

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today is a special day, a festival day, when we remember the angels. How unusual is that! Most of our festivals, especially those assigned the liturgical color white, are Christ festivals.

In fact, today is a saint's day for the angels we celebrate today are the holy ones, who are ever before the Lord and are confirmed in their goodness. To be sure, there are other angels that fell away from God, and we'll talk more about them in a bit, but we don't celebrate them. Today is a saint's day—St. Michael and All Angels, and like other saint's days, the point is not so much the saint himself or herself, but how that saint confessed Christ, and how by their actions they lead us confess Him, too.

It's probably good that we have a day to think on the angels and give thanks to God for their service, after all, how often do you think about angels, ordinarily? Twenty to thirty years ago, television shows featuring angels were commonplace, so perhaps you watched and thought about the work of angels more then. Now? I don't know of any similar shows.

How often do you think about angels? Is it weekly at Divine Service, when we are all encouraged with “angels and archangels” to join in their heavenly songs — the Gloria and the Sanctus? Or maybe you're more pious, and pray Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers: “let your holy angel be with me that the evil foe may have no power over me.”

What you might believe about angels and their work is not fundamental to saving faith. After all, the angels are not mentioned in any of the creeds. There is no “you must confess this catholic teaching regarding angels, or you will ‘without doubt perish eternally’” (a play on words from the Athanasian Creed). Francis Pieper has a short section about angels in his *Christian Dogmatics*. There, he writes that “the doctrine of the angels must not be classified as a fundamental article. We are brought into communion with the grace of God not by believing in the existence of angels and their services, but by believing in Christ the Crucified, in His *satisfactio vicaria*” (I:498)—that is, by believing that Christ sacrificed Himself “for us men and for our salvation” (Nicene Creed). Thus, Jesus tells His disciples, and us, to “*rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*”

But that doesn't mean that we can or should just ignore what the Bible teaches regarding angels. Indeed, we prayed today acknowledging that God has “ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order.” The Scripture teaches us about this order, and that gives us great comfort.

We know, for example, that the angels are mighty creatures; that is, they are part of the created order; but although powerful, they are not eternal; they are not

Divine! We are not to worship them, as St. John the Divine was instructed: *“I fell down at his feet to worship [the angel], but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God’”* (Rev. 19:10).

Angels are creatures just like we are, even though they are not named in the creation account in Genesis. It seems to me as if they were created early in the six days, for the Lord intimates that these *“sons of God”* were there shouting for joy when He *“laid the foundation of the earth,”* and *“determined its measurements.”* These *“morning stars sang together”* as God sank *“[the earth’s] bases”* and *“laid its cornerstone”* (Job 38:4-7).

The angels were created before man, created to *“serve and worship [God] in heaven,”* appointed to *“help and defend us here on earth.”* They are part of the *“all things ... invisible”* that God created (Nicene Creed); they are *“ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of”* us, that is, for the sake of *“those who are to inherit salvation”* (Heb. 1:14).

We rejoice, therefore, that we have this mighty angel army to fight for us. The Syrian army, for example, was no match for the angel host with their *“horses and chariots of fire”* (2 Ki. 6:17), protecting Elisha and his servant. We’re not strong enough on our own to oppose even one angel — Adam dared not challenge the mighty cherubim with flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life (Gen. 2:24).

But the very reason that mankind needs the ministry of angels is that not all angels remained good. Some rebelled, led by the garden deceiver. He’s sometimes called the ancient serpent or the devil and the dragon, but he has a name, too: Satan, Adversary, and he seeks our demise.

Satan sought it first through the Offspring of woman, tempting Him in the wilderness, then using Peter to try to divert Jesus from cross and death, and corrupting Judas to do his dastardly betrayal. But he ultimately failed. Christ would not sin; He would not be turned from His purpose to save mankind; Christ piled the world’s sins onto His broken body and hung from a cross until death—until justice was served and salvation was won.

And though in defeat, this powerful angel was subdued and bound, he roars still and he still seeks prey. Every person that the devil can turn away from Christ and the truth to his lies and unbelief gives him delight as he thwarts God’s will that every person be saved.

Therefore, God enlists His mighty angels to fight on our side, and they will be there, *“battling for right”* (LSB520) until the day when Jesus comes again in glory. They will be fighting for us, not by their own power, but by the power of the message

given them, the message of “*the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*” And with these, these messengers conquer, for Jesus has already conquered by them. With the angels still at His side on that great and glorious day, the books will be opened and the names read, and believers will be given our blessed inheritance.

Moreover, this message is the weapon with which Jesus sent out the 72, and they returned rejoicing because “*even the demons [were] subject to [them] in [Jesus’] name.*” And we have that same sword of the Spirit, the word of God. It’s a word of peace and the coming kingdom, the word of the cross, the word of grace, the word of forgiveness of sins, the word of a salvation that comes through faith, the word of names written in heaven, the word of everlasting life.

It’s that powerful word especially that pastors get to wield publicly, and those training to become pastors, like Kyle and Peter, and those who teach our young people, like Dawn and Cathie, that is, Mrs. Gill and Mrs. Wakeland for any students out there, and this word is “just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord [spoke them] Himself” (Small Catechism, Office of the Keys).

One can understand how parents may be fearful especially today about their children, that the wiles of Satan might woo them away from Christ and from godliness. I’ve witnessed parents trying to save their children by frightening them with talk of the devil.

I understand it, but I also know that that’s not what casts Satan and his demons down. That’s not what saves. What Satan hates and what saves is the message of God’s Son incarnate in the womb of a virgin, and born the Christ, called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. What Satan hates is the message of the cross and forgiveness, of strength hidden in weakness, of Godly wisdom found in human folly. What Satan hates is the message of resurrection and life, of victory snatched from the jaws of death. What Satan hates is the message of Christ reigning in heaven until He returns again on the clouds to judge the living and the death, and to send the devil and his demon hordes to their ultimate demise.

You recognize these messages; they’re the messages of the angels delivered at momentous occasions in Jesus’ life; but they are not just the angels’ messages; they are ours. And with God’s angel hosts by our side, we need not fear to speak them, not now even in the midst of Satan’s flaming darts, and not then when we hear the trumpets blast from angel lips. Steadfast in Christ and in His word, we can be sure that “*the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come*” to us. We can be sure that our names are written in heaven. And we can rejoice. God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.