

The Feast of St. Michael & All Angels, September 29, 2024

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Glimpses of the Unseen

Daniel 10:10–14; 12:1–3

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

Eph 1:2

In a vision, Daniel was told about days yet to come: **“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book”** (Dan 12:3).

There’s more happening than what you see with your eyes. I’ll say it again: There’s more happening than what you see with your eyes. That shouldn’t come as a surprise to us. As Christians we know this, though sometimes we forget. Reality—ultimate reality—is more than matter in motion through space and time. We confess that God is the maker of all things visible *and invisible*. The Maker of things real but unseen by our human eyes. Well, what invisible things? The holy angels—Michael, Gabriel, the six-winged seraph, the cherubim with sleepless eye, angelic hosts innumerable and unnamed. They always see the face of the Father in heaven (Matt 18:10). And yet, at the same time, these ministering spirits are sent out to serve those who inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). In other words, these messengers of God are sent to serve you. That’s their job, their calling. So, yes, there’s more, way more, going on behind, underneath, and all around our unremarkable daily lives. Though we don’t see it, we believe it.

Now Holy Scripture gives us some glimpses into this unseen realm. I say “glimpses” because what we get are images that appear briefly and then move out of sight. We catch a little scene here about the holy angels, another scene there. It can be hard to understand exactly what’s happening. Maybe we don’t need to know all the details, just the big picture.

We get a glimpse through the prophet Daniel. As a young man he’d been taken captive from Judea to Babylon—close to a thousand miles. There in Babylon God gave him the gift of interpreting dreams, which brought him into high positions. But life in exile—life in a pagan land surrounded by pagan gods—often clashed with his own deeply-held beliefs and his worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. You likely know how Daniel was

thrown into a lions' den—and lived! God sent His holy angel to shut the lions' mouths (Dan 6:22).

In our reading, we now meet Daniel as an old man. He's fasting and mourning. Perhaps it was sorrow over not being able to join other exiles in returning to their homeland. He's an old man, probably not able to make the journey back. While he's fasting and mourning, God sends a heavenly messenger: a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold, his body like beryl, face like lightning, eyes like flaming torches, arms and legs gleaming like burnished bronze, and a voice—oh, that voice!—like the thunder of many people (Dan 10:5, 6). God sent this heavenly messenger to Daneil to tell him of the things that were to come.

But—here's the revealing thing—this angelic messenger describes first how hard he's been working on behalf of Daniel and on behalf of the returning exiles and of all God's people. He describes how he was opposed by the prince of the kingdom of Persia for three weeks. He's not talking about an earthly prince, mind you, but a spiritual one, a fallen angel and demonic power. You get this picture of a standoff between this heavenly messenger and demonic power for three weeks until he received the help of Michael, one of the chief princes. We call him an archangel of God. So, with Daniel, we get a glimpse of the supernatural struggle taking place. Above this earthly realm, over the nations of this world, a spiritual battle rages. We hear this in the New Testament as well. St. Paul says that we wrestle 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 6:12). A spiritual, supernatural struggle—a battle is taking place.

We are *not* fighting alone. This is what we confess on St. Michael and All Angels. We are not fighting that battle alone. The holy angels fight for us. Every day. Every hour. Every second. Sent by God. Jesus said, "I tell you that in heaven the angels of these little ones always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man came to save the lost" (Matt 18:10–11). As we little ones go blindly about our business, the angels are there, taking their directions directly from the Father in heaven, watching over the little ones, the lost whom Jesus came to save. As we face temptation and resist the devil, the holy angels are there providing strength and help. As we worship the blessed Holy Trinity, the angels are here and they worship too. What are we invited to do as the Lord Jesus comes to meet us in the Sacrament of His body and blood each Sunday? We're invited to join the angels and the archangels and all the company of heaven in praise. We even sing their song, the thrice-holy, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Sabaoth."

The angels do battle as the hosts of heaven, rank on rank of heavenly hosts. God Himself is the Lord Sabaoth. He's the Lord of heavenly armies. Jesus is their King who marches at their head. Yes, the fight is fierce; yes, the warfare long. Some of you are going through it now, perhaps deeply. It's not easy here below where the devil rages and the evil spirits are at work. But, as the prophet Elisha told his servant as the two of them faced an army with chariots and horses—Elisha said, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kgs 6:16). The devil and the fallen angels are no match for the heavenly host. They cannot withstand those who fight under the banner of Christ.

I think we sometimes misread the supernatural realm. When we match up the opposing forces in our minds, we view Jesus and the devil as opposites, like opposing quarterbacks. Satan isn't the opposite of Jesus. He's not even close. Yes, Satan is strong, but he's not God. He's never been God, and he never will be God—no matter how much he hopes it, no matter what he does. And who is Jesus? He's the Stronger One. He's God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten of the Father from all eternity. And yet He became one of us, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

Why do the angels fight for us? Why do they make common cause with us, weak, bumbling, and sinful as we are? Why do they love us? It's not because of any merit or worthiness in us. It's not because you're so lovable and so amazing. It's because of Jesus—all because of Jesus. Because they love those whom Jesus loves, and they care for those whom Jesus cares, and they fight for those for whom Jesus fights. That's why. They are devoted to our Lord. Their eyes are always on Him, and you know where His eyes are? His eyes are on you, and so they are devoted to you, the brothers and sisters of our Lord. Since Jesus was willing to shed His blood for you, the holy angels are more than happy to raise their swords on your behalf as well. The shed blood of Jesus that covers you is their battle cry.

We can see this when we consider the life of our Lord from the Gospels. Think about how closely and intimately the angels are connected to our Lord in His humanity. Who is it that announces the conception of Jesus, that the Word is becoming flesh? It's the angel Gabriel. Who is it that tells the shepherds good news of great joy on Christmas day? It's the angels. Who is it that attends Jesus in the wilderness when He undergoes temptation and strengthens Him? Who is it that comes when He's in the garden of Gethsemane staring into the cup of God's wrath that He's about to drink and lends Him their aid? Who stands by the tomb when Jesus has burst it open, no longer dead but alive? Who is it that appears to the apostles as Jesus ascends into heaven? The holy

angels. “As you have seen Him go into heaven, so He will come again.” The holy angels love our Lord in His humanity, and so they love you, those for whom Christ died.

As we think about this supernatural battle, the holy angels and the evil angels, we might be tempted to be discouraged or frightened. But there’s no reason for fear and trembling, dear Christian. There is reason for awe. If the holy angels serve us like this, let us also serve one another. If the holy angels are willing to bend down and honor even the little ones, let us stand beside them and do the same. No matter what it may feel like at times, Satan isn’t on offense right now. In fact, ever since our Lord’s death and resurrection, Satan hasn’t been on offense at all. The time of possession has been entirely in the hands of Christ. Satan’s on defense—forever on defense. Jesus is marching down the field. Yes, the devil fights to hold every single yard, but the chains are moving in our direction all the time.

And what about the end? The struggle will continue. It will even intensify until the end. But don’t despair, and don’t be overconfident. This is what Daniel was told:

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Dan 12:1–3)

Daniel is told about a time of trouble that lies ahead, but it ends in a time of joy. Because Daniel hears of the help that Michael the archangel will provide. He hears of the resurrection. He hears of the deliverance from judgment. And he hears of the eternal glory that awaits.

Jesus said: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then He will sit on his glorious throne. (Matt 25:31). Jesus speaks of a time that’s coming, when the unseen realm will not remain unseen, when the veil will be torn open and the curtain pulled back. We will see with our own eyes the very Son of God returning in glory and all the angel hosts with Him. And then the books will be opened. So what about our names? Written in those books in the blood of Christ. What about the part where Daniel says those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky forever? Wise? We are learning wisdom now. We’re learning the wisdom of recognizing our own sinfulness. We’re learning the wisdom of trusting in the only Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. And we’re learning the wisdom of thanking God for His holy angels, who fight for us.

For now we stick with the things that are seen. They may strike us as weak and powerless, but God reveals them to us as strong and full of grace. What do we see? A little bit of water, but the washing of God's Word that made us His own beloved children and brought us into His kingdom. What do we see? A book full of words, but what is it? The Holy Spirit breathing out the life and power of God as He makes known to us Jesus Christ. What do we see? A little bit of bread and wine, and yet we know and believe that it is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. What we see looks little. What is unseen is so great—so great that even the angels are here with us now. Even the angels are bending before our Lord as He comes to serve you. Even the angels are honoring the blood of our Lord. Even the angels are singing, singing with us, "Holy, holy, holy." If you can't hear them yet, you will.

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

Phil 4:7
