

THE ANGELS OF ADVENT

MATTHEW 2:7-23

GUARDIAN ANGELS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
DECEMBER 20, 2020 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

"Do you believe in guardian angels?" I've been asked that a few times over the years. My answer is, "I believe in guardian angels but not in the way most people believe in them." When most people speak about guardian angels, they are usually speaking of the unbiblical Roman Catholic view of guardian angels, a view often confirmed and caricatured in movies, shows, books, and jokes. It's the view that God has assigned an angel to each believer to protect, guide, serve, and pray for them.

A newly appointed bishop confessed to Pope John XXIII that he could not sleep at night due to an anxiety which was caused by the responsibility of his office. The pope told him, 'You know, I also thought the same when I was elected pope. But one day, I dreamed about my guardian angel, and it told me not to take everything so seriously.'" During the COVID-19 pandemic, Roman Catholics were encouraged to send their guardian angel to mass when unable to attend. The Roman Catholic Catechism says, "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life."

Although most of the beliefs about guardian angels are derived from the Apocrypha, some Reformed theologians have also argued for them on the basis of Matthew 18:10 and Acts 12:15. Most biblical theologians, though, have agreed that God does protect us through angels, but doesn't pair us with a particular angel. As John Calvin put it:

For if the fact that all of the heavenly hosts are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his especial guardian. Indeed, those who confine to one angel the care that God takes of each one of us are doing a great injustice both to themselves and to all the members of the church (Institutes I,xiv,7).

Turning away from superstition and speculation to Matthew chapter 2 we **find security in the angelic army guarding God's Son, God's Word, and God's children.**

CONTEXT

In this advent season, we've been studying the angels of Advent. We've met the teaching angel sent to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), the encouraging angel sent to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-24), and the singing angels sent to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). This week, we meet the guardian angels of Matthew 2:7-23.

Although these passages are not usually covered in Advent season, they are critical to the Lord's coming. Without these guardian angels there would have been no Christ, no Christians, and no Christmas.



Who do the guardian angels guard?



1. THE ANGELS GUARD GOD'S SON

The devil attacks through Herod

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ...And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way (7-8, 12).

Fearing a loss of power to the alleged King of the Jews, Herod attacked Christ twice. First, he tried to get the wise men to do some of his dirty work, by getting them to find baby Jesus then report back to him. He said he wanted to worship him, but his real aim was to kill him. Second, although Herod later died, his son, Archelaus also launched a politically-motivated assault on Jesus.

When [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee (22).

Although Herod and his son attacked Christ, the ultimate attacker behind them was the Devil. As predicted in Genesis 3:15, the Devil tried to kill Christ in order to kill hope for sinners. Throughout the Old Testament, the Devil attacked the Messianic line to prevent the birth of Christ. Having failed to prevent his birth, he launched an all-out attack upon him using government power. We can read more about this behind-the-scenes demonic plot in Revelation 12:1-4.

The angels protect through dreams

Genesis 3:15 did not just predict the devil's hatred and hostility against Christ and his people, but also Christ's victory over the devil for his people. Just as God used angels to defend the Messianic line in the Old Testament, so he used angels to protect the Messiah himself. He sent angels to the wise men and to Joseph through four dreams.

In the first dream, the wise men were **warned in a dream not to return to Herod, [and] they departed to their own country by another way (12)**. Although there is no mention of an angel here, the context leads us to believe that this dream involved angelic intervention. In the previous chapter, an angel encouraged Joseph in a dream (1:20). Two more angels appear in dreams in chapter two (13, 19). Therefore when we read of warnings through dreams, we assume that angels were involved in them.

In the second dream, **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod (13-15)**



In the third dream, **when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel (19-21).**

In the fourth dream, **when [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth (22-23).**

Why such an unprecedented and sustained political and spiritual attack upon such a little baby? Herod feared, wrongly, that a potential King of the Jews would weaken or defeat his political power. The Devil feared, rightly, that the actual King of Kings would not only weaken but destroy his spiritual power.

Most nativity scenes are painted or acted as scenes of great peace and joy. It was that, but it was more than that. It was also the scene of all-out war.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Realize how much the devil hates you.

You can see the real lying and murderous nature of the devil in this story. He uses any instrument—politics, education, the media, the courts, armies, cults, etc.—to accomplish his purpose. That hatred has not changed. What hope do you have, if you don't trust in God's Deliverer? Ask him to crush the devil for you.

Rejoice in how much God loves you.

If you are one of Christ's seed, you participate in his victory over the devil. All of heaven—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, together with the angels—all gather together to secure the salvation of Christ and of Christians. The angels guarded the Savior to guard our salvation.

CHRIST HAD GUARDIAN ANGELS
TO SECURE CHRIST AS OUR GUARDIAN



What else do angels guard?



2. ANGELS GUARD GOD'S WORD

The angels not only guarded God's Son, but God's Word. Motivated not only by love for Christ and love for Christians, but also by love for God's Word, they ensured that every prophecy would be fulfilled.

God called his Son out of Egypt

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (15).

There are 65 formal citations of the Old Testament in Matthew. Eleven of these are called 'fulfillment' citations, and four of them are in Matthew 2. They assert that a New Testament event took place in order to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy.

Verse 15 explains that baby Jesus's flight to, stay in, and return from Egypt took place to fulfill a prophecy made 800 years before in Hosea 11:1. However, there's a 'problem' here. Hosea's 11:1 does not predict a future event. It refers to the long past event of Israel's exodus from Egypt. So, how can Matthew claim that Hosea's backward-looking words were fulfilled many years into the future?

The prophet Hosea was reminding Israel that God's love for them began long before their Exodus from Egypt. God brought them into Egypt to save them from famine. God set them apart in Egypt for their protection (Gen. 46:4), and while there he called them his son (Ex. 4:22-23). Then he brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 12). Hosea was telling Israel, "Just as God showed his love to Israel in the past, he is doing it again. God designed and arranged past events to be predictive of future events.

When Matthew referred to Hosea's words as fulfilled in Jesus, he was saying that the past Exodus event in Israel's history, that was repeated in Hosea's time, is being repeated again. God's sending of Jesus, his special Son, to Egypt, keeping him in Egypt, and delivering him from Egypt was a repeat of God's similar loving protection of his national son, Israel. Like Hosea, Matthew was saying that Israel's history was predictive of their future. God's loving protection of his Son Jesus in, through, and out of Egypt was the greatest example of that.

God called his Son a Nazarene

And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene (23).

Bethlehem, Egypt, Israel, Nazareth. It would seem that this little family are at the mercy of events. However, a closer inspection reveals God's directing and overruling hand. His control and involvement in these events is emphasized by the



three dreams which guide Joseph from place to place (Mat.2:13, 19, 22), the four appearances of an angel with God's message for Joseph (Mat.1:20; 2:13, 19, 22), and the frequent references to events being the fulfillment of prophecy (Mat.2:15, 17-18, 23). So, these changes of location were not haphazard but divinely ordered, not only to protect Christ but to fulfill prophecy.

But, there's a 'problem' with this prophecy too. Nazareth is not even mentioned in the Old Testament, never mind as the predicted home of the Messiah. This is one of the reasons why the Jews had huge difficulties in accepting Christ's Messianic credentials. The solution is to understand that while Matthew is referring to Nazareth as a geographical location, he is also seeing in it a secondary spiritual significance which was predicted not by one prophet in particular, but by the Old Testament in general.

In Numbers 6, God instituted the office of the 'Nazarite,' meaning 'separated one.' This was somebody that God separated from ordinary society to serve him in a special way (e.g. Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist). Although the Nazarite (separation) vow had nothing to do with Nazareth, Matthew sees spiritual significance in Christ growing up in the place whose name has its roots in the same Hebrew word for 'separated.' He was the ultimate 'separated one' who aptly lived in the place of the same name. Christ's forced physical separation in Nazareth pictured his voluntary separation to God's service.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

God's story is perfect. There are no missing paragraphs, no unclosed loops, no plot contradictions. The angels protected God's story and ensured it would be written perfectly so that we could trust in it perfectly. The angel's protected God's Son and God's Separated One so that we could be God's sons and separated to him.

God's angels will look after you. You have far more than one guardian angel. You have the entire army of heaven looking after you, and looking after God's cause and Kingdom. They made sure not one word would fall and fail, and will ensure that not one Christian will fall and fail.

A SAFE AND SEPARATED SON
HAS SAFE AND SEPARATED SONS



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Lord of hosts, continue to send your angels to guide me and guard me from the Devil's lies and the Devil's attacks. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your understanding of guardian angels before this sermon and how has it changed? Why is the Reformed view of guardian angels more comforting than the Roman Catholic view?
2. At what other points in Christ's life do the angels serve him?
3. Read Revelation 12:1-4. What does that 'behind-the-scenes' look tell us about the events of Matthew 2?
4. How do you see the devil using politics to attack God's people today?
5. What kind of Christian experiences in your life do you believe involved angels?
6. "We don't pray to angels for protection, but we pray for angels to protect us." Why is it important to believe this?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net
www.whyamifeelinglikethis.com