

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

## ANGELS: GOOD AND BAD

Rev. 12:7-12, Lk 10:17-20; St. Michael; September 28-29, 2024

Today we celebrate the festival of St. Michael and All Angels, held on September 29<sup>th</sup>, which this year is a Sunday. Originally, this festival commemorated the dedication of a church to St. Michael alone. Lutherans kept the festival and added all of the good angels that serve God. You might have noticed that the color of the day changed from green to white. White is the liturgical color of God and His victories in Christ for us. How is a festival commemorating St. Michael and All Angels a festival of God's victories? The angels did not save us from sin and death, Jesus did. Today we celebrate how God's good angels serve in His plan of salvation, especially to defeat Satan, the devil, and all the evil angels who rebelled against God after being created good in the beginning.

I find it confusing that Michael, an angel, is called a "saint," a term usually reserved for humans. Saints are Christians who died for their faith or kept the faith until death, and all living believers in the true Church. St. Paul – a martyr for faith in Jesus – commonly addressed his letters to the churches, Epistles of the New Testament, to the saints in that place. For example Romans: **To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints** (1:7).

To be a "saint" literally means to be a "holy one." Christians, living and departed, are saints, holy ones of God, because they have been washed clean of their sins by the blood of the Lamb of God and dressed in Christ's own holiness. Good angels are "saints" because they did not sin against God in the beginning and always reflect God's holiness in what they say and do.

Bad angels were created by God good in the beginning and served Him, but became evil angels by rebelling against God and will never repent of their rejection of God. Satan, the devil and prince of the bad angels, appeared as a serpent at man's fall into sin. He is described as a dragon in the Book of Revelation (chs. 12, 13, 16, 20).

A couple more notes about angels in general before getting into the details of St. Michael and his army of good angels:

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The word “angel” in the Bible means “messenger”; angels often bring messages from God, announcements of what He’s doing. Angels are spirits without bodies, though they sometimes appear in human form and, when they do, are always described as “men,” not women, though popular culture often depicts angels as women. Angels are very powerful creatures that reflect the glory and majesty of God and, when they appear, the most common reaction of sinful humans is fear. The shepherds on Christmas Eve were “**sore afraid.**” Cherubs, a kind of angel, are not fat, naked, babies with cute little wings. Finally, humans who die do not become angels; our souls go either to heaven or hell when we die where we await the resurrection of dead and God’s judgment on the Last Day.

**Back to St. Michael and All Angels: Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.**

As spiritual beings, angels and demons can be both in heaven and on earth and are not limited by space. As eternal beings, they are not limited by time. God in His wisdom allowed Satan to continue to come before Him in heaven after the devil and his evil angels rebelled against Him. The Book of Job describes how Satan acted like a prosecuting attorney trying to bring a conviction against Job (1:6f.; 2:1f.). “Satan” is from the Hebrew word for “adversary.” The term “devil” is similar in that it describes someone who brings charges against another with a hostile intent.

While good angels, God’s messengers, bring His Word to humans, both Law and Gospel, the devil and bad angels always bring a message of accusation, tempting us to reject God’s Word, to believe the devil’s lies, fall from faith in God and live sinful lives. We pray in the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, **And lead us not into temptation.** When we do, we pray that “God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false believe, despair, and other great shame and vice.” We need God’s constant protection from all that.

But the time came when Satan could no longer come before God in heaven to accuse us. **Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down... to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.** When did Michael and his angels defeat the devil and the bad angels? In our Gospel Reading from Luke 10, Jesus tells His disciples, who in Jesus' name were given authority over demons: **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.”**

Didn't Jesus win the victory by His suffering and death on the cross, which was the fulfillment of God's promise given at the time of Adam and Eve's Fall into sin, that **the Seed of the woman** (Jesus, the Son of Mary) would **bruise the serpent's** (devil's) **head** at the cost of **the serpent bruising the Seed's** (Jesus') **heel** (Gn 3:15)? To defeat sin, death, and the devil, Jesus suffered and died, His heel bruised by Satan. But by this bruising, the serpent's head was bruised. The head's bruising is more severe by comparison than the heel's. Defeated and kicked out of heaven, his head crushed, the devil can no longer accuse God's saints of being sinners deserving of death and hell. The cross of Jesus determined the outcome of the battle in heaven when Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels.

John in his Revelation makes clear how the battle was won. **“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.”** St. Michael and all angels and human saints are victorious over the devil and his angels because of the **blood of the Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world.** No one can bring accusations against God's saints because they are justified, declared righteous because of Jesus, and cleansed of all sin by His blood (Rom 8:31-39).

If you get anything out of today's celebration of St. Michael and All Angels, may it be that Satan can no longer accuse you before God because you are a saint by baptism and faith in Jesus, the Lamb.

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This is what today's celebration is about. The **loud voice** John heard in heaven said, **"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come... Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!"** Jesus has won the victory on the cross and risen from the dead to justify us before God as saints, and the devil can't do anything about that. At the same time, we are warned that our struggles against sin, death, and the devil are not over as long as we live on this earth. **"But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"**

You might have experienced what it's like to suffer from a vindictive person with nothing more to lose. A cornered criminal facing punishment when taken into custody will fight to the death and does not care who gets hurt or killed in the process. The devil is like that. Some people who have already ruined relationships, maybe broken up a marriage and family by their sins, will do everything in their power to make things worse for everyone for as long as they can. The devil's situation is like that.

The devil knows his days of working evil in this world are numbered, and he is going to take every opportunity to make us miserable in an attempt to steal us from God and drag us to hell to burn forever in the eternal lake of fire. Satan and his bad angels are mad at their defeat and want to take it out on us in the Church.

Because things are getting so bad in the world, people keep asking me if the end of the world is near. What I say is that all the signs are there that it could happen at any moment, and we need to be ready with faith in Jesus until then. We are in the times noted in the Apocalypse of John when Christians who refuse to give up or compromise on their faith will suffer and die, **"for they loved not their lives even unto death."** God's promise is that, even in death **"they have conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."** What should we do when faced with our own deaths? Remember what Jesus said to His disciples when they were giddy with success over demons. **"Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."** The devil can no longer accuse us before God. Our names are written in God's Book of Life. Amen.