

We Believe: Feasts / 4

The Angels

About Angels

Part A: Most of us have a fairly clear idea of what angels are. But it's usually based on movies, songs, and Christmas tree decorations rather than what the Church and the Bible teach us.

Angels are fascinating creatures — and important in our relationship with God. Let's try to see what they really are like. To start, look at these pairs of words, and underline the one in each pair that you think *most* people would use to describe angels. (Note: There aren't any right or wrong answers — just tell what you think.)

Fluffy/fiery
Scary/sweet
Holding a harp/brandishing a sword
Delicate/mighty
Huge/small
Serving/commanding

Part B: Biblical descriptions of angels are quite different from the way many people think of them. Read the following passages having to do with angels. As you read, jot down some key words that tell how the passages depict angels.

Exodus 23:20 _____

Judges 13:6-7 _____

1 Chron. 21:14-27 _____

Psalms 34:1-10 _____

Psalms 35:1-6 _____

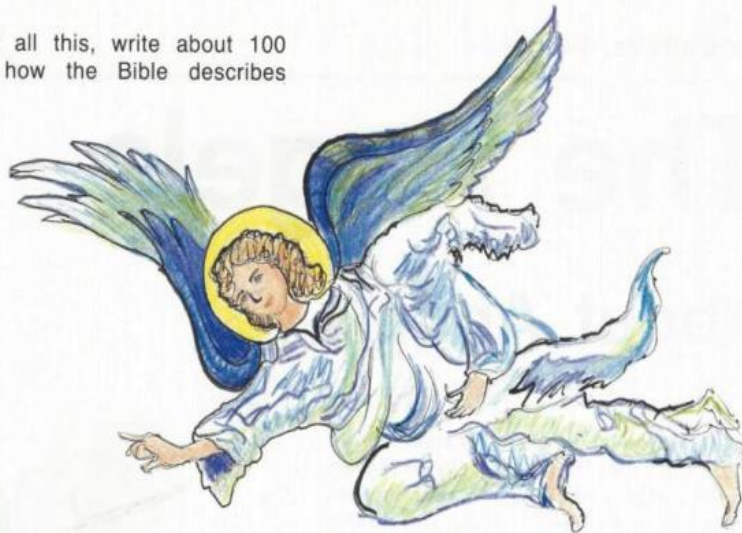
Revelation 10:1-7 _____



Now read these short passages from Luke, which all have something in common. Think about why the angels have to do the same thing in each case. Read Luke 1:13, Luke 1:30, and Luke 2:8-10.

Having read all this, write about 100 words telling how the Bible describes angels.

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Finding Answers About Angels

You have been hearing a great deal about angels. Now it's time to use the Bible and find some specific facts about them. Answer these questions, doing as many as you can now, and finishing the rest for homework.

1. There are nine ranks of angels. These are angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, and virtues — plus four others. Read Colossians 1:16 and write the names of the other four orders:

2. You know that angels are messengers. Read Zechariah 1:12-17 (note that the "me" here is the prophet Zechariah, who is describing his own experiences). Also read Judges 6:11-12. What are the messages angels bring in these two readings?

3. Describe the seraphim, after reading Isaiah 6:1-2 and Revelation 4:1-8.

4. Look at Revelation 12:7-9 and Jude 1:9-10. Then read Daniel 9:20-23 and Luke 1:18-19. From these, describe first the archangel Michael and then the archangel Gabriel.

5. Name two things angels guard, after you read Genesis 3:22-24 and Psalm 91:8-12.

6. You know about the archangels Gabriel and Michael. Now look in Tobit 5:4 to find and write down the name of a third major archangel. (Note: The book of Tobit is found in the "Apocrypha" section of the Bible).

Objectives

- Students will
1. Describe Joachim and Anne.
 2. Define the feast of the Nativity of Mary.
 3. Describe the qualities of Mary which enabled her to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Background for Teacher

Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of his son. She agreed to be his mother, and so the Incarnation came about.

In these simple facts is the basis of our faith. God chose to enter the world in the person of Jesus Christ, born from someone who was willing to be his servant and to trust him completely. She is the foremost saint, the greatest human example, because of this.

The lesson depicts her as one willing to face the unknown because she depended on God. She gave up control of her life to him, and so took part in the plan of salvation for all of us. She did what Adam and Eve would not do—obeyed God to the utmost.

So the Church venerates her (*not* worships—worship is only for God). We celebrate her birth as the beginning of God's coming among us.

Materials Needed

- A copy of *Living the Armenian Church Year*
- Bibles for each student
- Students' essays from last week

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer, and have students read or share main ideas from the essays they wrote during the week. (15 min.)
2. Have a student read and report on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in *Living the Armenian Church Year*, pages 7-8.

When this is done, have each student read I Samuel 1 (the entire chapter—the story of Hannah). Talk about some of the similarities between this and the story of Joachim and Anne:

- a. Both women wanted children very much.
- b. Both women promised God that any child they had would serve him.
- c. Both women kept their promises to God.

Under the circumstances, what special feelings might both mothers (and their husbands) have had when their children were born? (10 min.)

3. Tell your students that you are going to talk about the Virgin Mary. Two of the most important qualities she shows us are trust and willingness to submit herself to God.

To give students a feeling of this, try a "trust walk." Students will take turns leading another student by the hand while that student's eyes are closed, around the room, down a corridor, or outside, if weather

permits.

When the students have all taken part in this, talk about it. What did it feel like? What if anything did the students find out about themselves?

Now relate the experience to other things: When have the students ever needed to trust someone as they had to trust their walking partner? Have they ever put their lives into someone else's hands?

Read together Luke 1:26-38. Talk about the trust and willingness to submit to God's will which Mary shows. Notice that she is "greatly troubled" in verse 29, and questions the angel in verse 34. But she trusts God to do what is right, and puts herself in his hands—especially in verse 38. (17 min.)

4. Have the class read "About the Virgin Mary" in the student text. It is followed by a series of questions—students can begin answering these after reading, and finish them as homework.

At the proper time, close the class with a prayer. (18 min.)

(Correct answers to the questions are as follows:

1. No; 2. We do not teach that she was "immaculately conceived"—that is, born not subject to sin; 3. Students will form their own answers, but it is clear from the passage that Mary had questions in her heart and mind about her son's future; 4. Students will give their own answers.)

Session 4—The Angels

Key Concept

Angels are the mighty messengers of God.

Objectives

Students will

1. Enumerate the ranks of angels.
2. List some qualities of the archangels Michael and Gabriel.
3. Define "angel," based on what the Bible says about angels.

Background for Teacher

Angels are among the most beautiful, powerful, and important of God's creatures—they bring messages of God's will to mankind, and continually praise their Maker.

This lesson will dispel some of the commonly-held conceptions of angels as sweet and ineffectual "puffs" with wings. It will show some of what the Bible and the Church's services tell us about angels, and particularly the archangels Gabriel and Michael.

Materials Needed

- One copy of *Living the Armenian Church Year*

- Enough copies of the Divine Liturgy book to share
- Any Armenian miniatures or icons depicting angels (Check with your pastor or in the parish library for books of miniatures—if none is available, ask the DRE to send you some black-and-white photocopies of appropriate miniatures.)

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer, and look over students' answers to the questions from last week's lesson. Answers to these are found in last session's "Procedure" section. (12 min.)

2. Have the students do the "About Angels" exercise in their texts. Go over the answers to Part A with them, and talk about the reasons for their answers. This should be done before they begin Part B of the exercise.

When they finish Part B, have them share their short essays with the rest of the class. (Note: In each of the three Luke passages, the angel tells someone not to be afraid. Angels are powerful figures, and it is an overwhelming experience to meet one face-to-face.)

Throughout this exercise, try to emphasize that angels are strong, powerful creatures rather than little pieces of cute fluff. To strengthen the point, look with the class at some miniatures or icons that show angels as strong messengers and protectors. (23 min.)

3. Tell the class that the Divine Liturgy contains several references to angels. Look together at these examples (have the class share liturgy books and look on together):

- Page 1a: In the Hymn of Vesting, the angels (here called the "ranks of the fiery spirits" possessing "splendid glory") are named first among God's creatures, being those closest to him.

- Page 20a, top: As in most litanies, we ask God to give us the "angel of peace to guard our souls." Angels have an important task with us—they are our guardians, and the Bible refers to "guardian angels." This is a very real thing, not just a sentimental invention.

- Page 22a: The hymn, "Marmin Deroonagan," tells how the heavenly hosts praise God unceasingly, and on the next page (23a) we read in the Hagiody that even though the angels and archangels praise God, he still accepts the praise of us, his less exalted creatures.

- Page 27a: The priest's words at the bottom of the page remind us of the immense privilege we have: To sing God's holy songs with the angelic singer, the cherubim and seraphim (two categories of angels).

- Page 41a: As the Hymn of Communion calls us to partake of the body and blood of Christ, we are reminded that in doing so we really enter the Kingdom of God. We hear the songs of the angels and

hosts in the heights of heaven. (8 min.)

4. Tell the class that they are going to find some information about angels, and especially two called Gabriel and Michael. Read to them from *Living the Armenian Church Year*, page 25, beginning at the very top and reading through to the end of the second to last paragraph ending your reading with the words "... it is up to us to put our will into action."

Now have the class do the "Finding Answers about Angels" exercise on page 26 of their student texts. It is to be completed for homework. Let the class use the rest of the period to work on it, breaking at the end of the session to close with a prayer. (17 min.)

(Correct answers for the "Finding Answers about Angels" exercise: 1. Thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities; 2. Zechariah: After many years of allowing Jerusalem to suffer and be purified, God will again give his direct help and protection to his people and to Jerusalem. Judges: God is with Gideon, who will do great deeds for him; 3. Students can choose whatever details they wish from the descriptions of Seraphim in Isaiah and Revelation; 4. Michael is a fighting, protecting angel (he had the special job of protecting Israel). Gabriel is a messenger and obviously of very high rank; 5. Genesis tells us angels guard the entry to Paradise. The psalm tells us they guard or watch over those who love God; 6. Raphael.)

Notes