

THE ESSAY (PART I) DELIVERED AT THE SIXTY-FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION

by

The Rev. Edward J. Worley, Pastor • St. Luke's Lutheran Church • Seattle, Washington

Christ, Our Divine Prophet — *“The Angel of the Lord”* in the Old Testament

Introduction

Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, is our Divine Prophet, and taught from His own direct knowledge. In John 1:18 we are told: *“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”* He taught what He had seen and heard (John 3:32), declaring the grace and truth of God (John 1:17-18). In so doing, Christ revealed Himself as the Son of God and the only Savior and Redeemer of lost mankind. *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:14-15). *“Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28). Christ also directed all men to *“search the Scriptures,”* the Old Testament, declaring that Moses wrote of Him (John 5:39, 46). Part I of our convention essay will examine the Old Testament work of the pre-incarnate Christ as our divine Prophet.

In the Old Testament the term *“Angel of the Lord”* occurs 65 times. The Hebrew noun *ma • LACH*, usually translated *angel*, is similar to the Greek noun *ángelos*, and as far as the root meaning is concerned both mean *messenger*. As such, the Hebrew noun may be used of created angels, human messengers, and the unique and extraordinary divine Messenger, the pre-incarnate Christ.

How does one determine whether a given reference refers to a manifestation of the Son of God rather than a mere created angel? The orthodox Lutheran dogmatician, John Quenstedt, summarized the true and proper method in this statement:

Whenever and wherever either the name of Jehovah or a divine attribute or work and divine worship are ascribed to the Angel who appeared to the patriarchs and to other believers, there not some created angel is to be understood, but the uncreated Angel, the Son of God, the leader of the heavenly host, the Lord of all the angels; for in fact He frequently appeared in some assumed visible form to the fathers in the Old Testament by some unspeakable condescension, and thus this was a foregleam of His future incarnation. (Theol. did. pol., Pars I, Cap. Sect. 11, *Qu*: X1, p. 494).

The first time the term *“Angel of the Lord”* appears is in Genesis 16 during the time of the patriarch Abraham. At this time He does not appear to Abraham, but to Hagar, and can serve as an exercise in determining whether the term *“angel of the Lord”* is a manifestation of the Son of God or a created angel. The *“Angel of the Lord”* finds Hagar (v. 7) and promises her a blessing only God could fulfill: *“The Angel of the Lord said unto her, ‘I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.’ And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, ‘Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, because the Lord hath heard thy affliction’”* (vv. 10-11). Hagar confesses that she had received this blessing from the Lord Himself, identifying the Angel of the Lord as God: *“She called the name*

of the Lord that spake unto her, 'Thou God seest me;' for she said, 'Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?'" (v. 13). Notice also how she is surprised to have looked upon God!

The Angel of the Lord again speaks to Hagar in Genesis 21: *"God heard the voice of the lad; and the Angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said unto her, 'What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.'* And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink" (vv. 17-19). Here we see how the Angel of God speaks as God (*"I will make him a great nation"*) and yet distinguishes Himself from God (*"God hath heard"*). There is no difficulty here. Being One in Essence with the Father, the Son of God simply distinguishes Himself from the Father as to His person. There can be no doubt that the Angel of the Lord which appeared to Hagar on both of these occasions was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ.

I. The Angel of the Lord Spoke Directly to the Patriarchs

In Genesis 22 we read: *"The Angel of the Lord called ... out of heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.' And He said, 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me'"* (vv. 11-12). Later in the same chapter we also have this example: *"The Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time and said, 'By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord: for, because thou hast done this thing and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed My voice'"* (vv. 15-18). In this instance we have a pre-figurement of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and a direct promise of the Christ to come (Galatians 3:16). Is it not fitting for the pre-incarnate Christ to be directly involved in His prophetic office when the entire theme points to His person and work?

The patriarch Jacob also receives a visit from the Son of God as he relates in Genesis 31: *"The Angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob!' And I said, 'Here am I.' And He said, 'Lift up now thine eyes and see: All the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grised; for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me. Now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred'"* (vv. 11-13). The Angel of God identifies Himself with the God of Bethel, to whom Jacob had made his vow. Later, when Jacob speaks to his sons, he calls God *"the Angel"* which redeemed him from all evil, the God of his fathers (Abraham and Isaac): *"He blessed Joseph, and said, 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth'"* (Genesis 48:15-16). Once again there is a connection to the future person and work of Christ. The dream of Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:12-17) contains both the Gospel promise (Genesis 28:14) and a symbolic reference to Christ as the only way to heaven (Genesis 28:12). Christ told Nathaniel: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'"* (John 1:51). Christ declared to Nicodemus: *"No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven"* (John 3:13). The Apostle Paul affirms: *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (I Timothy 2:5). The

Savior told the twelve: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also; and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him”* (John 14:6-7). Certainly it is appropriate that the revelation to Jacob about the Christ to come would be delivered directly by the Angel of God, the Divine Prophet Himself, the uncreated Messenger of the Lord. Another reference to the angel of God speaking to Jacob at Bethel is found in Hosea 12: *“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God. Yea, he had power over the Angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto Him; he found Him in Bethel, and there He spake with us, even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial”* (vv. 3-5). The pre-incarnate Christ, the uncreated Angel of the Lord, spoke directly to the patriarchs.

II. The Angel of the Lord Spoke Directly to Moses and the Prophets (and through Them to the People)

In Exodus 3 Moses has an encounter with the Angel of the Lord, who is God Himself: *“The Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire; and the bush was not consumed”* (v. 2). The proof that this was indeed God and not a created angel is found in the following verses: *“When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ ... Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. ... God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you’”* (vv. 4, 6, 14). When God called to Moses out of the bush (v. 4), He identified Himself as the God of the patriarchs (v. 6) and the *“I AM THAT I AM”* (v. 14). The last reference connects to all the New Testament examples of Christ using the name *“I AM,”* such as in John 8:58: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.”* (cp. also John 6:35, 41, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:9, 11, 14; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

God tells Moses to deliver His message to Israel (Exodus 3:15ff.). The Son of God used Moses and other prophets to speak to the people. During the exodus from Egypt, we read: *“The Lord said unto Moses, ‘Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward’”* (Exodus 14:15). A few verses later we read: *“The Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face and stood behind them”* (v. 19). The result is recorded: *“Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord and believed the Lord and His servant Moses”* (v. 31). This earthly deliverance from death is a clear foreshadowing of the heavenly deliverance Christ would accomplish in the fulness of the time (Galatians 4:4-5).

In Exodus 23 God told Moses: *“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice; provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if thou shalt indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For Mine Angel shall go before thee and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off”* (vv. 20-23). These and many other promises and warnings were related to Moses by God (vv. 24-33); and *“Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord hath said will we do’”* (Exodus 24:3).

Later God repeats His promise of His Angel and clearly identifies Him as God's presence (Exodus 33:2-3, 14). In Isaiah 63 we read: *"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, 'Surely they are My people, children that will not lie.' So He was their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old"* (vv. 7-9). The "Angel of His presence" is their Savior, who saved them and redeemed them! This action certainly also points forward to the work of Christ in the New Testament as a foreshadowing of the good things to come in the vicarious work of the incarnate Savior.

In addition to the appearances to Moses and the children of Israel recorded in Exodus, we have some appearances recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges. In Joshua 5 we read: *"It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked; and, behold, there stood a Man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went unto Him and said unto Him, 'Art Thou for us or for our adversaries?' And he said, 'Nay, but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship and said unto Him, 'What saith my Lord unto His servant?' And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' And Joshua did so"* (vv. 13-16). This encounter is similar to the one Moses had at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-5). Since the "Captain of the host of the Lord" accepts divine worship and sanctifies the ground as holy by His very presence, this reference should be included in the pre-incarnation appearances of the Son of God.

In Judges 6 the Angel of the Lord appears to Gideon: *"The Angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, 'The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor'"* (v. 12). Gideon's reaction and God's answer indicate that Gideon considered this an encounter with God Himself: *"When Gideon perceived that He was an Angel of the Lord, Gideon said, 'Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an Angel of the Lord face to face!' And the Lord said unto him, 'Peace be unto thee. Fear not; thou shalt not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord and called it Jehovahshalom"* (vv. 22-24).

In Judges 13 we read of an encounter with the Angel of the Lord involving the wife of Manoah, the future mother of Samson (vv. 3-23). Manoah certainly identifies the Angel with God, for he expresses the fear that they would die for seeing God: *"But the Angel of the Lord did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that He was an Angel of the Lord. And Manoah said unto his wife, 'We shall surely die because we have seen God.' But his wife said unto him, 'If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things nor would as at this time have told us such things as these'"* (vv. 21-23). Thus, the pre-incarnate Son of God spoke directly to the prophets and through them to the people (and occasionally directly to an individual believer).

III. The Angel of the Lord Speaks in the Old Testament Scriptures to Us Today

In Hebrews chapter one, the holy writer summarizes the various methods God has used in history in His revelations to mankind: *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds"* (vv. 1-2). The New

Testament clearly declares that the Old Testament contains the same message for mankind as the New Testament contains: *“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). We are to heed Christ’s admonition regarding Moses and the prophets: *“Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39). As the Bereans demonstrated, the Old Testament enables us to judge doctrine (Acts 17:11), for *“whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Romans 15:4; cp. I Corinthians 10:11). The New Testament also informs us that the Spirit of Christ testified of salvation in the Old Testament through the prophets: *“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when It testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow”* (I Peter 1:10-11). The Old Testament work of our divine Prophet as the Angel of the Lord fully supports the purpose of Scripture as declared in John’s Gospel: *“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”* (20:31; cp. I John 5:13). The exhortation of I Peter 2 certainly applies also to the Old Testament: *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious”* (vv. 2-3). Remember what the risen Savior said to the disciples on the road to Emmaus? *“‘O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”* (Luke 24:25-27). Later we read: *“‘These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me.’ Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures and said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.’ And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:44-47).

May the Lord Jesus ever grant us such understanding as He continues to speak to us through the Old Testament Scriptures today!

