

Sermon #1,163: Homily on the Holy Angels
9-27-15, St. Michael & All Angels' Day, Bethany-Princeton MN

THE HOLY ANGELS

Prayer: O loving and merciful God! How I rejoice that You have given me Your angels for my protection and defense! How many dangers, of which I was entirely ignorant, have You not warded off through the mighty guardianship of Your holy angels! O merciful God, grant me Your Holy Spirit, that I may be preserved in faith and continue to be served by the holy angels. Grant that I may not grieve them by my sinful disobedience, but let me imitate them in willingly serving, praising, and obeying You here in this life. Let my motto be, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." O God, let Your holy angels be with me in death, carry my soul to Abraham's bosom, and accompany me to glory. Let me remain there forever in their fellowship, rejoice with them in the refrain, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Sabaoth," and thank and praise You for this, as well as for all other blessings of Your grace, forever and ever. Amen.

1. Homily: The creation of angels, and their various titles or ranks

You know when the angels become important to us: when we see our danger. When our child is sick, our spouse is gravely ill, we drive in a strong storm, we want to know the angels are there. The angels always see our danger; they protect us even when we're unaware.

The angels are part of God's creation. The Bible says He created all things "*visible and invisible.*" The angels are in the invisible part. So, the only things we can know about them are revealed in the Bible.

That includes how they came into being. God made the angels during the 6 days of creation. The Bible says the angels "***shouted for joy***" when God "***laid the earth's cornerstone.***" Everything God made was "***very good.***" But as we hear in Revelation 12 (the traditional epistle reading for this day), certain angels, led by Satan, rebelled against God. They became "evil angels." Then God cast them out of heaven; Jesus said that hell was made for them: it is "***the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels***" (***Mt 25:41***). Now those evil angels will always be evil angels; they belong to hell and its ruler, the chief devil Satan.

Like the evil angels, the holy angels' status will no longer ever change. They are always holy: the heavenly host.

The Bible mentions some angels by name: the archangel Michael who leads the heavenly host against all the devils, and the angel Gabriel, who announced the forthcoming births of John the Baptist and Jesus, appearing to Zacharias and the virgin Mary.

The Bible also gives the holy angels titles and divides them into ranks. It says Jesus is ***“far above all principality and power and might and dominion”*** –titles for ranks of angels. There are “cherubim,” who guarded the way to the Garden of Eden. And “seraphim,” angels with six wings who in Isaiah 6 sing *“holy, holy, holy”* around God’s throne.

**Ye watchers and ye holy ones,
Bright seraphs, cherubim and thrones,
Raise the glad strain! Alleluia!
Cry out, Dominions, Princedoms, Pow’rs,
Virtues, Archangels, Angels’ choirs!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (#540 v. 1)**

2. Homily: The angels’ adoration of God

The first reason for the angels’ existence is to glorify and worship God. This tells us the first reason why we exist.

In Isaiah 6, we see that the main feature of their worship is humility. ***“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up ... Above it stood seraphim; each one had 6 wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’ ” (Is 6:1-3).*** These six-winged angels covering their faces and feet shows their humbleness in the presence of God. In this they are examples for us, to approach God with humility.

Revelation 4 shows *“four living creatures,”* six-winged angels – seraphim again. It says: ***“Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures ... The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ ” (Rev. 4:6, 8)*** Their worship around the throne is never-ending. This is how we will worship Him in heaven too.

**Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be.**

**Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity! (#15 v. 2, 4)**

3. Homily: Angels in the story of salvation

Christ is “*the Lord of hosts*” and “*King of angels*,” but He isn’t one of them; He is their God. He’s above them. “*Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer, than all the angels in the sky.*” Hebrews 1 says He is “***much better than the angels.***”

But the holy angels do not resent Christ’s exalted position, like the evil angels did. Because they live to glorify God, they glorify Christ and His work as the Savior. The angels rejoice the most about our salvation. Jesus said: “***There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.***” The Bible says in 1 Peter that the preaching of the Gospel contains “***things which angels desire to look into.***”

The angels love us. Think what the holy angels love in you! -- Your faith and your salvation. They show what we should love most in each other. Treasure in each other what the angels treasure in each Christian: that here is a citizen of heaven by the free gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

The angels show how they treasure this in how obediently they participated in the history of our salvation, in the life of Christ. First, they protected the people of Israel from whose line the Savior was born, especially on the night of the Passover: the angel of death “passed over” the Israelites’ houses but killed the Egyptians’ first-born. Angels strengthened Jesus after He was tempted in the wilderness, and comforted Him in Gethsemane. Jesus said more than 144,000 angels stood ready to keep Him from death, but they were held back by Jesus’ will.

But most important, they were “herald angels,” messengers. “Angel” means “messenger.” They were messengers of the Gospel at three great moments in the history of our salvation:

Reading: Luke 2:8-15

**Angels we have heard on high,
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply,
Echoing their joyous strains.**

Glo-ria in excelsis Deo;

Glo-ria in excelsis Deo.

(#116 v. 1)

Reading: Matthew 28:1-7

**On that first morning of the week, An angel bade their sorrow flee,
Before the day began to break, For thus he spake unto the three:
The Marys went their Lord to seek. "Your Lord doth go to Galilee:"
Alleluia! ... Alleluia! ... Alleluia! Alleluia! ... Alleluia! ... Alleluia!**

(#366 v. 2-3)

Reading: Acts 1:9-11

**The heav'ns with joy receive their Lord,
O day of exultation!**

By saints, by angel-hosts, adored

For His so great salvation!

O earth, adore thy glorious King;

His rising, His ascension sing

With grateful adoration!

(melody: #378; words: A. T. Russell, Lutheran Hymnary #362 v. 2)

4. Homily: The angels' service in heaven

The holy angels continually see God "face to face." In Matthew 18:10 (the gospel lesson for this day) Jesus says: **"In heaven the little ones' angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."**

The holy angels always stand in the presence of God and see Him face to face, as we will in heaven. In a dream God showed Jacob that angels were **"ascending and descending"** on a ladder that **"reached to heaven."** The angel Gabriel said to Zechariah: **"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God."**

Because we don't see God face to face like the angels, we need to be reminded of this. We are always standing in the presence of God. We do not worship Him as we should, constantly and with purity like they

do. But He puts us together with the angels in spite of our sins, and for Jesus' sake, by His holy, precious blood we are pure in His sight. Isn't this grace? And doesn't it make you praise Him as the angels do! In the communion service we recognize that we share such intimate worship of Christ *"with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven."*

Even as the angels gaze upon God's face and adore Him, they see His concern for **"His little ones,"** and gladly go to protect them on earth. Philip Melancthon, the chief co-worker with Martin Luther during the Reformation, wrote this hymn about the angels. We will sing 7 verses from this great hymn. The first three verses speak of how the angels serve God simply by their worship of Him in the kingdom of glory.

**Lord God, we all to Thee give praise,
Thank offerings meet to Thee we raise
That Thou didst angel hosts create,
Around Thy glorious throne to wait.**

**They glow with light and heav'nly grace,
And constantly behold Thy face;
Obedience to Thy voice they yield,
And are with godly wisdom filled.**

**They never rest nor sleep, as we;
Their whole delight is but to be
Forever near Thee, gracious Lord,
Thy little flock to watch and guard. (#545 v. 1-3)**

5. Homily: The need for angels' service on earth

The world is a dangerous place, not first because evil people are here, but because the devil is here. He ***"walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*** In Revelation 12, we hear a voice from heaven saying: ***"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, for the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."*** In other words, the devil pours out his anger on the "inhabitants of earth" – on us! The story of Job shows that the devil ***"goes to and fro on the earth,"*** he knows what God's children are like, and he delights in striking against God by hurting His children, trying to inflict so much damage on them that they will give up their faith.

The history of the Christian Church shows the attacks upon Christians -- on Lot, Daniel, and Peter, for instance. But the Bible says that angels ***“brought Lot out”*** of Sodom and Gomorrah to safety, and ***“God sent His angel and shut the lion’s mouths”*** so Daniel was not hurt, and ***“the Lord sent His angel”*** to rescue Peter from prison.

Another of my favorites is in the Old Testament history of the prophet Elisha, when a wicked king of Syria sent an army to surround the city where Elisha was, because he thought if he killed Elisha then Israel would fall to him. Elisha’s servant was terrified but Elisha was calm. He said to his servant, ***“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2Ki 6:16)***, and he prayed God to open the servant’s eyes ***“that he may see,”*** and then the young man saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire – legions of angels.

These stories not only tell us what the angels did, but they are a reminder of our constant danger. How many dangers, of which we are entirely ignorant, do not the holy angels ward off without us even knowing it! And yet we worry about all the dangers that we know about, which are only a fraction of them, and often we are ignorant or heedless of the greatest dangers! This is the reason to pray for the protection and guardianship of the holy angels. But it is also the reason to believe and trust that God has already been protecting us through their help, and will continue to do so in greater ways than we know.

**The foul old dragon and dread foe
With envy, hate, and wrath doth glow;
It always is his aim and pride
Thy Christian people to divide.**

**Therefore, no halt nor rest he knows;
A roaring lion round he goes,
Or lies in wait with baneful snare
To drive the Christians to despair.**

**But watchful is the angel band
That follows Christ on ev’ry hand
To guard His people where they go
And break the counsel of the foe.**

(continued)

**And thus our God, still at this day,
From harm and many an evil way
Keeps us by His dear angel guard,
Placed over us as watch and ward. (#545 v. 4, 6, 7, 10)**

6. Sermon: The angels' guardianship of Christians

The angels do serve God on earth by protecting Christians. Jesus said: **"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."** The angels belong to Jesus' **"little ones"**; they are **"their angels."** If you belong to Jesus, if you're baptized and believe in Him, then He gives angels to protect you.

A verse from Hebrews 1 says: ***Are [the angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (v. 14)*** This reveals that the angels don't protect just anyone -- they protect you, a child of God by faith in Jesus. God doesn't give angels to guard unbelievers, only to Christians! It's another of Christ's benefits!

Learn to treasure these words from Psalm 91:

***Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,
No evil shall befall you ...
For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.
In their hands they will bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.***

These words, from a psalm, are a prayer. God is putting these words into your mouth, that His angels are stronger than the devil and all his evil angels, and never fail to guard and deliver you from evil.

**I walk with angels all the way;
They shield me and befriend me.
All Satan's pow'r is held at bay
When heav'nly hosts attend me.
They are my sure defense,
All fear and sorrow, hence!
Unharmed by foes, do what they may,
I walk with angels all the way. (#252 v. 4)**

7. Homily: Angels guard even children, even during sleep

All Christians are God's little ones. But Jesus actually set a child among the disciples when He said angels belong to His "little ones," that they are "**their angels.**" When infants are baptized and receive faith in Jesus, they also receive angels to protect them -- another reason to bring them to baptism right away. Every Christian boy and girl should know angels are protecting them, just as baby Moses was kept from harm when his mother had to set him adrift in a basket.

All Christian parents who worry about their children's welfare should know that angels are protecting them. Listen to what Martin Luther said: *"If it were not for the protection of the dear angels, no child would grow to full age, even if the parents took all possible care."*

The holy angels also protect us when we sleep. Psalm 121 says: **"He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."** The guardian angels are one of God's means for protecting us when we sleep. Parents watch the night-time breathing of their babies, wanting them to be safe while they sleep. Adults pray for a quiet sleep, and to make it safely through the night. But our angels will protect us best.

Both in the morning and at night-time, we learn to pray: *"Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me."*

**Lord Jesus, who dost love me, My loved ones, rest securely,
O spread Thy wings above me, For God this night will surely
And shield me from alarm! From peril guard your heads.
Though evil would assail me, Sweet slumbers may He send you,
Thy mercy will not fail me; And bid His hosts attend you
I rest in Thy protecting arm. And through the night watch o'er
your beds. (#569 v. 5-6)**

8. Homily: Angels accompany and welcome souls to heaven

The holy angels are always the Christian's companions. It's true even in the hour of death. A Christian never dies alone. We know this from Luke 16, in Jesus' words about the death of poor Lazarus. **"The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom,"** Jesus said. We sing about this in a hymn:

*Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing.*

This is what the old spiritual, "Michael, row your boat ashore," pictures: the archangel Michael leading each Christian soul to the harbor of heaven. The holy angels are present to see the Christian's soul safely to heaven. A Christian's departure is even more glorious than Elijah's journey to heaven in a chariot!

The holy angels bear the soul up to heaven, where it is welcomed by all the heavenly host, all the saints and all the angels. This is what John Bunyan described in the book *Pilgrim's Progress*, when the "pilgrims" going through life have reached the last stopping point before heaven, and then one of them goes over. Then it says: "*All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*" That's all the saints and all the angels. Think of the glorious welcome each Christian soul receives from all the holy angels! This is what we sing about next.

**Who so happy as I am,
Even now the Shepherd's lamb?
And when my short life is ended,
By His angel host attended,
He shall fold me to His breast,
There within His arms to rest. (#177 v. 3)**

9. Homily: The angel host will accompany Christ on the Last Day

The holy angels will serve us one last time, when Jesus returns in glory. The Bible says: "***The voice of the archangel***" will announce Jesus' coming. Jesus said "***all the holy angels***" will be with Him. "***All the nations will be gathered before Him.***" Jesus will raise the dead, but the angels bring them before Him.

The holy angels will be a terrible sight for the unbelievers. Jesus said He "***will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness ... The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth***" (Mt 13:41, 49).

But the angels will be a beautiful, comforting sight to every Christian. Jesus said He ***“will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven”*** (Mt 24:31). They will bring us to our Bridegroom, to enjoy His love that they share with us.

What a happy day for all the saints and all the angels. The angels no longer will be required to protect us, and we no longer will need their protection. We will join their everlasting worship of Christ in His kingdom that has no end.

**For the Lord, our God, shall come
And shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall in that day
All offenses purge away;
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.**

**Even so, Lord, quickly come
To Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In Thy garner to abide.
Come, with all Thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest home.
(#461 v. 3-4)**