

St. Michael & All Angels
September 27, 2009
Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3 • Revelation 12:7-12 • Matthew 18:1-11

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Each year, on September 29th, the Church's calendar gives opportunity to reflect on God's gift of angels.¹ Today we observe The Festival of St. Michael & All Angels two days early so we can join together on this Sunday and give thanks for the life-saving ministry of angels among us.

“St. Michael”... “and All Angels”

While today, we'll focus on all angels, it will be helpful to say a little bit first about St. Michael.

Michael is one of only two angels who are named in the Bible—the other being Gabriel). He is referenced in Daniel chapters 10 & 12 (today's Old Testament reading) as well as in Revelation 12 (today's Epistle reading). Other than that, the angel Michael is only mentioned in the New Testament book of Jude, the 9th verse.

The Daniel passage we'll leave for another time, except to point out that, there, Michael is called “*one of the chief princes,*” and also, “*the great prince*” who fights mightily on behalf of the Lord against those who would withstand Him.

In Revelation chapter 12 we hear, not only of Michael, but also of other angels—both good and bad. And thus Revelation chapter 12 sets the stage for us to appreciate more fully the critical ministry of all good angels. Listen again to this passage that we heard earlier.

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. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

These words describe the great cosmic battle that took place with the redeeming work of our Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension. There, with the climax of His saving mission to earth, Jesus broke the power of Satan, and defanged him of his *unchecked* ability to stand before God and accuse the children of God, day and night. With our Lord's death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of the Father, Satan and his angels were thrown out of heaven and locked out for good. (We'll say more about this ultimate good news in a moment.) But, while it is the ultimate good news for us, in view of eternity, for now, it means a terrible threat to us, because, while Satan has been cast out of heaven, he has not yet been confined to hell

¹ Unless otherwise noted, by “angels” I will always refer to the “good angels.”

eternally. That won't happen until God's kingdom of glory is consummated on the Last Day. In the mean time, as this passage of St. John's Revelation warns us,

"Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

And thus, the need for angels!

Dr. Louis Brighton (from our seminary in St. Louis) puts it this way in his commentary on Revelation:

*"The End is soon to come, and then the dragon will be forever separated from all of God's creation. And so the devil 'sets to work at once with redoubled zeal, goaded by his defeat.' And this 'short time' of his activity 'is the time of unprecedented peril' in which the church lives, from Christ's ascension to the end of this world when Christ returns."*²

"The time of unprecedented peril in which the church lives."

Do you believe it? Do you take this threat to your body and soul seriously? Do you live each moment of your life despairing of your own ability to fend off the attacks of Satan, and running instead for the cover of the Lord's pinions?³

Or do you get caught up in the lie of this humanistic age of empiricism, dismissing the reality of angels, ignoring the deadly threat of Satan, preoccupied with the daily cares of life, content with a theology that believes little more than that God exists, and that the unseen realities really have little to do with daily life?

It's a deadly game we play, if that is true. For Satan is real. His evil angels are real. And his ultimate goal is not only to harm you physically, but to deceive you spiritually, and to accuse you day and night on this earth, in order to pull you down to hell with him.

God's Word of Revelation 12 is talking about now when it says:

"Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

But the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels reminds us anew each year that the Lord has not left us alone in this world to face the onslaught of Satan. Rather the Lord has arrayed between His children and the great serpent a whole host of angels who serve their Lord by protecting you and me.

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures," we confess in the First Article of the Creed. And included in "all" those creatures, whom God has created besides us, are angels. Through these angels, God "defends us against all danger, and guards and protects us from all evil (whose source is the Evil One)." This is what God promises you in Psalm 91:

"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone" (v. 11).

² Brighton, pp. 338-339 (quoting also H.B. Swete and R. Mounce).

³ Psalm 91:4

A little later in this service we'll sing a hymn which speaks beautifully of God's gift of angels. Listen to the first stanza of the well-known Hymn 670:

Ye watchers and ye holy ones, bright seraphs, cherubim, and thrones,
Raise the glad strain: "Alleluia!"

Cry out dominions, principedoms, powers, virtues, archangels, angels' choirs:
"Alleluia, Alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"

Did you realize that these are all different names for the myriad of angels that protect us? Archangels, seraphim and cherubim we're more familiar with. But the Scriptures also speak of "watchers" and "holy ones" in Daniel 4:17, and of "thrones," "dominions," "rulers," "authorities," and "powers" in verses like Colossians 1:16. (All these are terms for angels.)

"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" (Col. 1:16).

Or 1 Peter 3:22 where God's Word tells us that Christ *"is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."*⁴

These terms are not referring to earthly things, but to angels.

What is more, in today's Gospel from Matthew chapter 18, God's Word even speaks of personal, protecting angels, who are assigned to us individually, when it says of "little ones" in the kingdom of heaven that *"their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven"* (v. 10). Thus, in Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers, from the Small Catechism, we rightly pray (in the singular):

"Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil for may have no power over me."

Yes, the devil has been thrown down to the earth, and he is filled with fury. But as God's beloved child you have the protection of His holy angels to defend you against all danger and to guard you in all your ways.

And even more important than that, is that through the saving work of Jesus Christ, your accuser has been cast out of heaven. The war that arose in heaven, in which St. Michael and his angels fought, is over! There is no longer any place for the devil to stand before the throne of God, naming your sins, and demanding the penalty of death for them, because Jesus Christ has paid for your sins by His holy life, and with His innocent suffering and death. And now that He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God, the heavenly courtroom has been purged of him who would prosecute you. Michael and his angels have cast out the dragon from before God's throne. *"Now the salvation and power and the kingdom of God have come!"* Now—already today—you have *conquered by the blood of the Lamb!*

So rejoice! There's no need to fear the raging of Satan, real thought it is. You have St. Michael and all God's holy angels fighting for you. More than that, you have Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the Father on the heavenly throne and is interceding for you. Now the salvation and power and kingdom of God are yours. And, in the Holy Communion, your baptismal relationship

⁴ See also Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; and Romans 8:38. (The names "principedoms" and "virtues" come, not from the Bible, but from other Jewish writings.)

with your victorious Savior is renewed and strengthened. And you are given a foretaste of the heavenly worship in which you will share eternally.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify God's glorious name evermore praising Him and singing, "Alleluia!" Amen.