



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

St. Michael and All Angels

September 29, 2019

“He Will Command His Angels Concerning You”

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*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone,...sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: Everlasting God, You have ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order. Mercifully grant that, as Your holy angels always serve and worship You in heaven, so by Your appointment they may also help and defend us here on earth; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

Please have a look at the back of your bulletin, at the painting of the little cherubs in the upper right hand corner. They are part of a painting by Raphael called the *Sistine Madonna*, completed in 1513. I didn't include the rest of the painting, which is of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus. She's standing on the clouds above the cherub. These two angels or cherub are at the very bottom of the picture, and they enjoy a certain celebrity status all their own. You've seen them around, right, on stamps, wrapping paper, t-shirts. It's been said that Raphael based the cherubs on two children he saw looking wistfully through the window of a bakery. Others believe when Raphael was painting the *Madonna* the children of the model standing as Mary would come in and watch him work, and he painted them as he saw them.

Ever since, when people think about angels, some think about these tiny little tikes, who might be potty-trained. But our texts say there's a very real battle going on between the spiritual forces of heaven and hell. I'm not sure I'd want these two anywhere near a battlefield; they'd only be in the way and would probably get hurt. I wouldn't even want them on my team in a pick-up game of baseball. Two automatic outs on offense, and a huge liability on defense out there in right field!

So, as we think about angels today, the first thing we must do is expel from our brains visions of these two. But don't stop there. Expel also all things angelic marketed by Hallmark or Hummel. And expel all those masonry angels in church gardens across the land. Exorcize them from your mind as Jesus exorcised the demons. Cast them all out. Exorcize them all.

We don't want them fighting for us. We need something more, something more like the mural of St. Michael on the front cover of the bulletin, delivering the death blow to Satan, represented by the dragon. Remember, God's Word teaches that

Satan wants nothing more than to destroy you. So you're going to need more than what Raphael's two little cherubs can offer. You need someone in your corner, or a lot of someones in your corner, who are strong and powerful and good, who do the Lord's bidding. You need those who can make even the devil himself quiver for fear.

On the church's calendar, today is the day of St. Michael and All Angels. It's a day that celebrates and gives thanks to God for his holy angels. They keep showing up in Scripture . . . One can only deny the reality of angels if he also denies Scripture.

The prophet Daniel describes a real angel. He said his "face was like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his voice" was deafening (Dan. 10). (That's who I want on my team!) The prophet Isaiah describes the seraphim each with six wings, and their voices were so loud that they shook the foundations of the temple. In the Bible whenever people see angels, they always fall on their faces terrified, and the first thing the angels have to say is "fear not."

What else? Angels are creatures, like we are. They possess certain knowledge and power, but they are not omniscient or almighty. They are not little gods. They are not to be worshiped or prayed to. They were created good and holy, but like us, were also given the freedom to rebel. Some did. In Revelation we read how when some of the angels rebelled, Michael and his angels fought back and defeated them, and threw them out of heaven. Notice, God himself didn't even need to be on this battlefield. God sent a lieutenant to lead this fight, and he, Michael, was victorious. Those evil ones have been forever rejected by God. There is no redemption for them like there is for us. Remember how he spoke to the serpent in Genesis 3? "Cursed are you . . . you shall eat dust all the days of your life." Similarly, Jesus spoke of the "everlasting fire" prepared for the devil and his angels. For sinful humans there is the possibility for grace and forgiveness. But not for fallen angels. There's no grace for them.

The Bible says the evil angels are many and powerful (Eph. 6:12). They are cunning and deceitful. They can quote Scripture (Gen. 3:1; Mt. 4:6; 2 Cor. 11:14) but are liars and murderers (Jn. 8:44), utterly depraved and wicked (Mk. 1:23).

And they have been defeated. But like a mortally wounded animal, the evil one is still dangerous.

What do the holy angels do? They are powerful, but they don't use their power for themselves. They serve God and are obedient to him. Psalm 103, "Praise the Lord, you mighty ones who do *His* bidding . . . you His servants who do *His* will."

What else? Their delight is in the Lord. They even experience joy over a sinner's repentance. There are various ranks and orders among the angels: Cherubim, Seraphim, angels and archangels. A few are mentioned by name: Gabriel and Michael. The good angels are confirmed in their holiness, no longer able to sin. That sounds odd, but remember one day in heaven we will also be confirmed in holiness, no longer able to sin.

In heaven the angels certainly enjoy communion with God and all the saints (Mt. 18:10), however their joy does not consist of leisure and idleness, but in willing and joyful service. They praise and worship God (Luke 2:13-14). They do his will (Ps. 103:20-21; 2 Kings 19:35). They serve us, for the sake of Christ. Maybe you remember how the angels in Acts 5 freed the apostles from prison. Often, angels are messengers, announcing the major events of salvation history. For example, they were there to announce the birth of Jesus. And they were there to announce his resurrection. They will also announce the return of Jesus.

Clearly there is a world that we see, but there's also a parallel reality that is invisible to our eyes, and quiet to our ears. A servant of the prophet Elisha was once given a glimpse of this parallel world. In 2 Kings 6, the king of Syria sent a great army to arrest Elisha. When Elisha's servant woke and saw the army, he nearly despaired. But Elisha didn't. Instead he prayed that the young man's eyes would be opened to see that invisible world of good angels all around us, and sure enough, when the Lord opened the young man's eyes he saw the whole mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire and angels, standing at the ready, waiting for the word.

Psalm 91 says, "God will command His angels concerning you to guard **you** in all your ways." In a dangerous and broken world, it is comforting to know God's angels are

here to guard and keep us. Nowhere in Scriptures does it say each of us is assigned a guardian angel. But the angels do guard us; there may be one doing that for you, or maybe a whole mountainside full of angels quietly keeping watch.

Nowhere in Scripture does it say we become angels when we die. When there's a death of a child, for example. people will say a lot of dumb things and one of the dumb things people say is that surely there's another angel in heaven. Scripture never says that. Angels are separate creatures. We don't become angels when we die, nor do we strive to become angels. We remain human. And there's no shame in that, because in heaven there is no sin.

The angels are especially tuned in it seems, to the dangers faced by little children. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (v. 10). That is, angels have direct access to our Father in heaven, who loves and cares greatly for each of His little ones. Every one of them matters to God, and therefore every one of them should matter also to us. They are small, weak and vulnerable. Therefore, we should also be protective of children as the angels are.

But God has also commanded his angels concerning us. Some of you have stories to tell, perhaps of a near miss on the road, or when lightning struck nearby. Most of the time, however, I suspect we have no idea how close we are to disaster! The angels are invisible to us; we are deaf and blind to their work. We carry on without notice, or without giving thanks to God for his holy angels.

While I have never seen the angels at work, I do know there is a great big list of illnesses I've never had, and accidents that didn't put me in the hospital. I've never been mugged, or the victim of violence. Of course, you might not feel so blessed. Maybe you've had more than your fair share and want to know just where those angels have been. If that's you, I can only say the Lord loves you enough to sacrifice his Son to save you. Somehow, he works good through these events; they are part of his plan for you, at least for now. But his eternal plan for you is

that joy of heaven.

Finally, we are not saved by angels. We are saved by Christ alone. It must have been hard for angels on the day Jesus died, hard to stand back and watch it happen. They were waiting for the word and would gladly have taken action, but that word never came.

You recall as Jesus was being arrested in Gethsemane, Peter drew out his sword and went after one of the servants of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Jesus rebuked him and said, “Do you think . . . there are not at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Mt. 26:52ff). But not even twelve legions of angels could do anything about our sin. That battle belonged to Jesus and him alone. It had to be Jesus, God’s Son. Not Gabriel, not Michael, Jesus alone is the lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

I think that’s the point of the other painting on the back cover. Please have a quick look at it. It’s by Crivelli, and is entitled, “*Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels.*” It seems those two little cherub are trying to shake him awake, and prop him up as if all was ok. It’s an age appropriate response to death. But clearly, all is not ok. God’s Son is dead, and the angels couldn’t do anything to prevent it or reverse it. Dying for us and for our salvation is why he came; it’s why he was born. That’s why outside of Bethlehem, a whole multitude of angels broke out singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.”

So the angels cannot save us from sin. Only God can do that. But I am glad that angels are in our corner and are all around to protect us. If we could see the devil and his demons we would surely faint in fear, but not Michael. Not Gabriel. Nor any of the angels. They aren’t intimidated by the devil’s might. I don’t think they even flinch. Thank God for that!

It’s St. Michael’s and All Angels’ Day, a reminder of the necessary work of angels in the kingdom of God. And it’s an opportunity, an opportunity to thank God for the holy angels who do his bidding, and to praise God for those angels too. Amen.

