

Angels

"The [guardian] angel will not retreat from us, unless we drive him away by our evil deeds. As the smoke drives bees away, and stench the doves, even so our stinking sin drives away from us the angel who protects our life."

Saint Basil the Great

What Does Angel Mean?

The word "angel" means "messenger" and this word expresses the nature of angelic service to the human race.

Created Long before Humans

Saint John of Damascus tells us: "God is Himself the Maker and Creator of the angels; for He brought them out of nothing into being and created them after His own image. They are an incorporeal race, a sort of spirit or immaterial fire, even as the divine David says that ' His angels are spirits , and His ministers a flame of fire (Ps 103:6).

Angels were among the first part of God's creation. In the Creed we say, "We believe in one God...Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. Holy Scripture says, "When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice" (Job 38:7, LXX). The Apostle Paul tells us "By Him all things created that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Col 1:16). Heaven that was created in the very beginning according to Genesis is generally understood by the Fathers to be an invisible heaven inhabited with powers on High. They believed that God created the angels long before He created the visible world.

How Do We Know Angels Exist?

How do we know angels exist? We have proof in the Bible of many interactions between angels and humans. Here is a look at how they interacted with humans in the Old Testament.

Mankind knew about the existence of angels from their first days in Paradise. From Genesis we know that a Cherubim was placed with a flaming sword at the gates of Paradise after Adam and Eve were expelled. Later, Abraham encouraged his servant Nahor telling him that the Lord would send His angel with him to protect him. (Gen 34:7). Jacob saw angels during his sleep and while awake. (Gen 32:1-2).

Here is the interaction of angels with humans in the New Testament. In the time of the New Testament Archangel Gabriel advised the Virgin Mary the Theotokos of the birth of Jesus. Angels announced the good news to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus and prevented the Magi from returning to Herod. Angels served Jesus after His temptation in the wilderness and appeared to strengthen Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was angels who informed the Myrrh-bearing Women about His Resurrection. Angels informed the Apostles of His second coming as the time of His ascension into heaven. Angels help the apostles - they freed Peter from

prison and instructed Cornelius. They told Paul to appear before Caesar. And angels are the foundation of the revelations given by John in his book of the Revelation.

Nature of Angels

Angels are active spirits with intelligence, will and knowledge. They serve God to carry out His will and glorify Him. The angels are bodiless and invisible to our physical eyes. They have no bodily needs or desires and passions, no cares about food, drink, clothes or shelter. They neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). They have no worries about the future either, and no fear of death. For, though God created them before man, they are neither aged nor aging, but unchangingly youthful, beautiful and strong. They have no anxiety about their salvation and no struggle for immortality, being already immortal (Luke 20:36). Unlike men, they are not faltering between good and evil, being already good and holy as when God created them.

Peter informs us that in their might and power they surpass all earthly governments and authorities (II Peter 2:10-11). But as created beings they have limitations. They do not know the depths of the essence of God (I Cor 2:11). They do not know the future that only God knows (Mark 13:32). They do not fully understand the mystery of the Redemption yet they wish to (I Peter 1:12).

Number and Ranks of Angels

They are an extraordinary number of angels. In the book of Daniel it says, "thousand thousands ministered unto Him and the thousand times ten thousand stood before Him" (Daniel 7:10). And in Luke it is recorded that "a multitude of the heavenly host" praised our Lord (Luke 2:13).

We can only assume that with such a number there differing degrees of perfection among their ranks. In Scripture we see some called angels and others archangels

The Tradition of the Orthodox Church teaches us that there is a Heavenly Hierarchy of angels. The angelic world is divided into nine ranks made up of three hierarchies with three ranks each.

• Thrones, Cherubims, and Seraphim - those closest to God.

The **Seraphim** (Means flaming) are aflame with love for God and kindle others to such love. They are closest to God as the prophet Isaiah saw, saying: "And the seraphim stood around Him, each having six wings" (Isaiah 6:2). They are fire-like, "For our God is a consuming fire." (Heb 12:29); "His throne was a flame of fire" (Dan 7:9), "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps 103:4).

After the seraphim, are the many-eyed **Cherubim** (Means Great understanding) who are radiant with the knowledge of the mysteries of God and the depths of His Wisdom. Through the cherubim wisdom is sent down to others and spiritual enlightenment is given to see of God and gain knowledge of Him.

Next are the **Thrones**. On them God intellectually resides. Residing on them in an incomprehensible manner, God makes His righteous judgment, according to the word of David: "Thou hast sat upon a throne, O Thou that judgest righteousness." (Ps 9:4). They serve His

justice, glorifying it and pouring out the power of justice onto the thrones of earthly judges, helping kings and masters to bring forthright judgment.

• **Dominions Virtues and Powers**

The **Dominions** dominate the rest of the angels. They send down power for prudent governing and wise management to authorities on the earth set up by God. Further they teach how to control the senses, how to subdue in oneself dissolute desires and passions, how to enslave the flesh to the spirit, and how to rule over one's will and be above all temptations.

The **Virtues (Authorities)** work miracles and send down the grace of miracle-working to those worthy of such grace, so they may work miracles. They help people laboring and those overburdened by troubles and they bear the infirmities of the weak. They also strengthen every man in patience.

The **Powers** have power over the devil, to restrain the demons, to repulse the temptations brought upon people by them. They help those wrestling with passions and vices to cast out evil thoughts.

• **Angels, Archangels, and Principalities - those closest to Man**

The **Principalities** direct the lower angels. They are entrusted with the management of the universe and the keeping of all the kingdoms and princedoms, of lands and all peoples, races and nations. They raise worthy people to various honorable offices and direct them so that they take power for the sake of spreading and augmenting of God's holy glory, and for the sake of the benefit of their neighbors.

The **Archangels** are the heralds of good news. They reveal prophecies, knowledge, and understanding of God's will which they receive from the higher orders of angels and announce to the lower order. They strengthen people in faith, enlightening their mind with the light of knowledge of the holy Gospel and revealing the mysteries of devout faith.

The **Angels** are the lowest of all the orders and the closest to man. They announce the lesser mysteries and intentions of God and teach people to live virtuously and righteously before God. They are appointed to guard each of us who believe.

All of the heavenly orders are also called by the common name "angels". Although they have different names according to their situation and grace given by God (as seraphim, cherubim, thrones and the rest of the orders), yet all in general are called angels, because the word "angel" is not a denomination of essence, but of service, as it is written: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister" (Heb 1:14). But their service is different and not identical: each order has its own service

In the Coptic Orthodox tradition the seven archangels are named as Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Suriel, Zadakiel, Sarathiel and Ananiel.

Ministry of the Angels

Angels were created as the most perfect reflections of His grandeur and glory. Angels that are closest in rank to humans are seen in Scripture as heralds of God's will, guides, and servants of an individual's salvation. Some angels are appointed for the governance of the heavens and the world. Others continually glorify God.

Guardian Angel

The Orthodox Church believes that each person is assigned a guardian angel.

It was originally from the Jews that the Church inherited this belief in the ministry of the Guardian Angels. The Psalmist had declared, "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalms 34 [33]:7). And again, "He will give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (91 [90]:11)

We believe that you receive a guardian angel when you are baptized.