

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We at Zion like the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels; we like the music associated with the day. But many of the hymns we sing remind us of the ongoing struggle we're in; they proclaim the Lord's manifold aid; and they rally us to continue the fight.

Indeed, we are at war! By we, I mean the Church is. The Church on earth is not called the Church Militant for nothing. We have foes that we battle, foes that "do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come," foes that want to "deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Luther, Small Catechism, 3rd & 6th Petitions). And you well know Luther identifies these enemies: our sinful nature, the world, and, most fearsome, the devil and his angel horde.

This latter enemy St. Paul especially warns us about: "*we 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*" (Eph. 6:12). St. Paul warns us about "*the schemes of the devil*"; he tells us about "*the flaming darts*" that "*the evil one*" throws at us (Eph. 6:11, 16).

Satan is after us especially now that he has been defeated and cast out of heaven. Poet John Milton wrote thus of Satan's designs for us after his humiliating defeat: that "Satan: he who envies now [our] state, Who now is plotting how he may seduce [us] also from obedience, that, with him Bereaved of happiness, [we] may'st partake His punishment, eternal misery; Which would be all his solace and revenge, As a despite [that is, as an injury] done against the Most High, [we] once to gain companion of his woe" (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VI). In other words, to paraphrase the saying: in his misery Satan wanted company.

Thus, St. Paul exhorts us to "*take up the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm*" (Eph. 6:13), and he goes on to describe our spiritual armor: truth and righteousness, the gospel of peace and faith, the assurance of our salvation, and the word of God.

These are what we use to defend ourselves now against the assaults of this "old [and] evil foe [that] now means us deadly woe." We need these heavenly weapons, for "on earth is not his equal" (LSB656:1), for devils "eager to devour us" still fill the world, for "this world's prince ... still scowl[s] fierce" (LSB656:3).

Has the devil's wrath been loosed upon the earth as in Daniel's vision? Is now the "*time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time,*" a signal to us that the consummation of all things nears? We can't know for certain, but as one looks around, as one witnesses outrageous behavior chronicled

on the news and promoted online in social media, it seems to me that what we are witnessing is not just grotesque; it is Satanic.

It is a time of great woe on earth, but it is not a time to despair — not for Christians. Satan would love nothing other than for us Christians to lose hope. Don't be deceived by the "deep guile and great might" of the ancient serpent (LSB656:1). He has been defeated; he's "judged, the deed is done" (LSB656:3) to Satan's great shame and rage.

For actually Satan's archenemy was first and foremost God's own Son Himself, the anointed of God. Again Milton wrote of it in this way: "not you [O angel host], but me, [this godless multitude] have despised, Yet envied; against me is all their rage, Because the Father, to whom in Heaven supreme Kingdom and power and glory appertains, Hath honoured me, according to his will. Therefore to me their doom he hath assigned, That they may have their wish, to try with me In battle which the stronger proves—they all, Or I alone against them; since by strength They measure all, of other excellence Not emulous, nor care who them excels; Nor other strife with them do I vouchsafe" (ibid).

And so Satan and his army, a third of the created angel host, came out in force against the Son of God to see which would prevail: the strength of their might or the weakness of incarnation and cross.

Yes, against the Son incarnate was the wrath of Satan's horde first applied, for Satan knew that in this One born of woman would be their demise and the world's salvation. And so, in the rest of Revelation 12, our epistle, we hear of the dragon's pursuit of a woman bearing a child, a male child, a child who would shepherd the nations.

We hear how this dragon sought to devour this child, and Scripture tells us how: first through Herod, sending the Holy Family fleeing as Herod sought to destroy the newborn King born of Mary (Matt. 2:13-23), next by tempting Jesus openly, who had just been anointed by the Holy Spirit after His baptism (Matt. 3 & 4), then by using Peter to try to divert Jesus from the cross and death (Matt. 16:23), and finally by entering into Judas to betray Jesus into the hands of sinful men (John 13:27).

But we know that the dragon—we know him also as the "*ancient serpent [and] the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world*"—ultimately failed. The second Adam would not fall, but would become "*a life-giving spirit*" (1 Cor. 15:45), for Christ would not be killed before His time; He would not sin; He would not be turned from His purpose to save mankind; instead, 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, until Satan was defeated in a head-crushing blow. Then, rising from the dead, Christ "*was caught up to God and to his throne*" (Rev. 12:5).

So that we now await His return in glory, the day when, surrounded by the angel host, the books will be opened, and those whose names are written there will arise from the dust to everlasting life. They will “*shine like the brightness of the sky above ... like the stars forever and ever.*”

Until that day, Satan has turned his attention to the Church and seeks to destroy it—which is why we are at war, and which is why war was waged in the heavens, too, with Michael and his angels doing battle against the forces of evil there. Satan and his angels were thrown down, so that the battlefield now is earth. Our enemies fight on, though hopefully, these are the last desperate writhings of a serpent whose head has been crushed, for the blood of the Lamb, shed once for all, defeated him, but “*the word of [our] testimony*” continues to be wielded in battle and will until that day.

We fight still adorned with heavenly armor and armed with the word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Let us wield it — our testimony of God’s anointed, which St. Paul says is “*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Rom. 1:16). We strike a blow against our enemy when we proclaim God’s Son incarnate in a virgin’s womb and born the Christ, called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. We thrust the blade deep into our foes when we preach of cross and forgiveness, of strength hidden in weakness, of Godly wisdom found in human folly. We trample down the enemy with the message of resurrection and life, for death is not the victor; life is. “[*T*]hough [*w*e] die, yet shall [*w*e] live” (John 11:25). We send the devil’s army fleeing in rout with the testimony of Christ reigning in heaven until He returns again on the clouds to judge the living and the dead, giving believers the blessedness of eternal life but sending the goats with the devil and his demon hordes to their ultimate demise.

Yes, with this testimony and seeing by faith the angels at our side, this is no time to despair ... not in the midst of the battle, for the victory is ours, for our names are written in heaven. Rather now is the time to engage the battle with even more zeal in the full knowledge that “*the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come*” to us. Now is the time to rejoice, singing our lays of victory through the blood of the Lamb.

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