

MEDITATIONS
ON
Vatican
Art
Angels

*A Preview
of the
Upcoming Book*

MARK HAYDU, LC, STL



MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO THE PATRONS OF THE ARTS IN THE VATICAN MUSEUMS

“Your passion for the arts and love for your faith confirm to me daily the incredible opportunity before us: to preserve, for today’s generation and for future generations, this most unique collection. May God reward all of you for your kindness! It is well beyond any human measure to repay.”

Fr. Mark Haydu

International Coordinator of the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums

“In every age, the Church has called upon the arts to give expression to the beauty of her faith.”

Pope Francis, greeting the Patrons of the Arts, October 19, 2013

Beauty, Ever Ancient, Ever New

The Vatican Museums are home to an unsurpassed collection of sacred art, works that depict humanity’s longing for God and bear witness to unfathomable spiritual mysteries.

Angels are one of those mysteries, and they are often portrayed in works of art as messengers and protectors. The book *Meditations on Vatican Art: Angels*, a brief preview of which you have in hand, will help you become more aware of the work of angels in your life, where they guard you and lead you ever onward to God. The beautiful artwork herein will aid your focus on these spiritual beings as you meditate and pray.

In the world of sacred art, another sort of work goes on, also largely unseen, yet crucial to the existence of the art: the work of preserving these fragile pieces from the ravages of time.

Thirty years ago, a group of devoted individuals was inspired to address the restoration and preservation of the Church’s rich heritage of sacred art and historic buildings. They founded the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, a nonprofit, interfaith organization committed to the restoration, preservation, and growth of the collections and buildings of the Vatican Museums while enriching the knowledge of its members.

We are excited that chapters of the Patrons of the Arts are active and thriving today in North American and European countries. Some of the most well-known treasures in the Vatican collections have been restored with money raised by the Patrons: the Pauline Chapel that houses Michelangelo’s last two frescoes, the Raphael Rooms, Borgia Apartments, the frescoes on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, and nonreligious and interfaith art. The Patrons have also made possible several art-education experiences for children and for the visually and hearing impaired, the first of their kind in Italy.

As millions of visitors to the Vatican Museums can attest, the Patrons' outreach spreads knowledge of the cultural and spiritual goals of the Vatican Museums. In gratitude, the Vatican Museums welcome the Patrons to their galleries with unprecedented access.

The Patrons' generous stewardship is not merely for the needs of the day; indeed, its legacy will impact generations. May the art in the Vatican collections help you in your quest to find God.

For more about the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums or to become a Patron, contact:

IN NORTH AMERICA

Lorna Richardson
Administrator, North American Office
Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums
43430 E. Florida Avenue, Suite F, PMB 322
Hemet, CA 92544
Tel: 951-658-9834
Email: membership-usa@vm-patrons.com

INTERNATIONALLY

Patrons Office in the Vatican Museums
Apostolic Palace
V-00120 Vatican City State, Europe
Tel: 011-39-06-698-81814
Vatican-patrons.org



Bring the beauty of the Vatican collections into your home.
Reserve your copies of *Meditations on Vatican Art: Angels* today. See back cover for details.
A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to the
Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums.



Imprimi Potest: Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, The Redemptorists
Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri 63057
To order, call 800-325-9521 • Liguori.org

Copyright © 2014 Mark Haydu

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

Photos herein are used with permission, courtesy of Vatican Museums, and copyright © Vatican Museums.

This booklet is not for commercial use.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of The Redemptorists.
To learn more about The Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14 / 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition



DAY 8

ANGELS JOIN US IN GLORIFYING THE LORD

The Nativity

Domenico Bigordi, called Ghirlandaio

1492



THEME: Treasures that last.

FOCUS OF THIS MEDITATION: Angels in the New Testament lead us to Jesus and proclaim his glory. They treat him as God and invite us to do the same!

◀ Domenico Bigordi, better known as Ghirlandaio, was a painter of the Florentine Renaissance. His workshop was known for producing numerous quality paintings from many talented artists but is perhaps most notably known for one particular apprentice, Michelangelo.

Ghirlandaio's style was famous for its portrayal of contemporary people within religious narratives that can be seen in his figures of Mary and Joseph in this story. Mary

is actively in prayer while watching over her newborn Son, in contrast to Joseph, who is in a restful pose on the other side.

The plain gold background works to make this piece timeless as it causes the viewer to focus on the figures of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. There is no stable, fire, manger, or animals to distract us from our Savior's birth. This scene could be taking place at any time under any setting. It is the Holy Family that is important. The angels overhead watch as this great mystery of God unfolds, and they call us all to worship this holy Child.



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

LUKE 2:4-16

And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.



The golden background of *The Nativity* focuses our attention on the mystical and timeless theological meaning of the birth of Christ rather than on the particular details of its historical setting. We find no stable, no grass, no cattle. The cave is gone, fire is removed, and there is nothing else that would link it to a time, place, or circumstance. Christ's birth is a universal event, valid for all times and places, for all people.

This more reserved decorative motif allows *Il Ghirlandaio* to focus our attention on the essentials of this moment. Joseph, the man who has a humble and silent heart, is shown sleeping peacefully, meditatively, because he is the just man capable of hearing God's voice while at rest. Angels told him in a dream not to fear to take Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20). Later, angels came to him in a dream to tell him to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's vengeful henchmen (Matthew 2:13). Like Mary, Joseph reflects on things profoundly as he grapples with God's will and the amazing vocation he has been given. His prayer leads him to "man up" to his call rather than take the easier path of becoming an absentee father. Following God will mean pilgrimage as the symbols at his feet indicate—his walking stick, water jug, and knapsack. He assumes his role as leader and protector, an example for the Holy Family. He is not dozing lazily. Rather, he is silently attentive. Later, he displays his commitment to get busy and follow the angel's voice.

Mary's figure has a heightened descriptive charm highlighted by her youthful appearance, flowing hair, and the ornate mantle that fans out from under her knee toward the viewer. She leans forward in active prayer and as a protective presence over her Child. Her knee is bent prominently in the foreground, adding depth to the painting. Her posture is at once eager, adoring, and active.

Our adoration of Jesus and our willingness to follow him should have these same characteristics: the silent meditation of Joseph and the active attentiveness of Mary. While Joseph and Mary are there for Jesus in different ways, both are very much present to him. It is that sense of being present to God, whatever we're doing, that can be the hardest to master. We must keep ourselves from being distracted by the things around us so we can focus on the only thing that matters.



As our focus moves from Mary and Joseph to Jesus, we see he is propped on a roll of wheat while playfully sucking his fingers and looking at his loving Mother. This seemingly innocent gesture could focus our meditation on John's theological reading of the Incarnation as the Word spoken by the Father. Or it can remind us of Jesus' prophetic mission as the preacher of truth and the one who will convoke his followers and form his Church with his instruction and revelation. Just as the Child Jesus responds to his Mother's loving gaze, so will our Lord respond to us when we go to him in prayer or gaze at him lovingly during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

In the line of sight between Mary and Jesus are the words "*EGO SUM LUX MUNDI!*" or "I am the Light of the World." Jesus' spiritually rich statement enables us to interpret the painting and the event of the Incarnation in one phrase. He is the light coming into the world that will enlighten the hearts of all people and cast out the darkness of doubt, fear, and confusion.

The angels in heaven watch over and are involved with the mystery playing out below them. This is indicated by the arrangement of the angels in heaven, all looking down upon Jesus and holding the heavenly choir sheet. Their roles are to praise God and lead us to adore Jesus with them. Turn your attention to the Latin phrase stenciled in red that runs horizontally through the center of the painting: *Venientes Gentes Adorare Dominum*, the "People Shall Come to Worship the Lord."

That is what the angels in heaven lead the shepherds to do. While out in the field with their flock, the pastors are interrupted by the angel of the Lord, who says in our Scripture passage: "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." The angel comforts them by inviting them not to be afraid and then proclaims the good news. The shepherds' response is to go in an adoring procession to see Jesus: "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

Angels are all around Jesus' life, and—as we will see—they make themselves present in all the key moments of our redemption. They accompany Jesus and are at his service while also reaching out to us. Keep your eyes open today to see how angels are reaching out to lead you to Jesus!





PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth! Lord God, heavenly king, Almighty God and Father: We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

- ✠ How often do you get distracted by your surroundings when you should be focusing on God? Like Ghirlandaio, try to ease out distractions so only God attracts your attention.
- ✠ Angels come to lead us to Jesus so we can worship him together. How have angels been at work in your life?
- ✠ We need both the silent meditation of Joseph and the active attentiveness of Mary. Which style is easiest for you? Which is the most difficult? How can you adjust your prayer life so both ways work for you?

Spiritual Exercise

- ✠ The next time you find yourself in silent prayer, let Jesus take up all of your attention. Let the rest of the background fade away. Let Jesus take the foreground. Let his light enlighten you.



The Deliverance of St. Peter is a pendant to two other frescoes working to demonstrate the spiritual and temporal supremacy of the Catholic Church, manifested by a special divine intervention: The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple of Jerusalem, from which he wanted to steal the sacred vessels, and the The Meeting Between Leo the Great and Attila. Leo the Great is depicted with the same features of Leo X (1513–21), the successor of Julius II (1503–13). In this second room, Raphael abandons the harmonic style and muted tones of the previous room, creating a dramatic pathos and using dark colors, which seem to draw a comparison with the work of Michelangelo.

In this fresco, there is not only an obsessive reach toward perfection and geometric perspective but also a certain originality of style in the use of light and shadow—one of the first known nocturnal paintings in Italian art.



DAY 24

THE ANGELS SAVE PETER

The Deliverance of St. Peter

Raphael Sanzio

1514



THEME: God protects the apostles, especially the pope.

FOCUS OF THIS MEDITATION: God protects the Apostle Peter, the first pope. He sends his angels to help and deliver him.

◀ *The Deliverance of St. Peter* is a wall fresco painted by Raphael and his assistants and completed in 1514. It is situated in the Room of Heliodorus, one of his famous frescoed Vatican Rooms. Raphael had already prepared the first drawings for these frescoes in the summer of 1511, even before the painting of the first room, the Room of the Signatures, had been completed. The Church had recently suffered a loss against the French, which gave them the city of Bologna and was under constant threat of foreign armies. Thus, Julius II suggested to Raphael the subject matter of miraculous interventions to protect the Church. *The Deliverance of St. Peter*, in particular, represents the triumph

of the first pope by divine intervention at the height of his tribulations.

For this fresco, Raphael planned a strongly unified scene, despite the articulation of the wall into three zones due to the interruption of a window in the wall. Each zone is a scene in the story. At the center, beyond a grate and between dark and massive curtained walls, a radiant angel appears in the prison, where Peter sleeps deeply, bound by chains. The appearance of the bright, glowing angel backlighting the dark, grated prison walls generates a stunning effect of spatial depth.

The bright flames in the background reach forth to illuminate all the elements of the scene, including the prison walls, displaying a reddish glow. Peter looks old and tired, depicted in this way perhaps to allude to the 1513 death and release from earthly prison of Julius II, or perhaps to commemorate the liberation of Leo X, a cardinal at the time, from captivity following the Battle of Ravenna.

On the right, an angel leads the apostle out of the prison in an atmosphere that seems somewhere between dream and reality, evoked by the presence of the guards, who miraculously fall into a deep sleep. On the left of the scene, other soldiers are depicted in the moment they discover the escape, illuminated by moonlight and the glow of their torches reflecting upon their armor. Notice the soldiers are dressed like Swiss Guards; notice how realistic the light appears as it falls on their armor.

There are four different types of light in this piece: the moon, which reflects upon the soldiers' armor; the torch, with its floating reverberation; the divine light; and the light from the window below, which emphasizes the light of the angel. This final light, the opening at the base of the painting, is not painted but the real window that Raphael cleverly accommodated into his painted scene.



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

ACTS 12:3–5, 7

And when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (It was [the] feast of Unleavened Bread.) He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.[...] Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, "Get up quickly." The chains fell from his wrists.

Many people who visit me in Rome ask and are concerned about the pope's security. I tell them not to worry, not just because Vatican Police and the Swiss Guard are the first-class outfits that they are, but because the pope has an army of angels protecting him. The Vatican Police and Swiss Guards would be the first to affirm that they have seen things that only divine protection could explain. I remember a story about St. John Paul II's trip to Bosnia in 1997. The bridges his motorcade would cross were inspected routinely, including on the night before his arrival. On the day his plane landed—thanks to a citizen's tip—police found mines under a bridge on the route. Yes, angels protect the Holy Father, just as they have been since St. Peter.

Saint Peter, and the other apostles, became courageous proclaimers of the good news after the power of the Holy Spirit came down upon them. Peter even told the Jewish authorities that he had no other option but to proclaim his faith, for it was more important to obey God than to obey men. Subsequent Holy Fathers and many members of the Church have followed St. Peter's advice. And for many, it has cost them their lives. The angels have always been busy protecting the bold apostles. Are you bold enough to need a little more angelic backup?

Peter's preaching finally leads to his arrest, and it is at this point we pick up today's passage and the Raphael fresco that helps us envision it. Peter is locked up in the prison and could have let fear or concern overcome him. He might have wondered if it was better for the fledgling Church that he steer clear of trouble in order to dedicate more time to accompany its adherents. The painting can inspire you to reflect on his fear, doubt, concerns, and the "now what do I do" thought that might fill his heart. Admire Peter's response and ask if yours would be the same. After being there for a few days, on the night



before his trial before the same man who tried Christ his Lord and condemned him to death, he sleeps peacefully between the soldiers. He seems to have not a care in the world!

What brings him peace? He is doing all he can by asking the Church to pray and then simply awaits his chance to testify about his Savior, Jesus Christ. He applies the adage of controlling what he can and accepting things he cannot change.

And before this trust and abandonment, God answers the prayers by sending his angel. Read the Scripture passage again and notice the parallels with Jesus' own trial and resurrection. Arrested because it pleased the people, Jesus was captured before Passover, placed under soldiers' guard, condemned, and taken into custody. His resurrection differs from Peter's story, of course, for Jesus had to give up his life for many. In the Raphael painting, it is not time for Peter's death, although the artist depicts the act of God's power like a resurrection. As happened with Jesus, the slumbering Peter lies in a tomb, and the angel of God enters into this sealed space. With a glorious burst of light, the angel walks Peter out of the grip of death while the soldiers sleep.

Peter can hardly believe what is happening, which leads us to believe he fully expected to go to his trial. He didn't anticipate such a powerful act of intervention! Then when he arrives at the Church united in prayer, the people can't believe it either. They think they are seeing his angel and not really him! It's funny that all are praying for his release and protection, then when God frees and guards him, they can hardly believe. Again, just like the resurrection of Jesus. We often pray and then are surprised to see our prayers answered as we hoped. We don't often expect God's power to be so evident, but we should. If we trust and pray with openness, then God will surely work miracles in our lives, like he did for Peter and the early Church. He wants to set us free and send us back to our task of preaching and extending the kingdom, just like Peter did.

It is beautiful to read Peter's testimony once he gets inside and talks with the praying family. He credits the Lord, even though the angels appeared to him and did the work. This reinforces what the Church already believed about angels. God sends them, and all the credit and glory goes to him. They are merely doing their jobs. If we honor them, pray to them, and write books about them, it is merely to honor and bless God, who sends us such glorious creatures for our protection.

The Church and the pope are under *their* protection because the Church and the pope are under *God's* protection.

Jesus promised us that the gates of hell would not be strong enough to withstand the attack of the Church. In the first battle, Lucifer attacked Michael. Ever since, God has battled to get back what is rightfully his, as shown by the first pope's miraculous escape from jail with angelic assistance. Renew your faith in God's action in the world through the Church and the pope. Call on the angels to protect the pope and all apostles of God.



PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Hear us, O holy Lord, Almighty Father, eternal God, bestow your favor on us and send your angels from heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit, and defend all of your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Adapted from *The Angel of Prayer*

- ✠ How do you find peace in the stressful or frightening situations you face?
- ✠ Think of a time God answered your prayer in the way you expected. Why is it hard of us to believe God really is in our lives?
- ✠ God constantly seeks to protect and defend our souls. Perhaps you haven't noticed. Name some ways you can protect yourself from temptation and evil.

Spiritual Exercise

- ✠ Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the angel protectors in your life.

Open your heart to the presence of angels, God's holy messengers and protectors. In *Meditations on Vatican Art: Angels*, you can reflect on stunning depictions from the Vatican Museums and contemplate angelic encounters in Scripture.

Following his acclaimed first book, *Meditations on Vatican Art*, Fr. Mark Haydu, international coordinator of the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, once again serves as your spiritual guide for a breathtaking journey through time, meditation, and the Vatican art collections.

Meditations on Vatican Art: Angels offers you a deeper understanding of your own spiritual journey as you follow Fr. Haydu's explanation of the battle between the fallen angels and the faithful angels and God sending his angels to watch over you. The book's splendid reproductions of major works represent ancient through contemporary periods in art.

Each day's meditation includes a:

- Unique image with descriptive and contextual background about the artist and the work
- Relevant and insightful passage from Scripture
- Reflection on the meaning of the work with questions to ponder

Contemplate the thirty-one meditations in this hardbound book as the Holy Spirit inspires or use them to create a retreat for yourself or a group. Let *Meditations on Vatican Art: Angels* open your heart and help you become aware of angels' existence and their desire to keep you from harm and guide you to God.



Available November 2014
10 x 10 hardcover with an elegant dust jacket
\$34.99 • Item #825606

Order your copies today!

Liguori.org
800-325-9521
15902

 **Liguori**
PUBLICATIONS