

ANGELS AND DEMONS

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**Cherubim. Angel of the Lord. Satan. Seraphim.
So many opinions. What do you believe?**

As Lutherans interact with other Christians, they often find themselves struggling to explain their beliefs and practices. Although many Lutherans have learned the “what” of the doctrines of the Church, they do not always have a full scriptural foundation to share the “why.” When confronted with different doctrines, some cannot clearly state their faith.

The Lutheran Difference Bible study series will identify how Lutherans differ from other Christian denominations and show from the Bible why Lutherans differ. If you are a Lutheran, this study will prepare you to share your faith. If you are not a Lutheran, it will help you understand the Lutheran difference.

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The Lutheran Difference



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With contributions by

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Contents

About This Series	4
Participant Introduction	5
Overview of Christian Denominations	6
Lutheran Facts	9
Angels and Their Beginning	11
Who and What Are Angels?.....	15
Ranks and Number of Angels	19
Good and Evil Angels (Demons)	23
What Do Evil Angels Do?.....	27
What Do Good Angels Do?	31
Leader Guide Introduction	35
Answers	36
Appendix of Lutheran Teaching	60
Glossary	63

About This Series

“You believe in angels? You’ve got to be kidding!”

“The Bible teaches that there *are* angels . . . and demons.”

“So you believe in harps, wings, pitchforks, and pointy tails?”

“Well, not exactly.”

As Lutherans interact with other Christians, they often find themselves struggling to explain their beliefs and practices. Although many Lutherans have learned the “what” of the doctrines of the Church, they do not always have a full scriptural foundation to share the “why.” When confronted with different doctrines, they cannot clearly state their faith, much less understand the differences.

Because of insecurities about explaining particular doctrines or practices, some Lutherans may avoid opportunities to share what they have learned from Christ and His Word. The Lutheran Difference Bible study series will identify how Lutherans differ from other Christians and use the Bible to show why Lutherans differ. These studies will prepare Lutherans to share their faith and help non-Lutherans understand the Lutheran difference.

Participant Introduction

When you hear the word *angel*, what image comes to mind? Clarence from the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*? Tess from *Touched by an Angel*? Popular culture formerly portrayed angels as harp-carrying spirits lounging on comfortable white tufts of cloud. Today, it seems, angels are all too human, such as the gritty Michael in the film by the same name or the love-starved Seth in *City of Angels*.

On the other hand, what comes to mind when you hear the words *demon* or *devil*? Hellboy from the comic book series or the movie? Various heinous creatures from *The Lord of the Rings* or *Constantine*? Or when you think about angels and demons, do you think of those comical creatures sitting on someone's shoulders—an angel in a white gown and wings on one shoulder and a demon with a pitchfork and pointy tail sitting on the other?

For many people, popular films, books, comic books, and other media are their only sources of information about angels and demons—if they believe in these creatures at all. Angels appear on screen savers, book covers, and wall calendars as pastel-colored feminine virtues or chubby, winged infants, while demons are either skulking black mists or hulks of roasted human flesh. These are inaccurate portrayals of angels and demons.

In contrast, this study will share the truth about angels and demons using God's errorless Word. What the Bible says about angels, demons, and other related topics is vitally important to Lutherans because what God says about these matters can be trusted. As God's people, we want to grow in our understanding of what God has revealed in the Scriptures, so that we believe in what God teaches us about angels and demons and can share His knowledge with others.

An Overview of Christian Denominations

The following outline of Christian history will help you understand where the different denominations come from and how they are related to one another. Use this outline in connection with the “Comparisons” sections found throughout the study. Statements of belief for the different churches were drawn from their official confessional writings.

The Great Schism

Eastern Orthodox: On July 16, 1054, Cardinal Humbert entered the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople just before the worship service. He stepped to the altar and left a letter condemning Michael Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople. Cerularius responded by condemning the letter and its authors. In that moment, Christian churches of the East and West were severed from one another. Their disagreements centered on what bread could be used in the Lord’s Supper and the addition of the *filioque* statement to the Nicene Creed.

The Reformation

Lutheran: On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo X wrote a letter condemning Dr. Martin Luther for his Ninety-five Theses. Luther’s theses had challenged the sale of indulgences, a fund-raising effort to pay for the building of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The letter charged Luther with heresy and threatened to excommunicate him if he did not retract his writings within sixty days. Luther replied by publicly burning the letter. Leo excommunicated him on January 3 and condemned all who agreed with Luther or supported his cause.

Reformed: In 1522, the preaching of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland, convinced people to break their traditional Lenten fast. Zwingli also preached that priests should be allowed to marry. When local friars challenged these departures from Medieval Church practice, the Zurich Council supported Zwingli and agreed

that the Bible should guide Christian doctrine and practice. Churches of this Reformed tradition include Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

Anabaptist: In January 1525, Conrad Grebel, a follower of Ulrich Zwingli, rebaptized Georg Blaurock. Blaurock began rebaptizing others and founded the Swiss Brethren. Their insistence on adult, believers' Baptism distinguished them from other churches of the Reformation. Anabaptists attracted social extremists who advocated violence in the cause of Christ, complete pacifism, or communal living. Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish churches descend from this movement.

The Counter Reformation

Roman Catholic: When people call the Medieval Church "Roman Catholic," they make a common historical mistake. Roman Catholicism emerged after the Reformation. As early as 1518, Luther and other reformers had appealed to the pope and requested a council to settle the issue of indulgences. Their requests were hindered or denied for a variety of theological and political reasons. Finally, on December 13, 1545, thirty-four leaders from the churches who opposed the Reformation gathered at the invitation of Pope Paul III. They began the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which established the doctrine and practice of Roman Catholicism.

Post-Reformation Movements

Baptist: In 1608 or 1609, John Smyth, a former pastor of the Church of England, baptized himself by pouring water over his head. He formed a congregation of English Separatists in Holland who opposed the rule of bishops and infant baptism. This marked the start of the English Baptist churches, which remain divided doctrinally over the theology of John Calvin (Particular Baptists) and Jacob Arminius (General Baptists). In the 1800s, the Restoration Movement of Alexander Campbell, a former Presbyterian minister, adopted many Baptist teachings. These churches include the Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches) and the Churches of Christ.

Wesleyan: In 1729, John and Charles Wesley gathered with three other men to study the Scripture, receive Communion, and discipline one another according to the so-called method laid down in the Bible. Later, John Wesley's preaching caused religious revivals in Eng-

land and America. Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, and Pentecostals form the Wesleyan family of churches.

Liberal: In 1799, Friedrich Schleiermacher published *Addresses on Religion* in an attempt to make Christianity appealing to people influenced by Rationalism. He argued that religion is not a body of doctrines, provable truths, or a system of ethics but belongs to the realm of feelings. His ideas did not form a new denomination but deeply influenced Christian thinking. Denominations most thoroughly affected by liberalism are the United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and Unitarianism.

Lutheran Facts

All who worship the Holy Trinity and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins are regarded by Lutherans as fellow Christians despite denominational differences.

Lutheran churches first described themselves as *evangelische* or evangelical churches. Opponents of these churches called them *Lutheran* after Dr. Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century German Church reformer.

Lutherans are not disciples of Dr. Martin Luther, but disciples of Jesus Christ. They proudly accept the name Lutheran because they agree with Dr. Luther's teaching from the Bible, as summarized in Luther's Small Catechism.

The Lutheran Church accepts the Holy Scriptures as God's errorless Word. Because the writers of that Word, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote about bodiless spiritual entities created by God, Lutherans believe in angels. Good angels are spiritual beings that serve primarily as messengers (*angel* in both Hebrew and Greek means "messenger") and as ministering spirits both to God and to believers. Lutherans also believe in evil angels or demons.

Jesus' coming was foretold by angels; His conception, birth, and resurrection were announced by them. Jesus received angelic ministrations after His desert temptation and following His garden agony. He frequently encountered demon-possessed persons whom He released from satanic activity and control. Jesus preached about angels and demons. The apostles also encountered both angels and demons in their ministries. Frequently, the Bible records angels assuming bodily (corporeal) form, taking on the appearance of human men to deliver a special message from God.

Throughout the ages, the Church's creeds and her liturgies and prayers have affirmed the Bible's teaching of the existence of angels and demons. Lutherans believe that angels serve God and human beings and pray for believers. However, on the basis of Scripture, Lutherans do not condone the human worship of angels or prayers made to them. These they reserve for God alone.

To prepare for "Angels and Their Beginning," read Psalm 148:1–5.

Angels and Their Beginning

“I’m an angel.”

—Irish folk-rock drummer, Caroline Corr

Claiming to be a (mostly) good or innocent person is acceptable in today’s culture, even if the closest point of reference is a pure, holy spiritual being without any faults whatsoever. Such claims are prevalent especially in the public square. There, opinions about spiritual matters (and not simply God or Jesus) are so diverse that it staggers the mind. Therefore, we should not be surprised that a diversity of opinion extends to angels and demons as well. What seems to be in abundance is religious opinion; what is sorely lacking is religious fact.

1. Why do you suppose people have such diverse views about angels and demons? God and Jesus? spiritual matters in general?

The Creation of Angels

2. Read John 1:1–5 and Genesis 2:2–3. Although the Bible mentions angels in almost three hundred passages, no one passage tells us about their creation. Nevertheless, what can we conclude about the creation of angels from these two verses?

3. Read Psalm 148. What can we learn about the creation of angels from this great hymn of praise?

4. Read Colossians 1:15–17 and Nehemiah 9:6. What additional information do these verses provide about the creation and activity of the angels?

5. Luther said, “Moses writes nothing about the creation of the angels because . . . he describes only the creation of matters visible.” Why do you think that in Genesis 1, God through Moses only recorded the creation of visible things, and not the creation of the invisible angels?

6. Read Acts 23:8. In Jesus’ day, a Jewish religious sect called the Sadducees denied both the bodily resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. Some people today also doubt their existence. What commandments do we break when we doubt their existence?

7. **Challenge question:** In the First Article of the Nicene Creed, when do we confess our belief in God’s creation of the angels?

What Does *Angel* Mean?

The term *angel* does not designate the nature or essence of angels but rather their office as God’s ambassadors or messengers. The Greek word for *angel* (*angelos*) is also used for human messengers like John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10).

8. Read Luke 1:26–38 and Matthew 28:5–8. What message did the angel Gabriel bring to Mary? What message did God’s angel bring to the women on Easter Sunday?