

INI

The Angels Are God's Gifts to Us
St. Michael and All Angels [Observed]
Tuesday, September 28, 2021
Matthew 18:1–11

In the front part of the hymnal is a list of all the festivals and observances in the Church Year. They celebrate events in the life of our Lord and in the life of the Church or commemorate the saints who have gone before us.

There are two exceptions. One we commemorated only a couple weeks ago in Holy Cross Day, extolling the great symbol of Christianity and our salvation. Today the festival of St. Michael and All Angels draws our focus not to significant events or human beings but rather to spiritual beings. They are commonly known as angels. The word angel from the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament often means messenger. It can also be used simply to refer to a heavenly being who is sent by God to do His bidding or who is engaged in the worship of the triune God.

Angels are fascinating and it is not just Christians who talk about them. People will speak of their guardian angel. People will give as a gift a cute little ceramic angel to a loved one. There are movies and tv shows made about angels, including the fallen angels. Angels are mysterious. We know they're important but we don't always quite know what to do with them.

The Scripture readings today paint a picture of angels that is anything but cute and little. Angels rather are powerful beings. We sing in the Sanctus, Lord God of Sabaoth. Sabaoth is from Hebrew and means armies. The heavenly host is God's army. Angels are God's soldiers. They are at war against our enemies. The book of Isaiah as well as our second reading from Revelation speaks of those enemies. They are the fallen angels, led by Lucifer, the angel of light. He is the adversary and deceiver.

He rebelled against God and was thrown out of heaven. The archangel Michael led the heavenly host of God against Satan and the angels who followed him. Now that they are banished from heaven they are suffering in hell forever. Even so, the devil and his fellow angels, which are called demons, still have been given a certain amount of leeway by God and are actively at war with God and His people. This is why we need God's angels. The war against us is a spiritual war. We cannot see the angels and the demons. But they are active and constantly at work, the angels for us and the demons against us.

We may be uneasy about the spiritual realm. We don't quite understand it and don't quite know what to do with it. But we don't need to fully understand it. It is enough to know that, as the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the

spiritual forces of darkness. There is nothing wrong with buying a ceramic angel but how awesome is it to know that God's angels are powerful and mighty warriors against the assaults of the devil.

There is a reason nearly every time in the Bible an angel appeared to someone they were afraid. You don't want to mess with an angel. Nevertheless, the angel often would immediately declare, Do not be afraid. Perhaps the most famous visitation of angels was that of the angels who appeared to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem declaring good news of great joy. We should not be afraid of angels, we should be glad that they are sent by God to bring us good news and to fight for us.

We human beings are indeed the crown of God's creation. Angels are powerful but they are below us in the great taxonomy of God's creation. We will rule in heaven. The angels will still be subservient to us. However, we humans are bound in original sin. Our sinful nature is turned in on itself. We think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Being the crown of God's creation is a great gift and blessing of God. It doesn't mean we should exalt ourselves. We should be humble in our gratitude to God for creating us and giving us eternal life.

We too often seek our own recognition. The disciples came to Jesus as we see in our Gospel reading, asking who was the greatest. Never mind that they were asking God almighty and should have concerned themselves only with serving Him. Even so, Jesus teaches them this lesson: if you want to be greatest, become as a child. He brought a child before them and showed them that the least among them is the greatest. If you are concerned about yourself you lose sight of those who are least among you and could cause them to sin. Then you would be guilty of severe sin against those children.

Now Jesus shows us what we do not see. Their angels are constantly viewing the face of God the Father in heaven. The powerful army of God is who you are up against if you are concerned about how you would be exalted and are not concerned about the spiritual welfare of the least among us. Treat them as the greatest. Serve them even as the powerful beings who are messengers serve you.

They after all were the ones to announce the glad tidings of great joy: the Lord of all became the servant of all. The eternal God was born in the flesh. The almighty God suffered in His body on the cross and bore in His body the sin and guilt of the world. He died on the cross so that we will join in with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who laud and magnify the glorious name of Christ. Amen.

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