

TO THEE ALL THE ANGELS CRY ALOUD  
Feast of St. Michael and All Angels  
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One of the most misunderstood creatures in all of creation is angels. Many professing Christians, perhaps even someone here today, may hold a belief about angels that really isn't supported by Scripture. It's not surprising with so many misconceptions promoted by television through programs like "Highway to Heaven" or "Touched by an Angel." These programs encourage the false theology of works-righteousness. If you do good works, you'll get into heaven. Another false notion these programs present is that angels always appear as human beings or once were human beings. The Bible clearly teaches that the angels are spirits; that is, they have no bodies.

However, there were occasions in the Old Testament when "angels" appeared in bodily form. It's very likely, that one of those angels appearing in the Old Testament, the Malak Yahweh (Angel of the Lord) was the pre-incarnate Son of God; in other words, Jesus' appearing in human form prior to His being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, being crucified, dead, and buried.

Angels were created during those six days of creation. God created them to be sinless. One of God's heavenly creatures was an angel named Lucifer, a name meaning "light bearer." He was very high among the angels, but he was overtaken by pride and wanted to rule heaven. He convinced many angels to rebel against God. So God cast Lucifer and his band of demons out of heaven. The "light bearer" became the prince of darkness and made hell his home. This is why Jesus says, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* And after the devil was cast out of heaven, God set a chasm in place so that none of the heavenly host could desert and go into hell, and the evil angels could not enter into heaven.

Why devote so much time to angels? Today is the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. Michael is one of the archangels. In our Second Reading for today (Revelation 12:7-12), he led the fight against the great dragon, Lucifer, and defeated the evil one and his band of demons, *"and the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, '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 and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! 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!'"* (Revelation 12:9-12). Michael and his host defended heaven from the evil adversary. And so we are gathered here today to give thanks to God for the witness and defense of heaven rendered by Michael the Archangel and all the heavenly host on this Sabbath.

Have you ever wondered why we sing in the Sanctus, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth"*? We are singing the very song the angels sing in heaven around the Lord's heavenly banquet table. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts" the angels are praising the Holy Trinity; their God and ours. We sing the Sanctus along with the angels, the archangels, and with all the company of heaven as our Lord and His heavenly host come down to earth in His Supper, that we may eat and drink with them. We eat Christ's holy body and drink His precious blood in this Sacrament, which is a foretaste of the feast to come, while the whole heavenly host dines with us as they partake of the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. The blessed apostle and evangelist St. John writes of what he saw in heaven, writing numerous times of the worship and adoration the angels bestowed on the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. On one occasion John writes, *"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in*

*them, saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped" (Rev. 5:11-14).*

It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to God for His angels and the work they do. The Confessors of the Lutheran Church write this: *Our Confession approves giving honor to the saints. This honor is threefold. The first is thanksgiving: we should thank God for showing examples of His mercy, revealing His will to save men, and giving teachers and other gifts to the church. Since these are His greatest gifts, we should extol them very highly; we should also praise the saints themselves for using these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful businessmen (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second honor is the strengthening of our faith: when we see Peter forgiven after his denial, we are encouraged to believe that grace does indeed abound more than sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation, first of their faith and then of their other virtues, which each should imitate in accordance with his calling.* (Apology XXI 4-7a)

Today we give honor to Saint Michael and all the angels in heaven. We thank God that He sent His angels into battle against the dragon, Satan, and defeating him so that we would not be persecuted in heaven. We thank God that His angels pray for and protect us. In his morning and evening prayers, Martin Luther encourages us to conclude our prayers thus: *"Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the wicked Foe may have no power over me."*

And as the Confessors also state: *Besides, we grant that the angels pray for us. This is attested to by Zechariah 1:12, where the angel prays, "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou have no mercy on Jerusalem?" We also grant that the saints in heaven [those who died in the faith before us] pray for the church in general, as they prayed for the church universal while they were on earth.* (Apology XXI 8-9a)

Even though we give honor to the angels, we understand that all praise and glory belong to God. We are not to worship the angels. The angels, God's messengers, serve Him and deflect all honor to Him and Him alone. John almost committed the sin of idolatry while heaven was being revealed to him. He writes, ***"Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God'"***... (Revelation 19:10). On this Martin Luther says, *Although angels in heaven pray for us (even as Christ does), and although saints on earth, and perhaps also in heaven, do likewise, it does not follow that we should invoke angels and saints, pray to them, keep fasts and festivals for them, say Masses and offer sacrifices to them, establish churches, altars, and services for them, serve them in still other ways, regard them as helpers in time of need, and attribute all sorts of help to them, assigning to each of them a special function, as the papists teach and practice. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone. As a Christian and a saint on earth, you can pray for me, not in one particular necessity only, but in every kind of need. However, I should not on this account pray to you, invoke you, keep fasts and festivals and say Masses and offer sacrifices in your honor, or trust in you for my salvation. There are other ways in which I can honor, love, and thank you in Christ. If such idolatrous honor is withdrawn from angels and dead saints, the honor that remains will do no harm and will quickly be forgotten. When spiritual and physical benefit and help are no longer expected, the saints will cease to be molested in their graves and in heaven, for no one will long remember, esteem, or honor them out of love when there is no expectation of return.* (Smalcald Articles II, II 26-28)

But why do we celebrate this minor festival today? Normally, a particular saint's feast day is the anniversary of the day on which he died. But this is not the case here because angels are by nature deathless. God created angels to not die. In the fifth century a basilica named after St. Michael was dedicated near Rome. This feast day became so popular in northern Europe that the Feast of St. Michael begins the last cycle of the Pentecost season, Angeltide. Michaelmas, another name for this day, still marks the beginning of the fall term in British courts of law and of the fall academic terms at Oxford and Cambridge. Later on, the rest of the angels were also commemorated on this day, hence the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

We remember the angels. We do not worship them. Nor are we to think that we become angels when we get to heaven; we dare not make the claim that we become angels once we die. We will become like the angels; we will not become angels. That is to say, we will be made perfect when we go to heaven, and we will sin no more. The major difference is that our perfected bodies and souls will be united in resurrection. This will not happen with the angels; they are spiritual creatures. When a person dies in the faith, another person is added to the rolls of the Church Triumphant, the Kingdom of Glory, heaven, and for this Jesus tells us to rejoice.

We rejoice that our names are written in heaven, in the Lamb's Book of Life. He has written our names down in His book because the Holy Spirit has brought us to saving faith in Him who died for our sins and rose for our justification, subjecting all things to Himself. Hear what the writer to the Hebrews says, *"Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man, that You are mindful of him, or the Son of Man, that You care for Him? You made Him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned Him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under His feet.' Now in putting everything in subjection to Him, He left nothing outside His control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him. But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone"* (Hebrews 2:5-9). Jesus tasted death for us that we may taste and see that the Lord is good. He made Himself lower than the angels that we may be lifted from this vale of tears and taken to Himself in heaven. We join the angels in singing the Gloria in Excelsis, *"Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men,"* because He is crowned with glory and honor, crowned with many crowns, for He, the King of all glory, has defeated sin, death, the devil once and for all. Michael won the first battle; Jesus won the war, not with a sword, not with a weapon of mass destruction, but with His cross. Jesus Himself has treaded on the serpent, and crushed his head, just as God foretold in Genesis 3. And because Jesus' heel was struck by the serpent, that is, He was crucified for our offenses.

Nothing shall separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not our sicknesses or worries, and other trials and tribulations shall not last and shall have no power over us, for *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For we are sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:35-39).

So through Him who loved us we join the glad celestial hymn with Angel choirs above with the Cherubim and seraphim, in unceasing choral praise, filling the heavens with sweet accord: *Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee; Holy holy, holy, merciful and mighty! God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!* (TLH 246:1). In Jesus name, Amen and Amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus! AMEN

Please rise for the offertory.