

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The Festival of St. Michael and All Angels happens every year on September 29th. At Zion, we think the festival is important enough to transfer its celebration to a Sunday, like we do for Reformation and All Saints Day. Certainly, we like the music associated with the day; we like the festive brass; we like singing the hymns. We like being reminded each year of God's great provision for us tender mortals, so easily hurt, so easily ensnared in the devil's wiles, so quick to fall, so quick to die. God provides for us in part by His holy angels.

Not all Christians are so eager to think on and preach about God's holy angels. Earlier this month I was listening to a podcast by a popular commentator — a Christian, but the podcast is not a Christian-themed podcast. On this occasion, however, he was interviewing Lee Strobel, a rather prolific Christian writer who had just written his latest book: "Seeing the Supernatural: Investigating Angels, Demons, Mystical Dreams, Near-Death Encounters, and Other Mysteries of the Unseen World." I haven't read this book, but I have read some other books that Strobel wrote. He is known for being an investigative journalist who had gone to law school. He was at one time an atheist who sought to use his lawyering and journalist skills to prove the Bible false. It was a journey into the Bible, however, that resulted in his conversion, and since that time he has written books on "The Case for Christ," "The Case for Grace," "The Case for Faith," and other "The Case for" ... books.

In this interview on Strobel's new book, angels was the first topic the interviewer took on, it being the first in Strobel's list of supernatural phenomenon he was investigating. As Strobel is talking about them, his interviewer says: "Interesting. I've been to church. I don't know that I've — probably the wrong kind of church — but I don't know that I've ever heard anyone refer to it." And Strobel responds: "It's so funny you say that, because I was giving a talk the other day and I said, 'I've been a Christian now since November the 8th of 1981. I have never heard a sermon on the topic of angels. Ever. ever.'"¹

That's sad, for even though a 2023 Pew Research study showed that "88% of Americans believe in God of the Bible or another higher power" and "81% of U.S. adults say there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we cannot see it," they're not learning about these invisible creatures that the "God of the Bible" created to minister to us. As we sang, beginning the Divine Service today: "These are Your ministers, these are Your own, Lord God of Sabaoth, nearest Your

¹ From The Tucker Carlson Show: Lee Strobel: Possession, Miracles, Visions, and Encounters With Angels & Demons, Sep 1, 2025.

Victorious, Michael and His Angels Fight for us Still — Rev. 12; Luke 10
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throne; These are Your messengers, these whom You send, Helping Your helpless ones, Helper and Friend” (LSB520:2).

Yes, as Lutherans, we’re reminded often both of the dark powers arrayed against us and of the holy angels who fight for us. Praying the Lord’s Prayer petition “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we implore the Almighty God’s intervention against “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature,” that seek to turn us away from the truth and from godliness (Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, 3rd Petition). And when we pray Luther’s morning and evening prayers, we pray that God would “let [His protecting] holy angel be with [us] that the evil foe may have no power over [us].” These are worthy prayers that both beseech God’s help and remind us of these “*ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of [us believers] who are to inherit salvation*” (Heb. 1:14).

We need the aid of Michael and the host of heaven beside him, as we “*wrestle [not] 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). The devil schemes against us that he might cause our demise, that he might “deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, 6th Petition).

Surely the devil and his demon horde are relentless in their efforts to oppose God. They continue their assaults against God and the world He sent His Son to redeem, though they have suffered defeat after defeat. In the war in heaven, “*the dragon and his angels ... [were] defeated*” by Michael and his angels. He “*was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*” As the prophet Isaiah said: “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! ... you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ... you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit*” (Isa. 14:12, 15).

Jesus by His cross too has delivered us “*from the hand of our enemies*” (Luke 1:74). He defeated the devil, crushing this serpent’s head. He defeated death “*by the blood of the Lamb.*” Our sins are forgiven, and we have gotten salvation “*by the word of [our] testimony,*” namely, that Jesus is Lord, that He is risen from the dead (Rom. 10:10). The victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we now wear “*the whole armor of God*” as protection against our foes: truth and righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God (Eph. 6:14-17). But with eyes to see, we also know that we are surrounded by a mighty army of warrior angels, as Elisha was, and as was revealed to Elisha’s servant, as Syria’s army sought to seize Elisha. That servant was distraught by the army, but Elisha remained calm and resolute. He prayed to the Lord: “*‘O LORD,*

please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17). They were being defended by an angel army.

Do such things happen still? Let me return to the interview. Strobel tells the story of a Christian who “went to an island in the South Pacific to be a Christian missionary.” Here is Strobel telling the story:

The missionary “and his wife were living in a cottage there. And he’s talking about Jesus. Well, the local tribespeople didn’t quite like that. And so one day a mob of them came to burn down their house and kill them. So they see this mob forming. And he and his wife are in their house. And what can they do? They start to pray, ‘God, protect us, help us. They’re going to kill us. They’re going to burn our house down. What do we do?’ And they prayed all night long. And by dawn, the mob began to dissipate.

“A year later, he led the head of that mob to faith in Jesus Christ. And they’re having a conversation. And John [the missionary] said to him, ‘by the way, do you remember that day when you all came to burn down our house and kill us? Why didn’t you do it?’ And the man said, ‘well, who are all those men you had there?’ He said, ‘no, no, no, man, it was just my wife and I.’ He said, ‘no, no, no, your house was surrounded by these muscular men in white garments with drawn swords. There’s no way we could have hurt you that night.’

“Well, what’s the explanation for that? I think it could very well have been an angelic encounter that God had sent angels to protect him. And there’s multiple numbers of cases like that.”² That’s Strobel.

I don’t have any reason to dismiss this story. An angelic encounter? It sounds like it. Does it still happen? Sounds like it. Always? No, neither with prayer nor without it. There are no promises that Christians will always be shielded from danger, and anyone watching the news knows this to be true. I’m thinking of the children shot in the Catholic church in Minnesota recently. And more recently, I’m thinking of the young Christian Charlie Kirk assassinated in Utah, leaving behind a mother and two children.

Why did God let them die and save others? Why were they not spared from this hurt? Where were the holy angels for them? Pastors everywhere wish they could give an answer to this “why” question. *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (Rom. 11:33).* And no doubt, the survivors are sad and lonely and empty from this loss ... and angry! Why, God?

² Ibid.

I don't know. But Mrs. Erica Kirk, by the word of her testimony, showed that with all the other feelings she had, she was not left without hope. By the word of her testimony, a word filled with Divine grace, she spoke Christ-like words, strong words though muffled with tears: "that man, that young man ... I forgive him." And by the word of her testimony and of others at these deaths, the Holy Spirit is about His work of saving the multitudes — by grace through faith.

God does provide for His elect, those whose "*names are written in heaven,*" "*found written in the book.*" It's hard to hear at such times, but He does work "*all things ... for good*" "*for those who love [Him],*" *for those who are called according to his purpose.*" But there is something eternal happening here. "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified*" (Rom. 8:28-30). As God's elect, we still experience tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, and for us today bullets. But we are "*more than conquerors through him who loved us,*" and nothing "*will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:37, 39).

Of course, we grieve at such tragedies. These young believers were taken far too soon. But the finite disappears in the face of the infinite. "*[A] thousand years in [God's] sight are but as yesterday when it is past*" (Psa. 90:4). Their deaths have been swallowed up in victory. Glorified, they now stand with their Savior, flanked by holy angels, while Michael and his angel host fight on, as our entrance hymn says again: "Still let them aid us and still let them fight, Lord of angelic hosts, battling for right, Till, where their anthems they ceaselessly pour, We with the angels may bow and adore" (LSB520:4).

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