

St. Michael and All Angels – 2024

Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3

Revelation 12:7-12

Matthew 18:1-11

An angel shut the mouths of lions while Daniel was cast into the lion's den by a feckless king (Daniel 6:22). An angel of the Lord delivered Peter from prison after Herod laid violent hands on those who belonged to the church (Acts 12:1, 6-11). Angels, cherubim with flaming sword, guarded the way back to Eden, the way to the tree of life, after Adam and Eve had rebelled and eaten the fruit that they were commanded not to eat and were exiled from paradise (Genesis 3:24). An archangel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah the priest to announce the conception and birth of the last prophet, the forerunner of Christ who would prepare His way, John the Baptizer (Luke 1:8-22). This same Gabriel appeared to the Virgin to announce the altogether unique conception of the Messianic King, Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). At the birth of Christ, an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds to deliver the good news. And then a great company of the heavenly host streamed from on high and gave voice to God's glory and man's peace (Luke 2:8-13). After Jesus endured, triumphed over the devil and his unholy temptations, angels came to the Lord in the desert and ministered to him (Matthew 4:11). When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood and praying to His Father, an angel appeared to Him to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

Do you know what all of that is? All of that is glorious! All of that is delightful, fantastic, inspiring and wonderful. How many of y'all are aware that our lot here in this world is fraught with difficulty? Crime, disease, trauma, temptation, loss, war, flood, wildfire, storm, poverty, famine – our lives are under assault. This is a spiritual world. In the Nicene Creed we confess that the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and *invisible*. Some things you can't see. This is a spiritual world. Good and evil aren't mere notions, not mere constructs conjured up to help us navigate a tempestuous world. Evil is a menace and it is real. Evil has designs on the capture of your soul and there are things at work that are unseen. It is naïve to think that every life isn't consequential. It is naïve to think that one lives, one dies and that's it. This is a spiritual world. Truth has a spiritual component. Virtue has a spiritual component. Morality has a spiritual component. In this spiritual world there is conflict. Can you feel it? Have you experienced it? Have you found yourself on both sides of this conflict?

God's grace is the single most critical entity in this spiritual world. Christ's blood is the single most defining substance in this physical world. Christ the mighty, Christ the humble, Christ the crucified – He is the fulcrum of life, the center point of history, the instrument of salvation. He entered the battle. Physical and spiritual battle; God was made man; this incarnate Christ entered our realm and engaged the enemy. That action is the premier work of divine love. That love is extended to you through Word and Sacrament, God's delivery system, whereby you are made a participant in Christ's life, His death and His resurrection. God cares for you in a multitude of ways, doesn't He? In our table prayer, Lutherans quote Psalm 145 as we thank God for our food. "The eyes of all look to you, [O Lord] and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and you satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15-16). Our gracious God gives us all that we need for this body and life. And He protects us. Angels are part of that protection.

The book of Hebrews calls angels “ministering spirits.” “Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). That’s you. You are served by angels. The angels serve God. They are deployed by God to watch over His people. “For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11). Some of you might think that your guardian angel is defective. If you were a member of the Soggy Bottom Boys you might sing this line: “I am a man of constant sorrows. I’ve seen trouble all my days.” If God sends angels to watch over me, why am I enduring this difficulty? How many of y’all have come to grips with the fact that you have a cross to bear? Most times, we don’t get to choose our crosses. By nature, they are unpleasant. Our crosses perform multiple functions. They keep us humble. They keep us dependent on God and His provision, His grace, His strength. They help us understand the Lord Christ and His suffering. They make us tender-hearted toward others. They discipline us. I could go on.

Have you ever thought that angels assist you in bearing your cross? Our crosses won’t be taken away, but we will be given the strength to bear them. As the prophet Elijah lay dejected under a broom tree, an angel came to him to strengthen him with a cake and a jar of water (1 Kings 19:1-8). When death from thirst seemed to be near Hagar and Ishmael, an angel showed Hagar a fountain, a well, where she and her son might drink (Genesis 21:15-19). God sees each and every one of us. Angels are His instruments, His agents, His servants who do His bidding to defend us in a spiritual world where evil exists. Evil angels exist. Fallen and corrupt, their demise is a certainty. There was war in heaven. The great usurper led a rebellion, a mutiny. Satan and his demonic horde were met by those who would not depart from their nature, their calling, their vocation. Michael and his angels fought to expel the usurper. Imagine the ferocity. Imagine the stark division. Imagine the devotion of those who would not leave their Creator’s design. This was a primordial battle. Before the serpent slithered into Eden breathing his lies, this battle had taken place. Michael is victorious (Revelation 12:7-12).

Here’s why you are to treasure this battle, treasure this victory. Satan was defeated by the blood of the Lamb. Satan was defeated by the Word of the angelic testimony. Christ’s blood is the instrument of the defeat of evil (John 12:31). Satan is forever defeated by the shed blood of the Messianic King. That blood transcends time. The sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ invades time, invades souls, invades this world with a spiritual force that debilitates evil and established an eternal kingdom (Luke 11:20). You have access to that blood. Christ’s church is saturated with that blood. It is not angels who command our worship, our gratitude for heaven’s promise. It is the Lamb that was slain. It is the Lord Jesus, true God and true man, who commands our worship. The Word of the Gospel is still unleashed into this physical world. The Word and the Sacraments – that’s the fountainhead of life for us in this spiritual world. The Word and the Sacraments bring us Christ’s victory, bring us Christ’s kingdom, bring us forgiveness, life and salvation.

Satan cannot accuse us for the blood of Christ covers our sin. “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come” (Revelation 12:10). Angels, God’s true and confirmed servants, are our friends. St. John tells us that “they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11 NIV). Jesus tells us: “Whoever loves his life will lose it” (John 12:25). We don’t love *our* lives. We love Christ’s

life. We love Christ's resurrection. We know that death has no sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). The Lord is risen and our sins have been paid in full by His atoning sacrifice. The Lord is the one who loved us. From eternity, before the war in heaven, God wrote your name in the book of life. That is worth celebrating. That is why we are here. God has woven all these strands together in a marvelous tapestry. Christ and His angels; Christ and His grace; Christ and His cross; Christ and His supper; you are the recipients of extraordinary gifts. May we who treasure His gifts grow and prosper in His sight.