

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
St. Michael and All Angels
September 29, 2024
Revelation 12:7-12

Michael and the Dragon

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. (Revelation 12:7-8 ESV)

Dearly Beloved,

Many people love angels, or at least the thought of them. They often have false ideas about them though, thinking more highly of them than they should. So, as we celebrate a day in honor of St. Michael and All Angels, it's good to remember that we do not praise the angels. We do not worship them or pray to them. We do not trust in them for all good things, especially our salvation. But the church has set aside September 29 to give attention to angels and to give thanks and glory to God for creating them for us.

Now, many people view angels as sweet and gentle creatures. We picture them as flying about with their wings outstretched, or as cute cherubs with tiny wings. Some wear an angel pin on their coat. You've probably heard people describe their children, or at least their grandchildren, as angels. By this they usually mean that those children are sweet and kind, loving and thoughtful. Then there is that popular opinion that says when someone dies, especially a loved one or a child, that person *becomes* an angel. There have even been movies made about a person receiving his or her wings and maybe even a harp. But none of this is true. When we die, we *don't* become angels, contrary to popular opinion. But, the Bible tells us, we will become *like* angels, that is, we will be perfectly holy and stand before the throne of God singing the endless praise of Him who created us and saved us from sin and death.

Still, the importance of angels mustn't be overlooked or underestimated. For they exist for our benefit and they serve us at God's bidding. And one of the ways they do that is by proclaiming God's Word and will to man. Before Christ's birth an angel was sent to Zacharias to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth would have a son (Luke 1:11-20). An angel was sent to Mary to tell her that she would have a son and that she should give Him the name Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). An angel appeared in a dream to her betrothed husband, Joseph, to tell him to take Mary to be his wife (Matt. 1:20ff), and later to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13ff), and still later to return (Matt. 2:19ff). Of course, we remember the angels proclaiming Christ's birth (Luke 2:9-15), His

resurrection (John 20:12), and His ascension (Acts 1:10-11). By doing this, they lived up to their name, angel, which means messenger.

But angels do much more than bring messages from God. They also protect God's children from harm and danger. Two examples will suffice, both from the book of Daniel. The three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to the image of King Nebuchadnezzar. When the king looked into the furnace, he saw not three men, but four, the fourth being an angel (Daniel 3), and the three came out unharmed. The other example is when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for praying only to the true God. The next morning, Daniel declared, "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me." (Daniel 6).

In the same way, they protect us too. God says, "No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, Lest you dash your foot against a stone." (Psalm 91:10-12). Yes, God sends His angels to guard and protect us. And they can do this because they are strong and mighty.

And to see how strong they are, and why we need them, consider our text: "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." You see, Michael and his angels fought against Satan and his evil angels, or demons, and cast them out of heaven. Satan no longer stands in God's presence to accuse you of your sin. Indeed, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who gave His very life into death for you, has risen again and has ascended to His throne in heaven. Satan has been defeated, his fate is sealed, but he continues to fight.

And this is where we have so much trouble. You see, the devil's fall came as a result of his rebellion against God. He didn't want to submit himself to God's reign, even though God had created him. Sometime after God had created all that exists, including Satan, and saw that it was very good, this once-good angel rebelled against God. And when he couldn't overcome God, he decided to attack the crown of God's creation, man.

Thus we are constantly beset by attacks from Satan and his demons. He constantly tempts us to doubt God's Word. He continually says to us as he said to Eve, "Did God really say...?" He continually spews forth lies to us, and because of our sinful nature, we believe them. Indeed, Peter encourages us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8). The danger is real and constant.

To make matters worse, we are too weak to resist Satan. In fact, our sinful nature is on his side. By nature, we are all too willing to do his bidding. We deserve the same punishment he has received, and that is to be cast out of heaven and eventually thrown into the lake of fire for eternity.

But God doesn't want that to happen to us. That's why He sent Jesus to be our Savior. But Jesus didn't fight the way Satan or we expect. He didn't come in a show of force and might. Rather, Jesus defeated the devil through meekness and humility on a cross. God didn't claim His glory by being born in a palace, but by being born of a lowly virgin in a stable. Now, Jesus was powerful, healing the sick and casting out demons, yet, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering..." (Isaiah 53:2-3). He was arrested, tried, and executed, nailed to a cross. It looked like the devil had won.

But we know from God's Word and Christ's resurrection that Jesus had won. He conquered sin, death, and the devil on the cross. Then He rose from the dead, ascended back into the glory that was His, and He will come again with glory and all His heavenly host on the Last Day. His followers will then live in glory for all eternity.

Yet, we continue to live in the here and now. And the devil, the Accuser, knows that his time is short (Rev. 12:12). He knows that the war was lost for him on Calvary when Jesus' died on the cross. His fate was sealed when Jesus broke the seal of the tomb on Easter morning. Satan is defeated. He knows that he'll never win. But like an insane dictator, he wants to drag as many as possible down with him. Why? Because that is who he is. While God rejoices in creating, saying "It is good," the devil finds joy in destroying the good that God has created. The devil knows he'll never rule in heaven, and so he makes his short reign on earth as miserable and painful as possible for those who belong to God.

So God sends His Word to you to assure you that the victory is yours through Jesus Christ. But that's not all. God assures you that you are not alone. In fact, you have never been alone in this battle. From the day of your baptism, when you were brought to faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, God's great army has been at your side. Your angels are before God's face in heaven singing His praises and receiving their orders concerning you. And with these angels and archangels we too sing God's endless praise for the salvation He gives us in and through Christ Jesus.

And because of Satan's power and threat, and God's gift of angels to us, Martin Luther teaches us to pray every morning and evening: "Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me." God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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