

Did you know that the US president and every former US president still living is being closely watched? It’s not always obvious, but they’re being guarded and protected by heavily-armed men and women in suits. Who are these protectors of presidents? They’re the United States Secret Service.

Since 1901, after the assassination of President William McKinley, the US Congress authorized the Secret Service to protect US presidents. Wherever a president goes, the Secret Service goes ...\* watching them, guarding them, protecting them.

Would you like to be closely watched, guarded and protected like that? As a Christian, you already are, but not by heavily-armed people wearing suits. Someone bigger, better and stronger follows you wherever you go. **God’s Secret Service** watches you, guards you, protects you. They are in this room with you right now. They came with you and they’re going home with you ... and you probably didn’t even know it. You’ve probably figured out that angels are **God’s Secret Service**.

Contrary to popular opinion, when you die and go to heaven, you are not given a pair of wings and become an angel. That’s not how it works. When you die, you don’t become an angel. You are a child God. You stay that way. God sends angels to protect his children.

And please don’t think of angels as cute and harmless creatures. The Bible describes them as just the opposite. The angel Michael made appearances in both the OT and NT. He’s an intimidating warrior who leads a powerful army of angels, who defeated Satan and his angels.

Angels, **God’s Secret Service**, serve in several ways.

- Sometimes they’re messengers – telling the shepherds that Jesus was born ... telling the women that Jesus had risen ... telling the disciples that Jesus would visibly return to earth one day.

- Sometimes they’re protectors – Daniel in the lion’s den ... Joseph, Mary and Jesus finding safety in Egypt ... today’s lesson, when King Herod had planned to execute the Apostle Peter.

That’s where we’ll pick up today’s story. Peter is in a maximum-security prison with 4 squads of 4 soldiers standing guard. 16 highly trained soldiers – that seems about right for such a dangerous criminal. This fisherman turned apostle had been arrested for sharing the good news of Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior, in Jerusalem.

What are the other Christians in Jerusalem doing the whole time Peter was behind bars? They did what Christians always do in times of trouble: **They’re praying for their fellow believer.**

In our lesson, God answered their prayers in two totally different ways. First, he took **James, the brother of John**, home to heaven when King Herod had him executed **with a sword**. And then, God sent an angel to rescue Peter from prison, the night before his trial.

FYI ... This is the third different Herod, same name, we’ve come across in the NT. This King Herod is Herod Agrippa I. His grandfather, Herod the Great, had the baby boys killed near Bethlehem around the time Jesus was born. His uncle, Herod Antipas, beheaded John the Baptist and wanted Jesus to perform miracles at his trial.

Back to Peter’s escape. Those 16 highly-trained soldiers, providing around-the-clock watch, were no match for Peter’s Secret Service detail.

The night before Herod was going to bring Peter to trial, Peter was chained up and sleeping between 2 soldiers, with at least 2 more guarding the prison. That’s when an angel stood right next to Peter, in his cell. When he shook Peter to wake him up, his chains fell off. That allowed Peter to get dressed and put on some sandals so he could follow the angel.

Don't you find it interesting that Peter wasn't up all-night pacing and worrying about the next day's trial or what might happen after that? He lived with his Lord's promises every day. In fact, it was such a deep sleep he didn't even realize that a Secret Service detail was rescuing him.

And, don't you find it interesting that they didn't try to sneak out the back way, undetected? Peter and his rescue team of 1 walked right past not 1 but 2 guard posts. They continued to the city gate, which opened all by itself, where they walked safely into the city.

Once Peter was free and clear, the angel left him. That's when his brain-fog cleared and he realized: **"Now I know for sure that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me."** God's Secret Service sent to protect God's people.

This wonderful miracle in today's Bible story teaches us something about our God. When you're in trouble, when you need something, God can respond in a number of ways. One of them is to alert your Secret Service detail to step in. You've never met any of them before, but they're with you everywhere you go. If it wasn't for their constant and watchful care, the Devil and his demons would make your life miserable.

As sinful human beings, we often underestimate God when we're in trouble. We often underestimate how closely God is watching over our lives, and how much he cares about us and how much he helps us. We forget that God has an unlimited number of Secret Service Agents to send our way at a moment's notice.

There was another situation with Peter in which angels were also the topic of discussion. Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to protect Jesus. Jesus told him that he could ask his Father and he could have instantly sent 12 legions of angels. (1 legion = 6,000, so 12 legions = 72,000 angels ... that's an army of angels.)

We often underestimate God, by thinking we're on our own down here: *"It's up to me to figure things out. It's up to me to be strong."*

But God reminds us in today's lesson, we're not on our own down here. God sends his Secret Service into your life. What makes you so valuable that God would do this? What would make Jesus live the perfect life you could not live, and die the death you should have died? What would make him place his name on you at your baptism?

You're his child. He's your Father. That's what makes you so valuable to him. That's why he sends angels into your life to watch you closely and protect you. That's why he rescued the Apostle Peter.

Have you recently read or heard stories about angels? Sure you have! They're never mentioned, but they're in the daily news stories.

There are always collisions on our roads. The one north of Milwaukee on Wednesday made national news. Unfortunately, a person died in that 48-car pile-up. But most walked away unharmed. Sometimes a crash is avoided when a car swerves, or there was a crash, but no fatalities or injuries. That wasn't great driving or luck. You won't read about angels in any story, but they were on duty.

An intruder gets scared away by something. You won't read about angels in any story, but God angels were on duty.

The dangerous situations at your job – machinery, chemicals or heights. How is it that you've never had a life-altering accident? God's Secret Service prevented these things from happening to you. You may never have even been aware of it.

You are so valuable to your heavenly Father that he has a Secret Service detail following you everywhere you go. And someday, when you die, those same angels will escort your soul to heaven. That's when you'll get to meet **God's Secret Service**, and together you'll worship your Savior – the crucified Christ who is your living Lord.