

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Study
"Angels, Angels Everywhere"

XI. Angels and Worship

We can be tempted to misunderstand the ministry of angels. Instead of seeing angels as servants of God for our benefit, we may be intimidated by the glimpse of God's glory that we see in the presence of His angels and then make them the objects of our worship. In this lesson we will see briefly how other religions teach about angels, where the Bible warns us against worshipping angels, and how we properly refer to angels in our worship, especially in our hymns.

A. *Angels in World Religions*

1. Judaism- Many references to angels are found in Jewish writings such as the Talmud (how the rabbis taught Jewish law). According to the Talmud, each Jewish person is assigned 11,000 guardian angels at his or her birth.
2. Hinduism- The main religion of India, Hinduism, mixes angels in with its pantheon of gods. It can be difficult to keep angels and gods separate from one another and from nature itself. Good angels are identified with the planets. Evil angels are tied to the seven deadly sins. In a religion where god has 100,000 faces, where rivers are sacred, where cows are worshiped, and where people supposedly live many lives through reincarnation, there is little room left for the ministry of angels. This confusion of angels with gods is seen in American offshoots of Hinduism like the New Age Movement, Transcendental Meditation and Yoga.
3. Islam- Islam sees itself as the fulfillment of Judaism and Christianity teaching that Moses, David and Jesus were prophets of the true god, Allah. They say that the final prophet was Mohammed (AD 570-632). Muslims believe that an angel revealed the *Koran*, their holy book, to him. Then Mohammed believed that he was possessed by demons until the angel Jibril (sounds like ???), saved him from taking his own life and confirmed Mohammed's prophetic office. The Koran mentions Mikal (sounds like ???) as the angel of food and knowledge, Izrail (sounds like ???) as the angel of death, and Isafal as the angel who places souls in bodies and sounds the last trumpet. Islam teaches that there are four archangels, with Jibril being the only one mentioned by name. There are also female angels who inhabit Muslim paradise and provide delight to male Muslims. Muslims believe that everyone is assigned two recording angels at birth. One records a person's good deeds and the other records a person's evil deeds. At the end of one's life those lists are compared to determine where that person will spend eternity. Islamic tradition also says that there is an angel in every raindrop.
4. Mormonism- The basic belief of Mormonism is that souls are pre-existent. They take on human bodies in the attempt to become gods of their own planets by virtue of their good works on earth. Since there are as many gods as there are good Mormons, there is little place for angels in their theology. There is, however, one well-known "angel" in this religion. This is Moroni. In Mormon teaching Moroni is a resurrected person from a race of people killed off over 1500 years ago. Joseph Smith says that it was this "angel" who led him to the buried golden plates from which Smith claims to have translated into English *The Book of Mormon*. Moroni's statue is at the top of the Mormon temple in St. Louis County.

B. *Biblical Warnings Against the Worship of Angels*

How do these Bible passages warn us against our worshipping of angels?

Deuteronomy 5:7-10; 6:4 _____ **Matthew 4:8-10** _____

Colossians 2:16-19 _____ **1 Timothy 2:5-7** _____

Revelation 19:9-10 _____ **Revelation 22:8-9** _____

C. *The Lutheran Confessions Warn Us Against the Worship of Angels*

Based upon the Bible's warnings against the worship of angels, the early Christian church up through the papacy of Gregory the Great (who died in AD 604) condemned this practice. However, during the Middle Ages the popular piety of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox segments of the church included the worship of angels in the faith life of the people.

The Smalkald Articles, Part II, Article II, "The Mass"

The Roman Catholic opponents of Martin Luther appealed to the church fathers and tradition instead of to the Bible in their attempt to refute the reformers' teaching of the Christian faith. Luther responded in this way (referring to Galatians 1:8) in this document he prepared for what he thought would be an upcoming church council: "It will not do to formulate articles of faith on the basis of the holy Fathers' works or words. Otherwise, their food, clothes, houses, etc., would also have to be articles of faith—as has been done with relics. This means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith."

(later in the same section) "Although the angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ Himself also does), and in the same way also the saints on earth and perhaps those in heaven pray for us, it does not follow from this that we ought to invoke angels and saints; pray to them; keep fasts and hold festivals for them; celebrate Masses, make sacrifices, establish churches, altars or worship services for them; serve them still in other ways; and consider them as helpers in time of need, assign all kinds of assistance to them, and attribute a specific function to particular saints, as the papists teach and do. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone."

D. *The Proper Place of Angels in Our Worship*

The service of angels in the Christian church is not to be exaggerated. Yet, neither is it to be ignored. The Christian Church has set aside September 29 in the church year calendar as a day to thank God for the work of His angels. This day is called St. Michael and All Angels. We refer to angels in our worship during the celebration of Holy Communion as we use these words of the Proper Preface, "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name evermore praising You and saying..." (followed by our singing of the Sanctus from Isaiah 6).

There are references to angels in many hymns. Which portion of the church year hymns do you expect have the most references to angels? _____ Some examples (by no means an exhaustive list) from *Lutheran Service Book* are: 356 "The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came," 358 "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," 361 "O Little Town of Bethlehem," 366 "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear," 367 "Angels From the Realms of Glory," 368 "Angels We Have Heard on High," 379 "O Come, All Ye Faithful," 380 "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," 491 "Up Through Endless Ranks of Angels," 507 "Holy, Holy, Holy," **520 "Stars of the Morning, So Gloriously Bright,"** **521 "Christ, the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken,"** **522 "Lord God, to Thee We Give All Praise,"** 549 "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," 670 "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones," 695 "Not For Tongues of Heaven's Angels," 812 "Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs," 826 "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying," 940 "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," and 960 "Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old." There were about 85 hymns with angel references in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

Luther's Morning Prayer: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Next Lesson: Angels at the Time of Death and Judgment