

September 29, 2024
The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 18:1-11 (Revelation 12:7-12)

St MICHAEL, ALL ANGELS, AND CHILD-LIKE FAITH.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today the Church remembers St. Michael and All Angels. Make no mistake, we don't worship the saints and angels. We don't pray to the saints and angels. We simply honor them:

- in thanksgiving to God for His works of mercy through His saints and angels;
- and, that we imitate their faith and other virtues, each according to their calling. (cf: Ap XXI, 4-6; Tappert, 229-230)

In the Western church, the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels has been celebrated since the 12th century. Michael is called a saint because he and all God's angels are holy. At the time of the Reformation, the Lutherans removed the celebration of many of the Church's named saints in order to give greater prominence to the work of Christ Jesus. Yet, the celebration of St. Michael and All Angels was retained because their work on behalf of Christ.

From the beginning of Holy Scripture to the end, the Bible bears witness to the existence of angels – yet it tells us very little about them – and for good reason. They are not the source of our salvation. The sinful human heart dreams up myths and images of soft, cuddly angels who grant comfort, healing, and protection – but the devil is in the details. The old evil foe tempts you and I to get distracted by charming images of guardian angels so that we take our eyes off Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. Because... who wouldn't love to float around all day bouncing from cloud to cloud without a worry in the world?

The Bible doesn't say precisely when God created the angels, it but does say that:

"... by [Christ Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him." (Colossians 1:16)

The fact that the Bible speaks very little about angels and volumes on the creation of mankind and God's work of redemption to save mankind in Christ Jesus, it should tell us all we need to know of God's love for His creation. Mankind is the crown of God's creation. Our Lord God spoke every other creature into existence. But when He created man, He got down into the dirt and formed him by hand out of the dust of the ground, then breathed life into his nostrils so that he became a living soul. (cf: Genesis 2:7) God then built a woman from the rib that He had taken from the man. (cf: Genesis 2:22)

"²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

And while sin has stained the perfect image of God in man and woman, they're still to join together in marriage to work together, being fruitful and multiplying while serving as God's stewards over of all creation.

Angels, on the other hand, may indeed appear cute a cuddly in your imagination, but they're the invisible, supernatural beings created to be God's messengers and workhorses. They don't enter into marriage or reproduce. (cf: Matthew 22:30) In the Bible, they never act on their own. They always act as God's messengers, speaking His Word, delivering His messages, carrying out His actions in judgment or salvation. A true angel always points a person to see Jesus and His work. An angel always proclaims the Gospel. Paul writes to the Galatian Christians:

"⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8)

This means that an angel of God will never speak or deliver to you anything contrary to, or different from, the Holy Scriptures, particularly regarding our Lord, Jesus Christ. He suffered and died to save all mankind from sin, but not to save the angels. The good angels are sinless, but that doesn't make them more beloved by God than mankind. The angels are perfectly content with the duties God has assigned them.

But it wasn't always that way. Some of God's created angels chose to rebel against God and follow the devil instead. Again, Scripture gives us few details. St. Jude writes:

"⁶ And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, [God] has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day..." (Jude 6)

Since that time, the devil and his evil angels, which we call demons, are dangerous enemies who seek the ruin and spiritual death of all believers. These demons do the devil's bidding. The devil thought he was the greatest in heaven – and to be sure – the devil and his demons are powerful – but they're not all powerful. During His earthly ministry Jesus battled the devil and his demons on earth while St. Michael and his angels fought the devil and his demons in the heavenly places.

We see this heavenly battle depicted in our epistle reading this morning. (Revelation 12:7–12) The devil picked the wrong fight. In Christ Jesus' death on the cross, He crushed the head of the old evil serpent (cf: Genesis 3:15) and in His resurrection from the grave, He declared victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. The devil and his host were cast out of the heavenly places and restrained on earth.

The devil can no longer accuse you before God in heaven – yet God, in His mysterious wisdom, allows the devil and his demons to make threats and accusations against you and the rest of Christ's Church here on earth. But the devil **cannot** overcome the Church. The gates of hell will not prevail. You dear baptized believer, clinging to Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, being nourished through Word and Sacrament, are safe and secure against the devil's threats. But for all who don't know Jesus as Savior... for those who've fallen away, woe to them:

"... for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Revelation 12:12)

The devil knows he has lost the war; however, he continues the battle under restraints, to drag as many people into eternal damnation with him as possible. And this spiritual battle will continue until Jesus' return on the Last Day. St Paul writes:

"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." (Ephesians 6:10–12)

The devil and his demons are excellent students. They watch you and memorize your desires, your weaknesses, and your transgressions. They know their time is short, so when their reconnaissance is complete – they go on the attack – laying traps and temptations hoping to draw you into sin and unbelief. It starts with a little white lie, or one hit of the drug, or a lustful glimpse *here*, or cheating Uncle Sam on your tax form *there*. But if you're not vigilant and on guard, you'll be lured into all sorts of sin: drunkenness, sexual immorality, idolatry, jealousy, and fits of anger. (cf: Galatians 5:19–21)

Jesus died for those sins. In Baptism He has made you a new creation in Christ. (cf: Galatians 2:20) How can you continue to live that way? (cf: Romans 6:2) Repent, trust the Gospel Good News of Christ, and receive His forgiveness. Dear Christian, our Lord God has not left you to battle your demons alone for He has given you St. Michael and all angels who always see the face of God the Father in heaven while they defend you on earth. (cf: Matthew 18:10) But more than defending you with just His angels, our Lord our Lord Jesus Christ says:

"... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

On the cross Jesus won victory over sin, death, the devil, and the grave. And He comes to you in this place in His Word and Sacrament giving you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He equips you to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. (cf: Ephesians 6:10) It sounds too simple. How can hearing the preached Word create and sustain faith? How can mere water and Jesus' words in Holy Baptism save? How can Jesus body and blood be in, with, and under, bread and wine to forgive sins and strengthen in body and soul unto life everlasting? That's the problem with the sinful nature. You and I try to overthink everything. Jesus says:

"... Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3–4)

Babies don't worry if someone is going to feel them or change their diaper. They have faith that it's going to happen. Toddlers don't worry if the rent is paid if there's food in the cupboards, or if heat will be turned off. They have faith that everything's going to be okay. Even children who unfortunately live in abusive homes still trust that mom and dad will defend and protect them from intruders. They have so much faith that they'll believe whatever you tell them – and – they'll attempt to do and say whatever you do and say.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, beware of your words and actions lest you cause one of God's little children to sin. (cf: Matthew 18:6) The devil and his demons are laying traps and temptations for you. He desires that you do his bidding as well. Woe to the devil, his demons, and to all others by whom temptations come. (cf: Matthew 7–8) Greatness in the kingdom is not

being an angel or archangel. Greatness in the kingdom is having humble childlike trust in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (cf: Matthew 18:1–6)

Flee from temptations and all unrighteousness. Look into the mirror of the Law and repent. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (cf: 1 John 1:8–9) Repent and live in your baptismal promises as a new creation in Christ. For there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (cf: Luke 15:10) While Jesus' words in our Gospel text about cutting off body parts well may be hyperbole; these words perfectly describe how much our holy God hates sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (cf: Romans 3:23) We all deserve to be thrown into the hell of fire. (cf: Matthew 18:9) But in the words of St. Paul:

"... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

He adopted you as His own redeemed child in Baptism. He creates and strengthens your faith in the hearing of His Gospel Word. (cf: Romans 10:17) He forgives your sins and keeps you in body and soul unto life everlasting in His Holy Supper. And He has given you St. Michael and all angels as the psalmist writes:

"¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." (Psalm 91:11)

In the words of the writer to the Hebrews referring to God's holy angels:

"... they [are] ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

Angels always act as God's messengers, speaking His Word, delivering His messages, carrying out His actions in judgment or salvation. A true angel always points a person to see Jesus and His work of salvation.

"¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.