

Passion Sunday

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Date: 17 March 2024

Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

At the end of the book of Revelation, St. John falls down in worship before an angel. But the angel tells him, Do not do that, for I am a fellow servant with you, and with your fellow prophets, and with all who keep the words of this book.

Worship God. In other words, angels don't want to be worshipped. Angels instead want for us to worship God just as they worship God.

That is, except for fallen angels, which are also called demons. After all, demons are fallen angels who do not worship God, but would like for us all to worship another.

Which is why some of the Jews in this morning's gospel accused Jesus of having a demon. Because they understand that Jesus is claiming that he is equal to God.

[1 : 20] And thereby claiming that he is one worthy of worship. Which is why the Jews wished to stone him. However, the Jews in this morning's gospel forget there was another angel, or one who was called an angel in all of Holy Scripture, who really didn't seem to mind when people worshipped him.

And this angel was not a demon, but was the one who throughout the Old Testament was always referred to as the angel of the Lord, which is different from an angel of the Lord.

For the angel of the Lord was not actually an angel at all, but was as several church fathers argue, God himself.

That is to say that the angel of the Lord was a messenger sent from God, who also was God. For the angel of the Lord spoke with the authority of God, often identified himself as God, and was even worshipped as God all throughout the Old Testament.

For example, in Exodus chapter 3 we read, Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian.

[2 : 51] And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush.

And if you are already familiar with the story of Moses and the burning bush, you know that this was a theophany, a visible manifestation of God to a human being.

In this case, a visible manifestation of God to Moses. But what many often seem to forget, or perhaps overlook or even deny, is that someone was actually standing in the midst of that burning bush.

And that someone was the angel of the Lord. And it is he who told Moses, I am who I am.

And that is why in Christianity, the angel of the Lord is believed by many to be the pre-incarnate Christ. For again, all throughout Holy Scripture, the angel of the Lord spoke as God, was often identified as God, and was even worshipped as God.

[4 : 17] And after God became man and was born of the Virgin Mary, the angel of the Lord never appears in Holy Scripture again. Even though he played a central part in so many of the Old Testament stories, because as so many Christians have argued, the angel of the Lord became a flesh and blood human being, in the person of Jesus Christ.

And please, please do not misunderstand me. I am not arguing that the second person of the Trinity was ever a created being like an angel.

And I'm also not arguing that any angel at any time ever actually became a human being either. I am instead just simply stating that the angel of the Lord really wasn't an angel after all, but was simply God alone.

For in Hebrew, the word angel, that word doesn't always refer to an angelic being, but can also refer to a human messenger such as the prophets.

For the word angel just simply means messenger or one who is sent by God. And Jesus Christ, who is both sent by God and who also is God, really is the only person who fits the description of the angel of the Lord throughout the Old Testament.

[6 : 04] Therefore, when Jesus tells the Jews in this morning's gospel, most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am, he really wasn't telling them anything different than what he had told their ancestors thousands of years before.

After all, it was in the midst of a burning bush that the pre-incarnate Christ stood and told Moses, I am who I am.

For Jesus Christ is the Holy One sent by God, who also is God, the great I am, the very one whom both angels and men rightly worship and adore.

For whether it is in the midst of a burning bush or a blood-soaked cross, whether it is outside of an empty tomb or inside a church, upon an altar, on top of a silver plate and inside a silver cup, Christ Jesus stands victorious and in him, all the people of God are set free.

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.