

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

At the time of Hurricane Harvey, with people being rescued from their homes by the military and police and rescue personnel, and by ordinary citizens in their boats, a political cartoon was published. It depicted a Texan being rescued from the roof of his house by a Coast Guard helicopter. The man was arrayed in the Confederate Battle flag, his Lone Star state flag had the word “secede” across it, and he was flying a “Don’t Tread on Me” flag. As the man is being lifted into the helicopter, he exclaims, “Angels! Sent by God!” While the “Coastie” still on the rooftop saving a child responds, “Er, actually Coast Guard...sent by the Government.”

Now, of course, this political cartoon was drawn to make fun of God-fearing, self-sufficient, secession-minded Texans, reminding them of how foolish they are, and how much better the benevolent Government was than God in helping them in time of need. I think it shows the ignorance of the media elite who know nothing of what the Bible teaches about how God operates in the world, or what God's angels can be.

For the Greek word ἄγγελος (and the Hebrew מַלְאָךְ) means generally “messenger,” but more specifically, it can mean several things in Holy Scripture. For example, it can mean a human messenger. Thus, when the Lord through the prophet Malachi says, “*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me,*” (Mal. 3:1) the word that gets translated “messenger” is the Hebrew word “mal’ak,” and when that passage is quoted in the New Testament, “mal’ak” is translated into “angelos.” We know that the Lord in Malachi is prophesying the coming of John the Baptist for the Gospel writers affirm it, applying the words to the forerunner of Christ. We know, moreover, that the pastors of the seven churches in the book of Revelation are referred to as “angels” — there the word doesn’t even get translated. Jesus calls them “*the angels of the seven churches*” (Rev. 1:20), but He’s talking about those who preach the message to those churches, the pastors.

So, you see, Christians don’t deny the good of the government at all, as the cartoonist suggests by his satire. We know that God puts people in authority over us in government as His servants for our good (Rom. 13:4). We understand that those sent by government can rightly be called angels ... human messengers sent by God to help and defend us.

But most of the time when we think of angels, we don’t think in this way. We think more in terms of the heavenly messengers whom God sends, like the angel Gabriel delivering the εὐαγγέλιον, the good message, to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she would be the Mother of God, or the angels shining with the Lord’s glory in

the sky above the shepherds proclaiming Christ the Savior is born, and singing “*Glory to God in the highest*” (Luke 2:14).

And although these creatures of God are among the “things ... invisible” that God made, for they are “*ministering spirits*” (Heb. 1:14), nevertheless, they often manifest themselves in human form to deliver their message, like at the birth of Jesus or at the empty tomb. “*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*” the angel asked. “*He is not here, but has risen*” (Luke 24:5). Or at Jesus’ ascension: “*why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11).

We give thanks to God for these angelic messages whereby we know these grand and glorious things that we confess: that our Savior, Christ the Lord, was indeed conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary; that after His death He arose victorious over it on the third day; that although He has ascended to God’s right hand, He will come again in the same way to take us unto Himself in heaven. And we give thanks today for the ministrations that these servants of God perform for us, often without our realization of their angelic service and without thanks from us.

But, although we rejoice on this day, which we’re celebrating as the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels, as you can hear, we rejoice not foremost in the angels, but in the Lord. We rejoice because the ultimate battle has been won. We rejoice that the Lord took on mankind’s enemy — Satan — in Christ Jesus, by cross and suffering, by bloody death. We rejoice that He has crushed the serpent’s head and redeemed us unto Himself, that the devil has been conquered by the blood of this Lamb, that the ransom has been paid; “*It is finished*” (John 19:30); that “this world’s prince” “can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done.”

That is, as we celebrate on this day, we remember that Michael is not the Christ. The angels are not God; they’re not our savior. Michael is “one who is like God” — that’s what his name means; but Jesus is God. He is “*God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God.*” Jesus is not of similar substance with the Father — He is not *homoiousios*; He is God begotten of the Father, of one Substance with the Father — He is *homoousios*. Jesus is truly the Lord. He was Lord to Adam and Abraham, to Moses and David. He was God and Lord to Thomas and the rest of the disciples. He is God and Lord to us. He is not Michael, one like God; He is Jesus, bearing the Divine name: “*The Lord saves.*” He is God.

Nevertheless, we rejoice this day in the work of Michael and his angels on our behalf — not just in their aid to us, but in their battling for right on our behalf. They are fighting for us still in a cosmic battle with the dragon and his army of demons.

Of course, as we confess, the ultimate battle has been won, but a cosmic battle still ensued following the cross. Why, I don't know, but after the fall into sin the Lord permitted the devil access to Him in the heavenly places. Consider how in the first chapter of Job, Satan could actually come to the Lord in heaven, and strive with Him face to face. You remember how Satan sought to get Job to curse God and how the Lord permitted him to try.

But no longer. The strife being over and the battle won, the Lord of hosts had had enough and sent Michael and his angel hosts to throw Satan and all our accusers out of heaven to earth. And they did—they conquered "*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*" The vanquished was cast down; the Victor took His place at the Father's right hand. No longer the constant accusations; no longer "*any charge against God's elect*"; no one left in heaven "*to condemn*" (Rom. 8:33-34). Christ the crucified is there; Christ risen from the dead is there; Christ our Righteousness is there "*interceding for us*" (Rom. 8:34).

Of course, although accusing hordes can't accuse us before God—they've been cast down to earth—still they do accuse us in our own ears and in our own thoughts, and we are sorely tried. We need help. Thus we have holy Michael and all his angels fighting for us still "*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). Thus we have angels and archangels encamped around us today, not here with horses and flaming chariots (2 Kings 6), but armed still with the blood of the Lamb and His word of absolution with which the devil's accusations are still thwarted.

And going forth from this place, we depart having "*Put on the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11). For you know you'll be assailed—the devil is still seeking to devour you. But when that liar and murderer starts lobbing his flaming darts toward you, "*you're not good enough,*" "*you haven't done enough,*" "*all this suffering is all your own fault; God has forsaken you,*" and you start wondering, "*shall I be separated from the love of Christ,*" covered in the Lord's armor with the holy angels at your side, this evil foe will have no power over you. And you will sing in triumph: "Satan, disturb my soul no longer! I belong to Christ; I am baptized into Him. I am more than a conqueror through him who loved me—through the Lamb who shed His blood for me." And you will confess: "*I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate [me] from the love of God in Christ Jesus [my] Lord*" (Rom. 8:38-39). God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

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