

How Do Angels View the Generation of Jesus Christ?

A Sermon By The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

1. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (*Matthew* 1:1)
2. So begins the story of the Lord’s birth in this world, according to the Gospel of Matthew.
 - A. In a narrow sense, our text introduces the ancestry of Jesus which demonstrates that His adoptive father, Joseph, was a descendant of both David and Abraham.
 - 1 Thus it shows that Jesus fulfilled both the prophecy that the Child who would be called “Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, Father Everlasting, Prince of Peace,” would sit on the throne of David. (See *Isaiah* 9:6-7; *Jeremiah* 30:9; *Ezekiel* 34:23-24, 37:24), as well as the prophecy that in the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (See *Genesis* 22:18)
 - B. In a broader sense, this verse introduces the *whole* book of Matthew as the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, for the book ends with Jesus in His glorified state—fully Divine—charging the eleven disciples to make disciples of all nations.
 - 1 Thus the *whole* book shows fulfillment of the prophecy that all nations would be blessed in the seed of Abraham, and also shows the full origin or generation of Jesus Christ as He was foretold to be: “Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, Father Everlasting, Prince of Peace.”
 - C. Although it is not clear whether this genealogy or the one in Luke traces the actual biological lineage of Jesus through Mary, and although the account of Jesus’ ancestry does not garner the attention and interest that most people give to the story of Jesus’ birth which follows, the angels undoubtedly find much in it to bring them delight.
 - 1 That is because the spiritual sense of the Word treats of regeneration where the literal sense treats of generation, and the angels find great delight in the way goods and truths are propagated in a regenerating individual or, in this case, in the incarnation and glorification of the Lord.
3. Before we look at the spiritual sense of the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, let us take a look at the literal sense from a vantage point akin to that of the angels.
 - A. When we read a list of ancestors, we have in mind that these are people who once lived but are now dead.
 - B. Angels have no such view of historical figures, for all people who ever lived are

now in the spiritual world, very much alive.

- C. As Jesus said of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living....” (*Luke 20:38*)
- 1 So the genealogy presented in *Matthew* is a list of people now living in the spiritual world.
 - 2 Not only are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob alive, but Judah and Phares, David and Solomon, Hezekiah, Manasses, Amon and Josias.
 - 3 The three sets of fourteen generations is thus giving living examples of 42 generations of people, all but that last two or three of which, were in the spiritual world at the time when Jesus was born.
 - 4 In coming into this world to save people from their sins, the Lord was positioning Himself to redeem people in both worlds and bring about changes that would improve the quality of life for everyone from the highest angel to the lowest devil.
 - a. The work, *True Christian Religion* says that the subjugation of the hells and the formation of a new heaven were chief among the Lord's acts of redemption, and they took place in the spiritual world. (See *True Christian Religion* 95, 115, 118:2)
 - b. The inclusion of both good and wicked people in the ancestry of Jesus reminds us that serving the whole range of people—bringing order to all spiritual states and in both worlds—is what brought the Lord into the world.
4. When He came into the world, the Lord not only came to save those willing to be saved, whose generation was represented by the individuals in the genealogy, He also took on the hereditary nature of Mary and her ancestors.
- A. Abraham's, Jacob's, David's, and Solomon's proclivity toward polygamy was passed on to Jesus.
 - B. Any inclination Jacob had to steal his brother's birthright, or David to take his officer's wife and have him killed was in Jesus' heredity.
 - C. Ahaz's and Mannasseh's idolatry, including child sacrifice, became inclinations to like evils in their descendants.
 - D. The genealogy in *Matthew* provides a reminder of all the hereditary evils that Jesus was willing to take on by birth, so that the hells could draw near, engage in the combats of temptation, and be defeated by Him.

- E. Perhaps the angels, viewing the negative spiritual sense of this genealogy, are also aware of the frightful evils the Lord exposed Himself to in being born of a human mother.
5. The spiritual sense of the Word that the angels view is primarily a positive sense about the Lord and heavenly things, not the opposite sense which is about those things which oppose Him.
- A. When the Heavenly Doctrine speaks of genealogies in other parts of the Word, at times it says they are about such things as the heresies in a succession of deteriorating church doctrines, (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1145, 1255, 1330) but more often it says they are about a succession of goods and truths pertaining to charity and faith. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3279, 4070, 4668, 5598, 6239, 9845, 10144, 10204, 10249)
 - B. Abraham, for example, at times represents the Divine itself, which is described elsewhere in the Word as “Jehovah,” or “the Father,” of whom He was conceived. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3278, 7058:3, 10052:2 10738:3)
 - 1 Isaac, then, represents the Divine Rational which is begotten of the Divine Itself, while Jacob represents the Divine natural which springs from the Divine Rational. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1950, 2630, 3278, 3288)
 - 2 Judah represents the Divine of the Lord’s love, particularly in relation to His Divine Human. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4606, 6330, 6363)
 - 3 Perez, his son, represents the truth of faith which appears to be in the first place. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4812, 4927, 5354:13)
 - 4 Ezrom, his son, represents derivative truths, which are also goods of charity. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6024:2)
 - 5 The spiritual signification of the next seven names is not given, until we get to the last of the first fourteen generations: David, who represents the Lord as to His Divine royalty, or Divine truth. (See 3441:4, 4594, 5313:5, 9548, 10249:5)
 - a. As you can judge from the listing of these qualities, it is difficult for people in the natural world to see how one is derived from another, and how one differs from another.
 - 1) Hints given for the spiritual meaning of the twenty-seven names following David are very few, leaving much for us to anticipate learning when we get to heaven.
 - b. We can be sure, however, that the angels see hundreds if not thousands of truths in relation to these names, beyond anything

people on earth can grasp.

- c. Still, we can appreciate that when we read these names, the angels see a descent of the Divine itself into the world such that the Human being that was born was Divine as to His soul, and thus, the Son of God. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 7058, 10052:2; *Luke* 1:35)
6. In addition to Abraham representing the Divine Itself, he also represents the Divine Human. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2833, 2846, 3061)
 - A. *Arcana Coelestia* puts it this way: “Abraham represented both the Divine itself, which is called the Father, and the Divine Human, which is referred to as the Son. He accordingly represented the Lord as regards both, though the Divine Human represented by Him was the Divine Human existing from eternity, of which the Lord was the manifestation and to which He subordinated the Human born in time when He glorified it. This is the representation of the Lord portrayed by means of Abraham.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3251)
 - B. When the book of the generation of Jesus Christ begins with Abraham, it undoubtedly carries both meanings for the angels.
 - 1 With regard to the Divine Human existing from eternity, before the Lord came into the world, the Heavenly Doctrine teaches that the Lord manifested His Divine Humanity by means of the heavens.
 - 2 *Arcana Coelestia* says, “what flowed from God and passed through that [celestial] heaven had until then been the Divine human” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6371)
 - 3 “But when the Lord came into the world, and by so doing made the Human within Himself Divine, He took to Himself what had rested with angels of the celestial kingdom.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6371)
 - 4 We can well imagine that when the genealogy is being read, beginning with Abraham, and when Abraham is thought of as representing the Divine Humanity before He came into the world, the angels think of the Lord’s taking to Himself the power of manifesting His Divine Humanity which had rested with the celestial kingdom.
 - a. Abraham represents that Divine Humanity from eternity, and his seed represents to the angels, not the people named in the genealogy, but “all people throughout the world - both those who are inside the Church and those who are outside - with whom heavenly seed, which is charity, resides. And indeed the more interior angels perceive love itself, which is the heavenly seed - by itself, abstractly.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1025:3, 3373:2)

- b. Whereas charity with all good people in heaven—selfless love acted out according to angelic wisdom—had manifested the Divine Humanity before, the Lord came to reveal His Divine Humanity directly in His own Human made Divine.
 - c. Although He did this while He was in the world, after His birth, He undoubtedly laid the groundwork for it as He descended through the heavens to be born.
 - d. The angels must have been eager for the Lord to take on that which had been with the angels, so that He could do the work of salvation that had faltered and was failing in spite of the best angelic efforts. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6373)
 - e. With poetic license, we might imagine a reading of the genealogy to be telling a story of each of the societies of heaven bowing to the Lord as He descended through their midst, from the highest heaven to the lowest.
7. How might reflecting on the book of the generation of Jesus Christ have a positive effect on the way we live our lives?
- A. The Lord taught that the kingdom of God is within us, and the Heavenly Doctrine says that our internal mind is an image of heaven, while our external mind and body are an image of the world. (See *Luke 17:21*; *Arcana Coelestia* 6057)
 - B. As the Lord makes His coming in our lives, the process by which He came into the world is in some sense repeated.
 - 1 Just as the historical characters listed in the genealogy are real people, living either in heaven or in hell, so our memories and the associated affections from our life up until now live within us.
 - a. Just as there are characters in the genealogy that we admire for their good deeds, and characters we revile for their wicked deeds, so we have past states of our lives that warm us, and others that chill and depress us.
 - b. And just as the Lord came to bring order to the whole spiritual world in order to save us, we can be sure that He can bring order to our lives such that the hell within us will not dare to rise up, and the kingdom of God within us will come to enjoy heavenly freedom.
 - 1) As we cooperate with Him, the Lord will save us from our sins.
 - C. The succession of generations beginning with Abraham represented, as we

saw, a succession of states, from the Divine Itself down to the outmost things of the Divine Human, such that the Human born was called “the Son of God.”

- 1 In an analogous manner, the Lord brings Divine truth into our lives which will grow and mature in us, defeat the hells and save us from our sins.
 - 2 How the Lord can make Divine truth present in a finite mind is ultimately beyond our comprehension, but we can see that the truth of the Word traces its lineage from the Divine and is Divine, or God-with-us.
 - a. As a recognition of the Divinity of the Lord’s Human is key to our salvation, so is a recognition of the Divinity of His Word.
- D. The generations from Abraham also picture the Lord taking on the Divine Human from eternity that was presented by the angels.
- 1 Just as the angels acknowledged that all the Divine power they exercised was indeed the Lord’s and rejoiced as He took it to Himself, so we acknowledge that the good we do and the truth we think are really the Lord’s.
 - a. We too can rejoice in that fact, and come to see the Lord at work in our lives, for our own salvation and the usefulness of the things we do to serve the neighbor.
 - b. In our earlier states of life, it seems like everything depends on us, and that if it were not for us, we would have no goodness in our lives.
 - c. But as the Lord makes His coming, although we continue to act as if of ourselves, we see more and more that the power of good and truth really does rest with the Lord, and we will that it be so.
8. As children, we may have thought of the Lord leaving His home in heaven to come to earth.
- A. In reflecting on the genealogy of Jesus Christ, it is more obvious that He did not leave heaven to come to earth, but clothed Himself with all the heavens to come to earth.
- 1 He even veiled Himself with hereditary inclinations from the hells, that He might put them in their proper place through victories in temptation.
 - 2 As it says in the Psalms, “Jehovah bowed the heavens, and came down, and thick darkness was under His feet.” (*Psalms* 18:9; see *Arcana Coelestia* 9406:5)
 - 3 He came to bring what is Divine and truly heavenly and truly human to us,

so that we, although in the world, might like Him, be not of the world. (See *John 17-14-16*)

- 4 To the angels, a wonderful description of the process of His incarnation and an outline of how He would make His Human Divine during His life in the world, is what is contained in the verses that begin:
- 5 “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”
- 6 *Amen.*

Readings: *Genesis 22:9-19; Isaiah 9:1-7; Matthew 1:1-17; AC 1330; 3279, parts.*

Arcana Coelestia 1330. ...In the Word 'generations' are nothing other than the things that constitute the Church, thus forms of doctrine and of worship. The internal sense of the Word encompasses nothing else. Consequently when any Church is born the generations of it are mentioned, as with the Most Ancient Church in Gen. 2:4, 'These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth'; and likewise with the other Churches that succeeded it before the Flood, 'This is the book of the generations', Gen. 5:1. The same is true of the Churches after the Flood which were three in number - the first called Noah, the second taking its name from Eber, the third from Jacob and subsequently from Judah and Israel. Verse 1 of the previous chapter, where the first Church is described, starts in similar fashion, 'These are the generations of the sons of Noah', as does the present verse in reference to this second Church taking its name from Eber, 'These are the generations of Shem', and in reference to the third as well, in verse 27 below, 'These are the generations of Terah'....

3279. 'These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son' means the Lord's Divine Rational, from which the Divine Natural sprang. This is clear from the meaning of 'generations' as derivatives,.... that is to say, derivatives of faith when faith is the subject, and derivatives of the Church when the Church is the subject.... Here however since 'generations' has reference to the Lord, Divine generations are meant. That is to say, the Divine Rational came into being from the Divine itself, which is meant by Isaac who was begotten by Abraham; and the Divine Natural came into being from the Divine Rational, which is meant by Esau and Jacob who were begotten by Isaac. For Esau and Jacob represent the Lord's Divine Natural, Esau as regards good, and Jacob as regards truth, both being dealt with in what follows next. These are the things meant here by 'generations'.

Through The Week

Recall the Readings

- ◆ Abraham was told that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
- ◆ Isaiah prophesied that the One who would be called "the Prince of Peace" would sit on the throne of David.
- ◆ The book of the generation of Jesus Christ calls Him the "son of David" and "the son of Abraham."
- ◆ The genealogy counts fourteen generations from Abraham to David, another fourteen to the captivity, and another to Jesus.

Reflect on the Message

- ◆ Most of the people in Jesus' genealogy were alive in the spiritual world when Jesus was born, awaiting the redemptive work He would do in the spiritual world.
- ◆ Jesus' genealogy reminds us of the varied human states impressed on the heredity He took on by birth in the world, and which He would subjugate as He won in temptations.
- ◆ Abraham represents the Divine Itself, from which Jesus descended into the world.
- ◆ Abraham also represents the Divine Human from eternity which had been manifested by means of the heavens, and whose power He took to Himself during the course of His incarnation.

Take Action

- ◆ Although your past is what it is, trust the Lord's power to bring a new order to it, just as He reordered past generations now in the spiritual world.
- ◆ Take comfort in knowing that the Lord took on awful tendencies toward evil as illustrated in His ancestry. He can use the power that overcame them to deliver you from yours.
- ◆ Reflect on the many Divine qualities the Lord brought to earth, and choose one to be mindful of this week, and express in your relationships with others.