

**The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, September 29, 2019**

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## **The Angels, at Your Service for Jesus' Sake**

Revelation 12:7–12; Luke 10:17–20

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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From the Revelation of our Lord to St. John: NOW WAR AROSE IN HEAVEN, MICHAEL AND HIS ANGELS FIGHTING AGAINST THE DRAGON. . . . AND THE GREAT DRAGON WAS THROWN DOWN, AND 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 [EVIL] ANGELS WITH HIM (Rev 12:7, 9). And from St. Luke's Gospel: Jesus said to the seventy-two, "I SAW SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTNING FROM HEAVEN. . . . NEVERTHELESS, DON'T REJOICE IN THIS, THAT THE SPIRITS ARE SUBJECT TO YOU, BUT REJOICE THAT YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN" (Lk 10:18, 20).

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In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther teaches us to pray each morning and evening by giving us two little prayers. They both end by asking God to send His holy angel to watch over us, that the evil foe may have no power over us. These morning and evening prayers remind us that the spiritual realm is real and personal. Even though we can't see angels and demons, we shouldn't underestimate their significance and activity in our lives. Today's Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is another reminder. It turns our attention to this invisible part of God's creation. We celebrate this feast along with Christians through the ages and all around the world.

Focusing on angels, however, requires a warning: We must believe what Holy Scripture says about them, nothing more and nothing less. On the one hand, we could easily forget about angels or ignore the parts of the Bible that mention them. On the other hand, we may want to know more than what the Bible tells us and so speculate about them or believe stuff that's made up. And there's a lot of made up stuff out there. People were speculating about angels even before the time of Christ and they've continued doing it right up to today—ideas about their names, ranks, and powers, how many of them can fit on the head of a pin, how they get their wings, what they look like, and other things that aren't in the Bible.

So what *do* we know about angels? What does Holy Scripture teach?

*ANGELS SERVE AND WORSHIP GOD IN HEAVEN  
AND THEY HELP AND DEFEND US HERE ON EARTH.*

They ALWAYS SEE THE FACE OF our FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN (Mt 18:11), while He COMMANDS them TO GUARD us IN ALL OUR WAYS (Ps 91:11). By helping and defending us, they *are* serving and worshiping God. And *because* they serve and worship God, they help and defend us. For angels, these two things belong together. They were made to serve God and to help His Church, and that's exactly what they do.

I.

But why would the angels delight to serve us? Aren't they so much greater and more powerful than we are? Why would they do for us what we wouldn't even do for one another? Why should they have JOY OVER even ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS (Lk 15:10)? Why are they pleased to bring good news of great joy to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay or to women weeping beside a garden tomb (see Lk 2; 24)? Yes, God wills them to do these things, but the angels aren't moved by a sense of obligation. They love to do what they do, for they love Him, and they know that He loves us. And so the angels love and serve us, too, poor, pitiful sinners that we are. They are MINISTERING SPIRITS SENT OUT TO SERVE FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE WHO ARE TO INHERIT SALVATION (Heb 1:14).

And just how do the angels know that God loves us? So often we have difficulty believing it. We see our own sin. We know the evil in our lives and our world. We live constantly under the shadow of death. We look at ourselves and wonder why any angel would possibly want to serve us.

It's *not* because of who we are in ourselves. It's because they behold the Father's face, and in His face they see how He SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON (Jn 3:16). And the angels see what the Son did for you—*everything* He did for you, to wash away your sins and rescue you from death and the devil. And they marvel at it! The angels were there when He was laid in the manger for you. The angels were with Him in Gethsemane when He agonized for you. The angels were present when He rose for you and when He ascended for you. And the angels will be with Him when He comes for you, to bear you home, and, finally, when He returns on the clouds in glory on the Last Day. The angels know just how valuable the blood of Jesus is, and they know He shed that blood for you. So, for Jesus' sake, they love and serve you. When they look at you, they see the image of their Lord. FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST (Gal 3:27). And so, dear Christian, the angels really do delight to serve us, doing what God bids, working always for our good.

## II.

Whenever an angel appears in Scripture, people are afraid, and that's appropriate. There are no cute cherubs or Cupids in the Bible. Angels are powerful beings. They are strong and magnificent, with fire and sword. They set prophets and apostles trembling. But, DON'T BE AFRAID (Dan 10:12). They serve Christ, and He is the author and perfecter of salvation. "FOR I AM SURE," St. Paul wrote, "THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (Rom 8:38–39).

So the angels are against sin, evil, death, and the devil, but they are not against us. They are for us in Christ. And so they fight for us. This fight is not 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 (Eph 5:12). Spiritual warfare is real and serious, but the angels are our allies. They carry out Christ's victory against the devil, and so we entrust ourselves and all things to Him. We know how it ends. The decisive battle took place at the cross. Our confidence is not in ourselves but in Him and His saving work.

## III.

This is what we heard in Revelation: 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 (Rev 12:7–8). The devil defeated. Satan thrown down. The deceiver of Adam, Eve and the whole world, he who is the liar and father of lies, the great accuser—he is conquered! How? THEY—the saints of God—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 (Rev 12:11). Our enemies can accuse, but they cannot condemn. They have no power over us. THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB speaks for us. Jesus has redeemed us from all the powers of hell.

Now heaven itself is a witness of the victory of Christ. St. Michael and All Angels are witnesses of Christ's victory. The Martyrs of the holy Church and the Christians who have gone before us, whom we remember, honor, and imitate, are witnesses to the victory of Christ. Take courage. Remember them. Give thanks for them. The victory is won. The outcome is certain. Christ is our champion.

When the seventy-two returned from their ministry of preaching and casting out demons in Jesus' name, Jesus said, "I SAW SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTING FROM HEAVEN" (Lk 10:18). Again! Satan defeated. Thrown down. Fallen. Conquered. How? By Jesus being preached as the savior of sinners. By all of you being washed in the blood of the Lamb through Holy Baptism. By His forgiveness applied to our lives. By the communion of the holy things and our eating His body sacrificed for us and drinking His blood shed for us. The devil is bound, chained, by Christ and His cross. It's like a stake driven into the Satan's heart. So we WITHSTAND IN THE EVIL DAY, AND HAVING DONE ALL, STAND FIRM (Eph 6:13), and we'll stand even after we die, just like Jesus stood in the flesh on the third day. And we will SHINE LIKE THE STARS FOREVER AND EVER (Dan 12:3)

And this is our greatest joy—not THAT THE SPIRITS ARE SUBJECT TO US, but THAT our NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN (Lk 10:20), inscribed there by the blood of the Lamb. In heaven with St. Michael and all angels, with the saints and martyrs, who for eternity praise and magnify God, singing, "Holy, holy, holy." And so we rejoice with the angels, we repentant sinners, and we sing with the archangels. Glory be to God on high! Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, now and forever!

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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