

HEAVENLY HOST
First in an Advent Sermon Series: “Angels We Have Heard on High”
December 1, 2013 –Luke 2: 8-14
The Church of the Covenant

The sermon *“Heavenly Host”* is the first in an Advent Sermon series on angels, entitled, “Angels We Have Heard on High.” I begin with a simple observation and that is that no angel depicted in scripture is depicted as having wings. I am sorry to disabuse us of the notion that angels are fluffy, feminine entities, skipping from cloud to cloud born upon gossamer wings. Wings were the invention of Renaissance painters trying to explain how an angel could just appear before someone. The book of Revelation is fairly clear that angels are arrayed in white; but again no description of wings. And then there is today’s biblical reference to the angel who announces the birth of Jesus, *“For behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2: 10-11) And if this is then not enough, God shows His Almighty hand when the shepherds look up in the heavens and there they behold, as the scripture says, *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying –‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.’”* (Luke 2: 13-14) Suddenly, as it says, the one angel is replaced by the **“heavenly host”**. Now the heavenly host is not a large group of fluffy angels, flying around with their angel wings, in the night time sky over Bethlehem. No, this is a very particular term of art meaning that there are angels present so vast that they cannot be numbered and they are armed to the teeth. They are an avenging angel army ready to pounce, standing guard over the Son of God at His birth in Bethlehem. These are armed and ready angels, armed with the sword of the Lord, fierce, protective, the vast power of Almighty God, the God of all creation, the God who declared in a word that the Big Bang would happen, and creation ensued. The vastness of the night is filled with a vast innumerably arrayed angel army. There is a reason why it says the shepherds were *“filled with fear”* and why at the appearance of this angel army they were *“sore afraid”*.

My grandmother passed away at Christmas several years ago and now is with that great cloud of witnesses in heaven, that communion of the saints beyond number, who now rest from their labors but who worship and adore God and His Son for eternity. My dear grandmother heavily armed with the sword of the Lord, is a frightening image to consider. I am *“sore afraid”* just thinking about it! Because in eternity there is no sense of temporal time, then we may surmise that all the saints of all time were standing guard over the Christ Child in the night time sky over Bethlehem. They exist in a parallel time when time is no more. Indeed they are watching over us now, today, in this moment. Armed with all the power of God they watch over us; the love that we have known and experienced through them still lives and still watches over us. They are not dead, in Christ they are alive forevermore. My grandmother was there on that starry night over Bethlehem; my grandmother is here watching over us as we receive communion today. Your loved one was there on that starry night; your loved one watches over you today, as we break the bread and share the cup, in communion the communion of the saints comes, the heavenly host arrayed above us in heaven. Powerful, powerful LOVE watches over us always in the heavenly host. God is not bound by our rules of time and space. His angels likewise are not bound by our rules of time and space. Angels don’t need wings; angels just need the power of God...

Sometimes we get the picture of angels wrong and sometimes we get the true picture of Bethlehem wrong as well. Sometimes we focus only on the scene of the infant Jesus, born humbly in a manger, what a sweet and dear little scene. But we forget the *“heavenly host”* standing guard over the place where the Son of God lies, standing guard over a manger in Bethlehem. We see only the weakness of a newborn babe; but we forget the power of God circling in the sky overhead. We incorrectly view the

manger surrounded by fluffy angels rather than the heavenly host. Bethlehem and what really happened that first Christmas can only be understood as the stark contrast between the weakness of a newborn and the frightening power of the heavenly host. We rob the scene of all the power of Almighty God when we forget who truly are the heavenly host. God could have come in power, but chose an infant born in a manger. God could have sent a marauding angel army to fix His creation, but instead chose the birth of love into the world. God could have sent the sword of the Lord and myriads upon myriads of avenging angels armed to the teeth to recompense all of the creation for killing the prophets, for mocking God and ignoring His law. But HE sent Jesus, born in Bethlehem; but HE also sent the heavenly host in the night time sky to remind us of the immense power wrapped in the babe in swaddling clothes. Do not rob the manger of its power, nor God of what HE could have chosen to have done, but didn't. God chose love over wrath at the manger. God chose perceived weakness over strength. God chose to come quietly and not in power. The newborn Christ...surrounded by the heavenly host...that is the picture of Bethlehem...that is the picture God painted on that starry night.

We come now to a time of communion. Envision all the angels heaven can boast above us; envision every loved one we thought we had lost now drawing near; see them standing there in power, standing guard over those they love and cherish, watching over us. Love came down that first Christmas in a manger filled with a little infant, surrounded by all the power of the heavenly host. And love and holy power come down today in the same way. Humbly we ask for Jesus to be born in us through this sacrament and that the angels might stand guard over us. Today, suddenly, unexpectedly, without reason or notice, suddenly and without explanation a multitude of the heavenly host surrounds us, praising God and saying –*Glory to God in the Highest!* Glory to God! Glory, glory, glory to God...all of His holy power packed into weakness and born in a manger. Glory to God and AMEN!

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*