

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today is St. Michael and All Angels, a festival of the Church. One of the endearing things of many such festivals is their hymnody. This one is no different. From the 9th century hymn text of Joseph the Hymnographer to the 16th century text of Reformer Philip Melanchthon to the 20th century text of Peter Prange, these hymns tell the Biblical story of the importance of angels and of their work. You may want to turn to Hymn 520 and follow along as I use it in outline for much of this sermon.

Joseph begins by calling the angels “Stars of the morning.” Answering Job “*out of the whirlwind,*” the Lord Himself tells us that “*the morning stars sang together*” at God’s great work of creation (Job 38:7). These angels shine with the glory of the Lord, as St. Luke reports their appearance to the shepherds at the nativity of our Lord. Thus Joseph helps us sing of their resplendent light, and our liturgy helps us join in their song of praise to “the Thrice Holy One.”

Of course, the angels don’t just sing praises to the “Lord God of Sabaoth,” they also serve Him. Indeed, they serve Him by serving us believers, us “helpless ones,” so often afflicted, troubled, persecuted, mired in sin, unable to save ourselves by our deeds. “These are your ministers,” Joseph says of the angels, echoing what David sings of them: “*Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, ... Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will*” (Ps. 103:20-21). It’s what the writer to the Hebrews calls them, too. They are “*ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation*” (Heb. 1:14).

The angels are also God’s messengers, as their title informs us, for that’s what angel means. In the New Testament especially they are privileged to proclaim the message of the coming of Christ, to announce His glorious birth and sing His praises, to bear witness to Christ’s resurrection, and to foretell Christ’s return in glory on the clouds as the disciples saw Him ascend from their sight.

Many in our country don’t understand rightly about angels. Their wrong ideas come more from movies than from the Scriptures. They think people turn into angels when they die; they think that angels get their wings when a bell rings; they think angels are gods themselves. But as powerful as angels are, they are not God. Indeed, they balk at those who would worship them instead of the true God and Jesus Christ His Son (Rev. 19:10). Not even Michael, an archangel, a prince among the angels, is God. His name is a rhetorical question: “Who is like God?” The answer is, of course, “no one”! As the Lord Himself says through the prophet Isaiah, “*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me*” (Isa. 46:9).

Indeed, angels are mighty ones, but they are God's mighty ones, doing His bidding. They are creatures, normally invisible to our eyes, created during the six day creation, when exactly, we can't say. We can't say for certain that they were there when the Lord "*laid the foundation of the earth*" and "*determined its measurements*" (Job 38:4-5), but they were there "when were ended the six days' employ" and then did these sons of God — as the Lord also refers to angels in Job — then did they shout for joy (Job 38:7).

These angels were all originally good, for when God had finished His creating, He pronounced all things good, and that included the angels. We don't know when, either, that a number of angels with Satan as their prince fell away and were cast down, for Moses moves directly from the creation accounts to mankind's deadly fall into sin. It had to happen some time between chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis, but how long that was, one can only speculate.

With Satan's fall from his state of perfection, a cosmic battle began between good and evil, "*Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon*" and his angels. This dragon is the "*ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.*" But "*he was defeated*" and was cast out of heaven along with his angels, cast down to earth, there still to trouble us.

Indeed, we have been enlisted in this great struggle, as St. Paul says "*against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12). And these "*spiritual forces of evil*" have lost none of their potency. As Luther says, "it is no joke to take sides against the devil ... such a mighty and lifelong enemy" (Luther's Baptismal Booklet). But the good angels still aid us; they still fight. These "angelic hosts" are still "battling for right."

But we have joined the fight. We now battle alongside the angels. Arrayed not with moneybag or knapsack or sandals, but with that whole armor of God — "*the belt of truth ... the breastplate of righteousness ... the gospel of peace ... the shield of faith ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Eph. 6:13-17), we do battle as the seventy-two did before us. We are armed with the same weapons that they used as they sent the demonic fleeing away in the name of Christ, for we know the victor. Christ is the victor. By cross and resurrection, Christ stomped on the head of the ancient serpent and crushed his head. Oh, he may still twist and squirm and writhe; he may desire to regain his status in heaven, but he has been defeated by the "*blood of the Lamb.*" And as we like the seventy-two employ Jesus' word and the testimony of the apostles and prophets, rest assured, the devil and his demons hear not us but Jesus, and Satan falls again like lightning from heaven. He and his hordes will not prevail against Christ's church militant.

Of course, the battle rages on. “The fight is fierce, the warfare long,” as another well-known hymn puts it (LSB677). Sometimes we tire of the fight; but we are urged to listen to “the distant triumph song” which makes our hearts brave again and our arms strong. Soon enough “to faithful warriors cometh rest,” we sing. That rest is the sweet “calm of paradise the blest.” Now we fight, but there awaits us, whose “*names are written in heaven,*” the “victor’s crown of gold.” So rejoice. Soon enough “we with the angels [will] bow and adore” our God in His eternal presence. Soon enough we will join the angels in their ceaseless anthems.

But until then, let us sing these glorious hymns today, these lays that tell of the battle and the victory. Let us by word and song be urged on in our fight with Michael and his angels against our relentless foes. And let us eat and drink of the meal that strengthens us for battle. Come now. Eat and drink at the Lord’s table and go forth to battle.

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