

St. Michael and All Angels (9/29/10 – *Thanks to God for His Holy Angels*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is one that tends to get relatively little attention in Lutheranism in our time. That seems to be nothing new, however. In 1958 Fred Lindemann – a professor of homiletics – lamented: “Evidently this feast is largely ignored in modern Lutheran circles, with the result that the faithful are rarely taught the doctrine of the angels.” [*The Sermon and the Propers, vol.4* (CPH 1959) p.66] On the other hand, the world – in typical fashion – dreams up all sorts of fantasies ... also about angels. So let us this day hear what God’s Word has to say about the angels, that we might give *Thanks to God for His Holy Angels* ... and praise Him for these wonderful *ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation* [HEB 1.14].

Now to understand this gift of God to us – a creation God intended (at least in part) for **our** benefit and blessing – we must first know that the word rendered “angel” in both the Hebrew and the Greek means “messenger.” The angels are God’s messengers to us – ministering spirit messengers. And Holy Scripture reveals holy angels to be messengers of both Law and Gospel.

As a messenger of the Law, God set His cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden to guard the Tree of Life. GENESIS 3.22 and 24 says: *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever—” He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the Tree of Life.* Notice that even when they are messengers of the Law, angels are still ministering spirits sent by God to serve us in His mercy. God’s purpose in blocking the Garden is not merely a sign of man’s separation from God and Paradise because of sin – a speaking of the Law – but also to protect mankind from living as separated sinners **forever!** If Adam and Eve had eaten from the Tree of Life, they would have been **immortal** sinners – like the devil and all

his evil angels ... eternally condemned ... with no hope of salvation.

In GENESIS 19 the LORD sends two angels to destroy wicked, unbelieving Sodom and Gomorrah. In ACTS we read of an angel striking down Herod for allowing the multitude to refer to him as a god: *Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last* [ACTS 12.23]. And in THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST TO ST. JOHN, it is the angels who pour out the *golden bowls full of the wrath of God* upon the earth [REV 15.7].

The angels of God are not only messengers of the Law, but also instruments by which God gives His Law to us. Though we do not hear about them in the Exodus account, the New Testament makes clear that God used His holy angels in delivering His Law. In ACTS we hear Stephen condemn those who would stone him: *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of Whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, you who received the Law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."* [ACTS 7.53] And by inspiration St. Paul says: *What purpose then does the Law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed – that is, Jesus Christ – should come to Whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.* [GAL 3.19]

But the angels do not bear bad tidings only – the Law we cannot keep perfectly and the condemnation we deserve for our many sin – but also good. In the *Old Testament* appointed for this *Feast of St. Michael and All Angels*, Michael the Archangel does battle with *the prince of the kingdom of Persia* and *with the kings of Persia* [DAN 10.13] on behalf of the people of God. In the appointed PSALM 91, we hear the divine promise that God *will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways* [91.11]. In the *Epistle* the Lord tells us that *in heaven, Michael and his angels* fought war *against the dragon ... and his angels*, defeating them. The end result was that the *ancient serpent, who is called the devil and satan, the deceiver of the whole world ... was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him* [REV 12.7-9]. And in the *Holy Gospel* we hear

Christ's declaration and promise that the angels of the *little ones* – that is, the sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock ... the Church ... young and old alike – *always see the face of the Father Who is in heaven* [MT 18.10].

Even in the Old Testament, the holy angels proclaimed the Gospel. For when Isaiah saw the glories of heaven, and beheld the LORD God sitting on the throne filling the temple, and heard the six-winged seraphim crying out: *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!* [ISA 6.3], he responded in repentant humility: *Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched Isaiah's mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."* [6.5-7] Pure Gospel!

Above all, these holy messengers of God declare the Savior! – His Conception and Nativity [LK 1.30-33; 2.9-11], His glorious Resurrection after His crucifixion and burial in the tomb [LK 24.5-7], and His majestic Return after the Ascension [ACTS 1.10-11]. They encourage God's people to proclaim the Holy Gospel of our Lord ... even and especially in the midst of adversity. When Peter and the Apostles are jailed for proclaiming Christ, the Lord sends His messenger to them; and *at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."* [ACTS 5.19-20] The holy messengers of God direct believers so that the Gospel-Word of Christ is proclaimed to unbelievers, like the Ethiopian Eunuch: *Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza"* [ACTS 8.26]. And they direct God-seeking unbelievers to hear the Gospel-Word of salvation in Jesus Christ through the Apostles: *About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a*

memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.” [ACTS 10.3-5].

How very much like Christ Himself the angels are, then. Like Christ our Lord, they are with and watch over the little ones [MT 18.10]. Like Christ, they have descended and ascended Jacob’s ladder [GEN 28.12] – for Christ also came down from heaven and was incarnate in the flesh of Jacob before He ascended again to dwell where He has always been. Like Christ, the angels excel in strength ... and fight mightily for God’s people. Like Christ, they do the Father’s commandments, and hearken to the voice of His Word. Like Christ, they are ministers of God that do His bidding. Like Christ, they proclaim the Gospel. And like Christ, they declare to people afraid of God’s might: *Do no fear*.

Yet Christ is, of course, far greater than the angels; for He is their Creator. And though He made Himself a little while *lower than the angels* [PSA 8.5; HEB 2.7, 9] – when He humbled Himself to work the salvation of fallen mankind – yet even then the angels did behold Him as their glory and ever worship Him ... since He is the eternal Son of God the LORD. For Christ declares in our *Holy Gospel* for this feast: *their angels always see the face of My Father Who is in heaven* [MT 18.10]; and is He not Himself the very Face of the Father ... since His is *the image* or *icon of God* [2COR 4.4], as Scripture says?

[This and the previous paragraph redacted from *Every Day Will I Bless Thee* by Burnell Eckardt, Jr. (Concordia Catechetical Academy, 1998) p.491]

Indeed, Christ our Lord is the first, arch-type and ultimate Angel of the LORD. He is the incarnate – living, breathing, walking – Message of God. He is the Word made Flesh Who dwells even now among us, ministering to us His Gospel ... delivering to us the fruits of the glad tidings the angels proclaimed ... feeding us forgiveness in the Mystical Supper – *things into which angels long to look* [1PET 1.12].

So let us give *Thanks to God for His Holy Angels* – this day and always.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]