of Revelation, not one is a solo?

- The twenty-four elders sing together as they cast their crowns before His feet.
- The united voices of countless angels join them as does every living creature in heaven and earth and under the earth.
- Those who are victorious over the beast sing. John says their singing is as beautiful as harps playing.

In every case multitudes of people or angels unite in the same song of victory and praise with absolute unity. Knowing that one day this song will be sung--well, it gives us courage to sing it today as we face life's fears and trials.

This week I read that on a balmy October afternoon in back in 1982, Badger Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin, was packed. More than 60,000 die-hard University of Wisconsin supporters were watching their football team take on the Michigan State Spartans. It soon became obvious that MSU had the better team. What seemed odd, however, is that, as the score became more lopsided, there were the bursts of applause and shouts of joy from the Wisconsin fans. How could they cheer when their team was losing? Well, it turns out that seventy miles away the Milwaukee Brewers were beating the St. Louis Cardinals in game three of the 1982 World Series. Many of the fans in those FOOTBALL stands were listening to portable radios and responding to something other than their immediate circumstances. That's an illustration of how we can “sing” when it looks like and feels like we are losing when it comes to the struggles of this life. Our knowledge of the angels' perspective on Christmas tells us that we can “sing” --- we can “cheer” --- because we know something beyond our difficult circumstances is going on.

As Paul puts it in 2nd Corinthians 4: ***“YES---We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...we do not lose heart...for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what***

***is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (8-9, 19)*** We endure because we know Jesus has won the victory and someday we’ll join the angels in singing about it.

So, as our text says, Jesus, ***“appeared in the flesh...was preached among the nations...was believed on in the world, [and] was taken up in glory.”*** What did the angels see? They saw all these things.

You know, one advantage the angels have over us is that they have seen and even now see the face of Jesus. But we have an advantage over them as well because angels have never known what it’s like for a sinner to receive the grace and forgiveness of God. As Peter tells us angels long to look into what it must mean for a human being to be redeemed by Jesus---for He did not come---He did not suffer and die---for angels. He did not assume the form of an angel. His blood was not shed for angels. All this was for us. Hebrews 2:9 says that for a little while Jesus was made like us in that: ***“He became lower than the angels so that He might taste death for everyone.”*** So by assuming our humanity, this Christ lifts us up, higher than the angels. The Bible says that one day, all Christians will be exalted with Jesus Christ. Isn’t that amazing! This is a message that must be shared--we must tell everyone what the angels have seen.

LET’S PRAY