

Matthew 28:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

Analysis

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. This description of the angel's appearance emphasizes the glory and purity of heavenly beings. The Greek προσωπεία (prosōpeia, 'countenance/appearance') being 'like lightning' (ὥς ἀστραπή/hōs astrapē) suggests dazzling, brilliant light radiating from the angel's face, similar to Christ's transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) and Moses' shining face after encountering God (Exodus 34:29-30).

Lightning symbolizes divine presence, power, and judgment throughout Scripture (Ezekiel 1:13-14, Daniel 10:6, Revelation 4:5). This heavenly messenger carries the authority and glory of the throne room into the earthly sphere. The angel's appearance manifests the breaking in of eternity upon time, heaven intersecting earth.

His 'raiment white as snow' (ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιών/endyma autou leukon hōs chiōn) signifies absolute purity and holiness. White garments consistently represent righteousness, victory, and glory in biblical imagery (Daniel 7:9, Revelation 3:4-5, 7:9). This contrasts sharply with the darkness of the tomb and death—light, purity, and life triumph over darkness, corruption, and death.

Historical Context

Ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature frequently described angels as beings of brilliant light and awesome appearance (Daniel 10:5-6, 2 Maccabees 3:26). Such

descriptions were not metaphorical but attempts to convey genuine otherworldly glory that exceeds normal human experience.

The comparison to lightning and snow would have been vivid to first-century readers familiar with Palestine's thunderstorms and Mount Hermon's snow-capped peak visible from much of Galilee. These natural phenomena represented the purest, brightest manifestations of light and whiteness in their experience.

This appearance recalls the Shekinah glory that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), and the pillar of fire that led Israel (Exodus 13:21). The angel's glory testified that God's presence now attended the empty tomb, confirming divine approval and power in Christ's resurrection.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does the angel's glorious appearance teach us about the holiness and majesty of even God's servants, and how much more glorious must God Himself be?
2. How should the reality of the supernatural realm—angels, glory, divine power—affect our everyday faith and worldview in a materialistic age?
3. In what ways does the angel's purity and light symbolize the nature of Christ's resurrection body and our future glorified state?

Interlinear Text

ἦν	δὲ	ἡ	ἰδέα	αὐτοῦ	ὥς	ἀστραπὴ	καὶ	τὸ
was	His	G3588	countenance	his	like	lightning	and	G3588
G2258	G1161		G2397	G846	G5613	G796	G2532	
ἔνδυμα	αὐτοῦ	λευκὸν	ὥσεὶ	χιών				
raiment	his	white	as	snow				
G1742	G846	G3022	G5616	G5510				

Additional Cross-References

Acts 1:10 (Parallel theme): And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Mark 9:3 (Parallel theme): And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

Mark 16:5 (Parallel theme): And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

Revelation 18:1 (Light): And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

John 20:12 (Parallel theme): And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

Revelation 10:1 (Parallel theme): And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

Matthew 17:2 (Light): And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.