



THE BASICS OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

The Hierarchy of Angels

Orthodox tradition outlines a structured hierarchy among the angels, often described in three triads, each consisting of three orders:

First Three Ranks:

1. Seraphim:

These are the highest order of angels, depicted with six wings and surrounding the throne of God, continuously singing praises.

- **Appearance:** Often depicted with six wings; two cover their faces, two cover their feet, and two are used for flying.
- **Symbolism:** They are usually shown in fiery colors, representing their burning love and zeal for God.
- **Isaiah 6:2-3:** *"Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'"*

2. Cherubim:

Guardians of divine mysteries, the Cherubim are depicted with four faces and four wings, symbolizing their comprehensive knowledge and swift obedience to God.

- **Appearance:** Commonly shown with four faces (man, lion, ox, and eagle) and four wings.
- **Symbolism:** They are usually blue, symbolizing their knowledge and wisdom.
- **Genesis 3:24:** *"He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."*
- **Ezekiel 10:1-22:** Detailed descriptions of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision.

3. Thrones:

Representing divine authority, the Thrones are the carriers of God's will to the earthly realm.

- **Appearance:** Sometimes depicted as wheels covered with eyes.
- **Symbolism:** Representing divine judgment and authority.
- **Colossians 1:16:** *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."*

Second Three Ranks:

4. Dominions:

These angels regulate the duties of lower angels, ensuring the divine order is maintained.

- **Appearance:** Often depicted carrying a scepter or a sword.
- **Symbolism:** They govern the lower choirs of angels and maintain the divine order.
- **Colossians 1:16:** (Same as above) *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."*

5. Virtues:

Responsible for bestowing grace and valour to humanity, they also govern natural elements.

- **Appearance:** Shown with symbols of miracles and grace, sometimes depicted with shining rays.
- **Symbolism:** They are believed to be responsible for performing miracles and bestowing grace.
- **Ephesians 1:21:** *"[Christ is] far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."* (The term "might" here is sometimes interpreted to refer to the Virtues in some angelology traditions.)

6. Powers:

These angels combat evil and protect the cosmic order, preventing the forces of chaos from prevailing.

- **Appearance:** Often shown in armor, symbolizing their role in fighting evil.
- **Symbolism:** They guard against the forces of darkness and keep the universe in balance.
- **Ephesians 6:12:** *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

Third Three Ranks:

7. Principalities:

Guardians of nations and leaders, the Principalities oversee groups of people and ensure the implementation of divine decrees.

- **Appearance:** Typically depicted with a crown and a scepter.
- **Symbolism:** They protect nations and groups of people.
- **Ephesians 3:10:** *"So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."*

8. Archangels:

Messengers of significant importance, such as Gabriel and Michael, who deliver critical messages and lead divine armies.

- **Appearance:** Recognizable figures like Michael with a sword, Gabriel with a lily, and Raphael with a staff.
- **Symbolism:** They are God's chief messengers and leaders of angelic hosts.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:16:** *"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."*
- **Jude 1:9:** *"But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'"*

9. Angels:

The closest to humanity, these angels protect and guide individuals, acting as personal guardians and messengers of God.

- **Appearance:** Often depicted in human-like form with wings.
- **Symbolism:** They act as guardians and messengers for individuals.
- **Hebrews 1:14:** *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"*
- **Matthew 18:10:** *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."*