

The Angels and the Ascension

I. The Parabolic Prelude

- a. Luke 15:3 *Then Jesus told them this parable: 4“What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the pasture and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, 6comes home, and calls together his friends and neighbors to tell them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep!’ 7In the same way, I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous ones who do not need to repent.*
- b. Luke 15:8 *Or what woman who has ten silver coins and loses one of them does not light a lamp, sweep her house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors to say, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin.’ 10In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”*
- c. Gregory Nazianzus shows Christ entering into heaven after having recovered the lost sheep and the Lost Drachma and calling together the angels to share his joy.
- d. There is a whole tradition, with Ireneaus as its first witness, but actually going back much further which sees the lost sheep as human beings, and flock which the Good Shepherd to set out in search of the sheep as the world of the angels. Origen sets it forth and Methodius of Philippi writes: “We must see the ninety-nine sheep as a representation of the Powers, Principalities and Dominations whom the Head and Shepherd has left behind to go down and seek out the one lost sheep.” Gregory of Nyssa adds: “We mankind, are the lost sheep...and have strayed from the other spiritual creates [i.e. the angels].

II. The Picture and processional of the Ascension

- a. John 1:50 *Jesus said to Nathaniel, “Do you believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51Then He declared, “Truly, truly, I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*
- b. Chrysostom says this is the behavior of those who want to see the unheard-of spectacle of man appearing in heaven.
- c. Eusebius, and also Chrysostom, Justin and Athanasius says, “The virtues of heaven, seeing him begin to rise and surround him to form an escort proclaiming his ascension as they cried: Rise up eternal gates and the King of glory will enter!” Gregory of Nyssa adds, that at first the higher angels do not recognize Christ since he has put on the poor tunic of humanity and because his garments were stained with blood. And herein comes a questioning and wondering dialogue back and forth:

- i. Psalm 24:7 *Lift up your heads, O gates! Be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may enter! 8Who is this King of Glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9Lift up your heads, O gates! Be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may enter!*
- ii. (Isaiah 63:1-3) *Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah with crimson-stained garments? Who is this robed in splendor, marching in the greatness of His strength? "It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." 2 Why are Your clothes red, and Your garments like one who treads the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone,*
- d. And this presence of the angels is attested to in the Scripture:
 - i. *They watched as He was taken up, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. 10They were looking intently into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:9-10*
- e. Eusebius also cites Psalm 47:
 - i. *God ascends amid shouts of joy, the LORD with the sound of trumpets. 6Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises! 7For God is King of all the earth; sing profound praises to Him. 8God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne. 9The nobles of the nations have assembled as the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of the earth belong to God; He is highly exalted.*

III. The Praises of the Angels

- a. St. Paul speak of their adoration:
 - i. Phil 2:9-10 *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
- b. Chrysostom says:
 - i. *Today we are raised up into heaven, we who seemed unworthy even of earth. [In Christ, and as members of his Body] We are exalted above the heavens; we arrive at the kingly throne. The nature which caused the Cherubim to keep God over paradise is seated today above the Cherubim. Was not such a glory beyond all expression? But he rose above the angels, he passed the cherubim, he went higher than the Seraphim, he bypassed the Thrones. He didn't stop until He arrived at the very throne of God."*
 - ii. *This is really a commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews: "He has taken his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Having become much superior to the angels as he has inherited a more excellent name than they." (Hebrews 1:3-4).*

- c. Hebrews says
 - i. (Heb 1:3-4) He has taken his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. 4So He became as far superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is excellent beyond theirs. 5For to which of the angels did God ever say: “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father”
 - ii. (Heb 2: 5-8) For it is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6But somewhere it is testified in these words: “What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You care for him? 7You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor 8and placed everything under his feet.
- d. And the true mystery of the Ascension is the exaltation of human nature above all the worlds of the Angels.
- e. And hence the angels are astonished.
- f. Man returns to God, but is now exulted!
- g. The Ascension is the counterpart of the Fall.
- h. Is this why Satan rebelled?

The Angels and the Church

- I. The angels and Paradise.
 - a. Throughout the tradition the sin of the angels was their refusal to recognize the dignity of Adam and Eve created in the Image of God. Satan in particular became envious of Man and induced him to sin.
 - b. For many of the Fathers Satan and St Thomas, was the chief Guardian angel of the Earth (An Archangel) who grew jealous of man at his appearance on earth. How could some one beneath him be in the image of God. He utterly rejected the notion of the incarnation and the exultation of Man and brought other angels down with him.
 - c. Opposed to this envy of the wicked angels toward Adam and Even were the good angels.
- II. The Church is the Body of Christ. He gathers lost and straying humanity and joining them to his body, he unites us to himself. The good angels rejoice in this.
 - a. The fathers especially see them as the “Friend of the Bridegroom” who have helped arrange the wedding by instructing the bride.
 - b. Gregory of Nyssa connects the angels to those who awaited their master’s return from a wedding.
 - i. [The Highest Angels] awaited the Lord’s return from His Marriage Feast, keeping close to the gates of heave, constantly watching for him so that they would be ready to open the gates for the Lord when he came from his Wedding feast.
 - c. The preparation of the Wedding was the role of the angels in the OT.
 - d. Now they assist in the wedding chamber of the Sacraments.