

**With Angels and Archangels**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
[Amen].

*Glory be to God on high: and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*

*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

Those two songs – that is, the Gloria in Excelsis and the Sanctus – are sung almost every time this church gathers for God’s Divine Service. They have probably become so familiar to you that it was hard to hear them read without wanting to sing them... And, in one sense, that’s good, because these songs are yours to sing. But the Gloria in Excelsis and the Sanctus are not limited to the lips of you Christians gathered here, or to Christians anywhere else on this earth... These songs are also the songs of God’s angels. The Gloria was first sung by the angel choir announcing to shepherds in the fields that the Christ Child was born that very day in Bethlehem. And our liturgy states plainly that “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven” we laud and magnify God’s glorious Name by singing the Sanctus... Today then, as we observe the feast of St. Michael and All Angels these songs will be our teacher... But we’ll return to them a bit later...

*[Why this feast and why care about angels?]*

St. Michael and All Angels, which marks the beginning of what is called “Michaeltide,” is an ancient feast day of the Church. Martin Luther and the Reformers retained this day in their liturgical calendars mainly because it serves as a good occasion to talk about a largely misunderstood topic which was of great interest in the sixteenth century – that is, the topic of angels. Today, as it was in Luther’s time, it seems that the subject of angels is either extended well beyond the scope of Scripture or ignored entirely as mythology. Many of those who are more than willing to believe in or talk about angels seem only to want to do so in the context of getting their wings when they die or getting special extra-biblical revelations while they’re alive... For others, the existence of angels doesn’t fit into their “*if I can’t see it then it’s not*

*real*” worldview... But mocking the existence of angels is just as damaging as embellishing their role and purpose.

The doctrine of angels, also called angelology, is an important one for all Christians to know. And it is important for you to know first because throughout God’s holy Word, from Genesis to Revelation, both good and bad angels have an active roll... In Genesis an evil fallen angel called Satan tempts Adam and Eve into sin and death. In Matthew chapter four that same evil angel appears again, this time to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. And after his temptation, the good angels came and were ministering to Jesus. In the book of Job, the devil wreaks havoc on Job and his family... In the Gospel according to Luke a good angel called Gabriel announces the Incarnation of Christ to the Virgin Mary. Most importantly for today, in our reading from Revelation we hear of Michael and his angels casting out the devil and his angels from heaven, quote, **by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.**<sup>1</sup> Angels are all over the place in the Bible, which means that their importance should be obvious to the student of God’s Word. And so, disbelieving in the existence of angels or elevating their role beyond what the Bible says is dangerous because such activity assaults the sufficiency of God’s Word – which is our only source for truth.

But angels are important not just because of their role in the Scriptures and their role in the past. They should be important to you because the Bible tells us that the angels also play a huge role in your daily life. The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that **we [Christians] 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...**<sup>2</sup> It’s a deadly mistake to doubt the fact that there are actually evil spirits constantly at work in this present evil age. Spirits working to, as Luther says, “bring to naught all that God has done.” 1 Peter 5:8 states very clearly that **the devil [an evil angel] prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**<sup>3</sup> Demons are real. The devil is real. The spiritual forces which surround you are real. One of the things that we can learn from the

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 12:11.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8.

book of Job is that it is very likely that the devil and his demons are behind much of the trouble in this world. Luther would even say to, quote, “*watch that you do not live as the heathen do. They see and experience misfortune too, but hold that it happens accidentally; for they know nothing of the devil. You however, should learn to say: The wretched devil has done that.*” Ignoring the reality of evil angels is damaging to faith because it makes people grow cold to their need for God’s protection. Ignoring the threat of evil angels leads to an absence from prayer, indifference to studying the Word, and a lack of desire to receive God’s gifts in Absolution and the Lord’s Supper. If the world actually took the time to consider how relentlessly active the devil is to destroy them and everyone they love, there would probably be more people celebrating the feast of St. Michael and All Angels...

And that is because, to keep us from being paralyzed with fear, today is set aside for us to reflect on the truth that our God is the Lord God of Sabaoth. That means that our God is the Commander of the greatest army of good angels in existence – thousands upon thousands of them – or as the Scriptures say, myriads of myriads. A myriad is just a countless number... And unlike Satan, these angels are not our enemies. No, the author of Hebrew tells us that the good angels are **ministering spirits sent out [by God] to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.**<sup>4</sup> Good angels are real. Ministering spirits are real. The spiritual forces that keep you safe under God’s providential care are real. To round out our earlier quote from Luther, he says, “*If on the other hand, you see that something has turned out well, you should say: ‘the man had a good angel; otherwise the matter would have turned out worse.’*” And although the Scriptures are silent on whether or not specific instances in your life are the result of a specific action taken by God’s angels, we can still consider that what the world calls “luck” is nothing more than God’s gracious protection, perhaps even by the hand of His angels... And so, because the Bible makes it very clear that there are both bad angels who seek to harm us and good angels that seek to help us, it is obvious that God wants us Christians to think on these things and be drawn to Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

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<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 2:14.

[What are angels and what do they do?]

So, to help with our understanding of angels, and in particular God's good angels, a brief word study can be helpful. You see, the word "angel" comes from the Greek *aggelos*, which simply means messenger. It is basically the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word *malak* which also means messenger. In both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament these words are used either in reference to the spiritual beings that we English speakers call "angels" or to men who occupy the office of preaching. So both the angel Gabriel, the apostle Paul, John the Baptist, and the Old Testament priests are referred to at times as *aggelos* or *malak*. These words then suggest what I'd like to call a wide and narrow meaning to the category of angel. What I mean is that in the wide sense, anyone who brings God's Word of law and Gospel to another is rightly called an angel or messenger. But in the narrow sense, and what we mean in English when we say "angel," is that an angel is a created spiritual being different from us humans.

Regardless though, in both the wide and narrow sense, because of their name, God's angelic creatures are always connected to their function as bearers of the Word in voice and action. This is because, as we see in the Scriptures, the angelic creatures don't do anything independent of God's Word. That is why Jesus says, **the angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.**<sup>5</sup> Because the angels behold God's face and see His good and gracious we can be assured that these created spiritual beings truly love Him and truly love you. God tells you about His angels then so that you might be comforted. For just as the Scriptures tells us that the Lord does not desire the death of the wicked, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, you can be sure that the myriads of God's angel host not only love you but are constantly looking out for you.

This point especially rings true when we consider the times when God has allowed His people to see the angel hosts. If you remember the story in 2 Kings 6 what we hear there is that the King of Syria was at war with Israel... and basically, the King of Israel was able to elude the Syrians multiple times because Elisha, through the power of the Spirit, was telling the king of Israel what the Syrian king was speaking in his private counsel. And so the Syrian king, quote, "**sent there**

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 18:10.

**horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city [where Elisha was]. When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, Alas, my master! What shall we do? [Elisha said] do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha...**

If you want to know how the story ends feel free to check it out later... But the point is that God's angels that watch over you and your family are like the great army of horses and fiery chariots that surrounded Elisha. Even though you might not be able to see them, they are there. God's angels make up the greatest army in heaven and on earth. And the only thing this great army of angels wants is for you to be preserved in both body and soul to life everlasting. Yes, the angels of God protect you bodily... But we also know that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who is brought to repentance... As messengers of the Lord, the angels announce and rejoice in the Good News of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross to atone for the sins of the whole world. While the angels help to protect you here in this lifetime, they also participate with you and with the whole Church in the reality that through Jesus' Passion, our Lord brings the final end to all the pains of this present evil age. The angels, like you Christians gathered here, have a front seat to the mercies of God in Christ [motion to the Altar].

And that is why the angels in heaven sing. The angels sing the Gloria Excelsis and the Sanctus because as Revelation says, **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.**<sup>6</sup> The angels sing because through Christ there is final victory over all the forces of evil. Through Christ, there is no power in heaven or on earth that can hurt you. Through Christ, your sin and the accusations of the Devil are trampled under the weight of the cross so that before the Lord God of Sabaoth the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony drowns out the sound of every last one of your sins.

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<sup>6</sup> Revelation 12:10-11.

*[How do we celebrate St. Michael and All Angels?]*

So today, like every day in the Church, is really about Jesus. Despite what some may think, today is not a day to worship the angels. In fact, our Lutheran Confessions are faithful to the Word of God when they say, “it does not follow that we should invoke angels [or] saints, pray to them, keep fasts and festivals for them, say Masses and offer sacrifices to them, establish churches, altars, and services for them, [or] serve them in still other way...” We don’t worship to angels, because today, like every day in the Church, is about Christ first. It is about receiving His gifts to us in Word and Sacrament. It is even about receiving His gift of the angels...the gift of beings greater than we who protect us and rejoice with us. Today is about receiving all the gracious gifts of God and responding the only way we Christians can, with songs of thanks and praise. And for this task, the angels are our great teachers. Because through their songs you Christians learn the best possible way to celebrate the feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

You celebrate St. Michael and All Angels rightly when you sing out:

*Glory be to God on high: and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*

*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

In these ancient songs you Christians learn that all honor, power, and glory belongs to God alone. When you sing the Gloria and the Sanctus, God and His angels teach you the reality that Christ has already conquered the devil and all his evil angels for you by the blood of his cross and the word of his testimony... When you sing the songs of angels, the Word of Christ’s victory sends Satan and all his demons falling to their fiery grave like lightning from heaven. Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. [Amen]