

Heavenly Beings

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Objectives:

- ✠ List the nine ranks of heavenly beings, according to the Orthodox Church.
- ✠ Obtain a general understanding of the differences between and the purposes of the heavenly ranks.

Key verses:

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones (children); for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).

Lesson Outline:

[CLASS QUESTION] – Ask the class what are the different heavenly beings.

Read Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 12 – Clue for the class.
Identify the 3 heavenly beings identified in this verse.

List the **NINE** heavenly beings, in order of status and importance:

Seraphim	Cherubim	Thrones
Dominions	Powers	Authorities
Principalities	Archangels	Angels

Explain the role each heavenly being plays in God’s plan for humanity.

- The supreme angelic order is the **Seraphim**. Their name means **flaming, fiery**. The seraphim burn with supreme love for God and this flame of love ignites all the others. Read Isaiah 6:1-3 “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory”.
- The second rank of the highest order is comprised of the **Cherubim**, whose name means **comprehension** or **knowledge**. It is for this reason that they are called the **many-eyed**. Contemplating the glory of God and possessing supreme knowledge and wisdom, they pour forth the wisdom of God upon others. Read Genesis 3: 24 “So God drove out Adam; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life”.

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- Explain the importance of this task and hence why the Cherubim have a very high rank.
- Read Ezekiel 10: 8-9: “**And there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man’s hand under their wings. And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubim; one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by each other cherub, and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone**”.
- The third rank of the highest order consists of **the Thrones**, called **God-bearing** not by their essence, but by their service, since God blessedly and unfathomably rests upon them. God also shows His majesty and justice through this rank of angels.
- The fourth rank is composed of **Dominions**, who dominate the lower ranks of angels. Serving God willing and joyfully, they pass on to those living on earth the power of prudent self-control and wise self-arrangement; they teach men to control their feelings, to restrain unbridled desires and passions, to subordinate the flesh to the spirit, to dominate one’s will and conquer temptations.
- The rank of dominions is followed by the rank of **Powers**, through whom God produces signs and miracles for the glory of God and to aid and strengthen those who labour and who are burdened. This rank is mentioned to us by Apostle **Peter**, who says that Christ, ascending into the heavens, was worshipped by angels, and authorities, and powers (**1Pet 3:22**).
- To the lowest rank of the middle order belong the **Authorities**, who have great power over the devil, conquer him, guard men from his wiles, and fortify those who engage in spiritual labours. Some Church Fathers believe that the **guardian angel of Apostle Peter, who led him out of prison, belonged to this angelic rank**.
- The lower order of the heavenly hierarchy includes the following: the first rank is that of the **Principalities**, who rule over the lower angels, assign tasks, distribute services among them, and rule over kingdoms and communities of men.
- The next-to-last rank is composed of the **Archangels**, messengers and heralds of God’s mysteries, who communicate God’s will to men.
- The last rank is called simply **Angels**, the bodiless spirits who are closest to men. It is they who are primarily sent into the world as our guardian angels. This is what we know of the ranks and orders of the heavenly hierarchy.

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Conclusion:

We must understand that there are so many spiritual beings, the heavenly beings, that are active and that God uses many of the heavenly beings directly with humans.

Some examples of how God uses the heavenly beings to interact with humans:

- Apostle Peter was miraculously delivered from prison by an angel.
- **St Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of St John the Theologian, was miraculously saved from death by his guardian angel. During one of his travels, **St Polycarpous** and his deacon stopped for the night at a wayside inn. At midnight his guardian angel appeared to him and said: “Polycarp, get up and quickly leave this inn, for it will fall down.” The vision and the warning occurred thrice. And as soon as St. Polycarp went out of the inn, it straightaway fell down.

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.