

## Robe of Human Frame

### Hebrews 1

Angels are a source of endless fascination and speculation in our world. Our hymn for this series was written in the fifteenth century, almost six hundred years ago. It was a time when it was somehow easier to believe beings like angels and demons exist. Our focus on science and materialism leads us to not think as much about spiritual things or believe in spiritual beings. But even now, we like to believe that there are spiritual beings whose sole purpose is to serve God and to take care of us.

When we think of angels, we probably think of those adorable little angel figurines with fat cheeks; maybe, if we're old enough, we think of Michael Landon or Roma Downey and Della Reese. We first see angels appear in the Bible in Genesis 3. God places an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. Angels appear as messengers, warriors, guardians, and worshipers and attendants at the throne of God. These biblical angels are not cute and cuddly. They are mighty beings who have been present at every significant event in the life of God's people throughout history. They are not people who died and were issued halos and harps as they entered heaven. They were created before anything else. They are purely spiritual beings. That makes them higher than humanity in some ways, but lower in others.

It should not surprise us, then, that some thought God would send an angel down to be the Messiah. After all, who could be more powerful, more in tune with God's will than His own created servant, the angels?

More than that, people weren't used to having direct access to God and didn't expect God to interact with them directly. Their leaders, their kings used intermediaries, messengers, to speak their words. Gods did the same thing – not working directly with the people, but working through priests and prophets. They had no expectation that God would come down to be with them, that the Messiah would be God in the flesh, God with us.

The flipside of any discussion of God's holy angels and how God uses them includes demons. According to the Scriptures, demons are angels who rebelled against God and His divine will. The leader of these fallen angels is Satan. Satan, which means "accuser," sits in opposition to everything God stands for. We heard about Satan in last Sunday's Gospel lesson from Matthew 4:1–11, the account of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. Just as the angels have been present for so much of God's story, Satan has also been there, lurking and slithering and tempting us away from everything that is good and right and true in this world. His demons act as his messengers, tempting and testing, possessing and oppressing.

So why didn't God use an angel to oppose Satan and undo his evil reign? We get the answer in our reading from Hebrews 1. The second stanza of "O Love, How Deep" sums it up well:

2. He sent no angel to our race,  
Of higher or of lower place,  
But wore the robe of human frame,  
And to this world Himself He came.

One of the most recognized slogans in advertising, “When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best,” was born from a three-by-five-inch notecard. Ed Goodman, a sales and marketing executive at Hallmark, jotted down his thoughts on what Hallmark stood for – caring, quality, the best.

That’s what the Father did in sending Jesus. He sent the very best. He didn’t just send a messenger. He came Himself, in the flesh. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the eternal Word, the heir of all things. It is through Jesus that God created the world (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus is the very voice of God in creation. The whole world was created through Him.

What’s more, Hebrews tells us that He is “the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3).

In other words, if you want to know the Father, know the Son. We could even go a step further and say that the only way to know the Father is through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. As mighty as God’s created angels are, they cannot redeem us from sin. Only the uncreated Son of God can do that.

So, what does it mean, then, that the Son of God became a little child in the womb of Mary? Why does it matter so much? Why is it in so many ways at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian?

In the words of one early Christian pastor, Gregory Nazianzus, “that which he did not assume, he cannot redeem.” In other words, in order for Jesus to save us, body and soul, He had to become one of us. He couldn’t just be a spiritual being like an angel. He had to become

human, with a head and hands and feet and everything in between.

We confess this every year on Trinity Sunday in the Athanasian Creed:

Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.

We have a Savior who is, as the author of Hebrews puts it, a “little while lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:7). Yet He is also the One who governs all things. He is the Lord of all and yet the servant of all. He is both the greatest and the least. He is fully God and fully man. He is the icon, the very image, of God’s love to the world.

What this means for you is that you have a God who does not simply understand your weaknesses. He does not merely “get us,” as the recent ad campaign claims. He is us. He was tempted just as we are, yet without sin. He wasn’t some detached spirit. He was, and is, God in the flesh. Which He did, for us.

We may still be fascinated by angels. But angels don’t attract attention themselves. As the comment goes, angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. They know they aren’t important in and of themselves. They are important because of the messages they carry. They are important because they point us to Jesus and how He came for us.

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