

*THE ANGELS AT THE EMPTY TOMB: A STUDY IN
SYNOPTICS.*

EACH of the four Gospels tells a different story of the angels seen on that first Easter morning at the tomb of the Risen Saviour. These stories harmonise perfectly with one another and with the primary purpose of their respective books. The evangelists must have often listened to a full and detailed account of all that happened at the tomb from the lips of the women, who would never forget or tire of telling what they saw. Evidently there were at least four appearances of angels on that eventful day, but for a special reason each writer recounts but one and that a different one. Matthew, for instance, writes impressively of *one angel*, whose "appearance was as lightning and whose clothing was white as snow." A great earthquake attends his descent from heaven; he approaches the stone, rolls it aside, and sits thereon (xxviii. 2, 3). Mark quietly mentions *a youth* sitting in the tomb on the right side wrapped in a white cloak (xvi. 5). Luke tells of *two men* in glittering apparel standing near the women in the sepulchre. John, again, speaks of "*two angels* in white sitting one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus lay." We hope to show not only the consistency underlying these apparent discrepancies—for that is an easy task—but the delicate subtlety and consummate skill whereby these different epiphanies are made to harmonise with and subserve the prime purpose of the whole narrative.

Linking the four accounts together we ascertain that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome came very early to the tomb with spices for the anointing of the body (Mark xvi. 1, 2). They found the stone rolled away and an angel enthroned upon it (Matt. xxviii. 2). He an-

nounces to them the Resurrection, and invites them to enter the tomb and assure themselves that it is empty. They obey, and on entering see the angel described as a youth by Mark. He shows them where Christ had lain, and bids them go tell the others. Next comes Luke's story (xxiv. 4). Whilst the women lingered bewildered and irresolute in the tomb, two men in glittering raiment appear by their side, enlighten their ignorance, and remind them of the Lord's own prophecy touching His resurrection. Thus at last, commanded by the angel in Matthew, encouraged by the youth in Mark, and instructed by the two men in Luke, the women rally their faculties and hasten away. Mary Magdalene ran to find Peter and John, and here John's narrative begins (xx. 2). Mary follows them as they hurry to the tomb; and on their departure homeward she lingered there to mourn her vanished Lord. Still weeping at the entrance to the sepulchre she stooped to catch another glimpse of the sacred spot where last she saw Him. But the tomb was no longer desolate. Incredulous Peter and believing John missed the twofold vision vouchsafed to Mary's clinging love. To her the angels appear saying, "Woman, why weepest thou?" But turning from them with yearnings still unsatisfied she met the Lord Himself.

Having thus woven the four records into one consistent whole, we proceed to find the reasons influencing each author in selecting for his use a particular portion of the whole story. These reasons spring naturally and inevitably from the leading purpose in the writer's mind, which governs not only his treatment of these epiphanies, but his whole narrative from first to last. For a distinct and dominating purpose has most profoundly affected the manner, matter, and method of these Memoirs. They are not general sketches of the Life of Christ. Each is a sermon written with a definite aim and urgent application. Each writer presents a different aspect

of our Lord's life and ministry, that the picture of Christ as Ideal Man and Very God of Very God may be foursquare and complete. Matthew portrays Jesus of Nazareth as son of David and Israel's rightful King. This conception colours the narrative throughout from the opening genealogy to the comprehensive royal manifesto for the nations at the close. Mark shows us Christ as the Ideal Prophet-Preacher and his vivid tableaux are all consistent with this main idea from the prophet-utterances of the opening verses to the prophet-voices of the New Era at the end. Luke portrays similarly the Priestly office and work of Christ from the temple-vision of Zacharias, a true priest of the old order, to the glad ministry of the new priesthood continually in the temple praising and blessing God; and John avowedly writes to unveil the Son of God in Jesus Christ. Not only does the thought of this presentation affect their style and method of treatment, but has governed them in selecting their material from the superabundant stores of knowledge they possessed. For of course these brief memoirs represent but a fraction of what these men knew of Jesus and His works. Our brief study of these angel-epiphanies in the light of the purposes already stated may shed some valuable light upon the methods of the writers, the synoptic problem, and the general question of gospel harmony.

The keynote of the first Gospel is:—Jesus of Nazareth, the born King of the Jews—ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (ii. 2); and the angel in Matthew appears in character as the Imperious Herald and Puissant Representative of Royalty. Burst are the barriers of adamantine rock; all earth trembles at his touch: the sacred seals of a proud hierarchy are contemptuously snapped: the Temple guard is dashed into insensibility: and, with the rolled-back stone his throne and earth his footstool, he sits in majesty

victorious over all that would obstruct the triumphal pathway of the King of Glory.

With arresting authority and purposeful irony he addresses the group of listless women who, sunk in the bewildered apathy of despair, have crept near "to see the tomb." Fear not YOU, the angel cried—let grizzled men-at-arms, so brave to mock and torture one unarmed man, lie numb with terror, but *you*—the king's friends, draw boldly near. Then in clear-cut, decisive tones he issues his commands, and finally rallies their flickering thoughts by another emphatic *you* :—"Lo ! I spoke to you." This climax claimed their loyal heed, defined his auditory, and sealed his mandate. The narrative throughout is full of austere dignity, the note of command is dominant, and the angel endeavours to rouse the women from their lethargy to the activity of alert obedience. Matthew represents him as victorious here also, for the women are said to leave *quickly* and *run* to execute the orders given. Yet we know from the other Gospels that encouragement and instruction from other angelic beings were necessary before the women recovered sufficiently to obey. The story in this Gospel shows us *Royalty commanding loyalty*.

In striking contrast is the account given by Mark ; yet it is in perfect accord with his prime purpose. Here the women are not lethargic ; but busily occupied in buying spices, arranging to anoint the body, and discussing ways to remove the stone. They arrive very early in the morning ; their activity is undeniable, but their *courage*—the primary and essential characteristic for all prophethood—is small. A youth in white sitting within the tomb suddenly meets their gaze, and paralyzed with fear they halt aghast. Here the angel is as one of "the sons of the prophets." He sits—the preacher's posture in those days. He represents the Ideal Prophet-Preacher, and strives to instil into the

women the *courage* upon which Mark insists throughout as the leading trait of the Saviour's ministry. His tone is earnest and familiar rather than peremptory and commanding. He exhorts and encourages, and his discourse, of which we have the *précis* here, is arranged under three heads—for Mark, like many modern preachers, loved triple partition."

(1) He soothes and strengthens *the spirit*—" *Be not aghast.*"

(2) He informs *the mind*—" *He rose, He is not here.*"

(3) He employs *the body*—" *Come, see—go, tell.*"

Thus he tries to inspire them with that confidence based on belief which is the root of all such courage as men need for telling out the tidings of the Risen Saviour.

Mark records the failure of the sermon—which of the prophets did not fail? But after Pentecost the boldness came and they "went everywhere." Here the angel is *prophet-preacher exhorting to courage.*

In St. Luke the angels fulfil with calm dignity the priestly office of *instructing the ignorant.*¹

The women come with spices expecting to find the body of the Lord Jesus in the tomb. No other contingency occurred to them. But had they understood the Lord's teaching they would have come without spices to hail the Risen Christ. Now the empty sepulchre perplexed them utterly; and as they stand helpless and absolutely at a loss, the angels appear, gently chide them for their ignorance, and remind them of what the Lord had said to them in His many Galilaean "talks," when He foretold His betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. Convicted of error, informed of facts, and reminded of predictions, the women return to be "priests" themselves by instructing the Eleven and all the rest. Here the picture is of *angel-priests informing ignorance.*

¹ Vide Lev. x. 11; Deut. xxxiii. 10; 2 Chron. xv. 3; Ezek. xliv. 23, 24; Mal. ii. 7.

The first words of the angels mentioned by Matthew and Mark are *imperative*, and constitute a *command* in the first Gospel and an *exhortation* in the second. Whereas the opening words of the angelic beings appearing in Luke and John are *interrogative*; and in Luke they rebuke the women for ignorance of the *Teaching of Christ*, and in John they rebuke Mary Magdalene for ignorance of the *Nature of Christ*. That John's narrative here fits in so perfectly with his *avowed purpose* (xx. 31), and in that respect resembles so closely the other Gospels, is a powerful argument in favour of our estimate of the *unavowed purposes* of the synoptic writers.

The angels in John are ministers of God the Son and marvel at the unbelief which can suppose Him dead. Mary Magdalene is still weeping inconsolably for the missing body of the Lord. She believes Him dead, mourns for Him as for a human friend deceased, and all her thoughts of Him centre in the sacred form reverently buried but now so strangely lost. To find His lifeless body and arrange for its peaceful repose in a grave that would be watched and tended by those who loved Him was the full content of her hope.

But such sorrow and such a hope were a sad confession that she had missed the truth—so insistently presented in the fourth Gospel—of the Deity of Christ. There Jesus is the Eternal Word, in the beginning with God, before Abraham was, one with the Father, the Resurrection and the Life, who will raise His own at the last day, and “whose years are throughout all generations.” Mary should have known all this, but she was weeping as though He were but the lifeless body missing from the tomb. The angels see her thus, and in surprise and wonder ask, “Woman, why weepest thou?” A world of meaning throbbed in the simple words. But she is blind, and turns impatiently away, still inquiring pitifully for the missing body of the Lord. In infinite com-

passion Jesus met and answered her, and as she clung prostrate to His dear feet He lingered for a time although the open heavens, the glory, and the throne were awaiting Him, to tell her of that deathless Union of humanity with Deity, whereby all those who love Him are His brethren, sons of His Father and His God.

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*THE TEACHING OF PAUL IN TERMS OF THE
PRESENT DAY.*

XXVI (*continued*).¹

It would, however, be going very far beyond what Paul would have allowed: it would, in fact, amount to a statement which he would have totally condemned: if one were to assert (as some do) that Paul regarded Christ as the "better self" of the individual man, and that in this world man is realising his higher self in the Christian life. Nothing can be more certain than that to Paul Christ is the real God beyond us and outside of us, but manifesting Himself to and seizing upon the man whom He has chosen. In the process of the true life, Christ is the moving power in the man whom He has seized. Of course, in this process, man realises his own higher self, that is to say, he attains to the true purpose of his life, and to the nature which God intended him to realise. But all the time that divine figure remains above him and beyond him, drawing him on, though also moving within him and possessing him. Thus Christ is, in a metaphorical sense, the "better self" of the individual man; but He is far more than that; and the part that is left unsaid in this term "better self" is by far the more important part of the whole.

¹ Omitted by mistake in its proper place, in the end of § XXVI., where it should come after "consummated," the last word of the third sentence from the end of that Section.