

Rev. Luke C. Werre

Peace, Sun Prairie

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Festival of Saint Michael and All Angels

Hebrews 1:14

HE MADE HIS ANGELS  
MINISTERING SPIRITS

In the Nicene Creed we confessed that we believe in God the Father Almighty, the maker of all that is, seen and unseen.

Not every component of the universe in which we live can be seen or touched or perceived with the five senses. There is an invisible, spiritual realm that envelopes this visible life. That spiritual realm includes heaven and hell, countless angels and demons, and even includes God Himself. The spiritual realm is just as much a reality of our daily existence as weather or air or trees or people or food. It's even a greater reality for us than the things we can feel and see because Jesus declared that this visible world and everything in it will pass away. But the things of the spiritual realm will endure forever. We want to be part of that ever-enduring realm through faith in Jesus.

Each year we celebrate the Festival of Saint Michael and All Angels. It gives us an opportunity to review the Bible's doctrine about angels and also to dispel some mistaken notions that may be perpetuated. With the doctrine of angels God intends to encourage and sustain us in our difficult journey heavenward. The portion of God's Word we are meditating on today from Hebrews chapter 1 says that He made His angels ministering spirits. To minister means to serve. So today let's consider how the angels serve Christ and how they serve believers.

The first thing to consider is that Hebrews 1 says God made the angels. Humans do not turn into angels after they die. God created the angels some time during the 6 days when He created all things. Angels are non-physical spirit beings. They are also personal beings. They use pronouns like "me" and "I." They have names like Michael and Gabriel. We know this from Scripture. Anything that does not come from Scripture is superstition. Though angels are spirit, the Bible always refers to them in the male gender. It also appears that they are capable of emotion. For example, Jesus said the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents.

We don't know what all angels look like. The Bible describes some as having six wings. Some are described as flames of fire. When they appeared to people they are described in some instances as young men dressed in white and at other times as armies. The Bible says that God is a God of order. Thus it appears also that angels are organized by rank. The very word "angel" means "messenger" -not exclusively in the sense that someone delivers a message, but in the wider sense that a person is assigned a task to carry out. Picture a civil war general sending out couriers -he sends out one to scout some place, another to send a message for more supplies, another to lead an attack in a certain field, etc. Scripture describes the angels as continuously flowing to and from the throne of God.

Thus their created purpose is to serve God. Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. That makes Him the chief commander of all the angels. Again, Hebrews 1 states He made His angels ministering spirits. Here on earth a government may have a ministry of defense and a ministry of education and a ministry of commerce. No doubt, as Christ governs the affairs of the world both visibly and invisibly the holy angels are divided into ministries and areas of responsibility.

Imagine what would be the highest, most privileged role for an angel. Could it be what we heard in the Gospel Lesson today? After being tempted by satan for forty days alone in the wilderness without even the benefit food for strength, Jesus was, according to His human nature, physically and emotionally spent. “Angels attended him,” Mark chapter 1 says. If you had been there, wouldn’t you have considered it the greatest privilege, a supreme joy to offer Him a cup of water, a word of encouragement, a blanket to stay warm as He labored and struggled to win our salvation? Imagine the thrill for these angels to serve as personal attendants to their beloved Captain.

Yet they couldn’t suffer for Him. They couldn’t lighten His load. They couldn’t help accomplish our salvation. The most they could do was to attend his needs so that He could go on to bear the full weight of God’s judgment on our sins alone. Only Jesus could carry out the work of saving us. Only Jesus is our Savior and Lord.

But we must satisfy the question -who is this devil who was tempting Him? The devil was once an angel, created by God along with all the other angels -holy,

powerful, beautiful. Some time before he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, the devil embraced the sin of pride. He rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Many other angels fell with him and they are called demons. The word “devil” means liar.

(As an aside... there is no such thing as ghosts -if you mean people who have died and their spirits are now floating around the world, haunting things. No, when a person dies, his soul goes either to heaven or to hell. Nothing in between. So there is no such thing as ghosts. But there are many, many demons throughout the world.)

Whereas the good angels are now permanently sealed in their holiness, the devil and all demons are already judged, sealed to their fate of damnation to hell without a chance of redemption. Thus they are filled with rage, pride, hatred, malevolence, perversity and wickedness. They roam around to wreak the cruelest havoc on God’s creation and in particular to destroy Christ’s Church.

This is why Christ has made his holy angels to be ministering spirits to serve His believers here on earth. While you can be sure the devil and his demons are

behind large things -revolutions, protests, wars, famines, disasters, abortions -so many horrific things - you also can be sure that every sickness, injury, accident or problem -if not caused directly by a demon, the demons are certainly nurturing it. The holy angels guard and keep us according to God's will.. It is due to the faithful work of the holy angels that all of us arrived safely here this morning. If you think about it, isn't it a flat out miracle that there aren't a hundred times more car accidents than there are? That's thanks to the work of God's angels.

So often, however, we behave as if the greatest threat is to our physical safety and well-being. But the devil and his demons do us far greater harm by nurturing and coaxing among us such things as unbelief, indifference to God's Word, anger, folly, despair, selfishness, grudges, greed, love of pleasure, sexual promiscuity and broken homes.

Add to that our own sinful hearts' willingness to go along with it all those things. Does it make you uncomfortable to think of the things that Christ's holy angels, our constant companions, must witness coming out of our mouths, or the things we do or when they see what we watch on our computer screens? It must grieve

them to think, “I’m assigned by my King to watch over these citizens who are given preferred status in His Kingdom -and this is how they behave? I’ve averted such and such temptation and chased away that demon who was grooming them for gossip -and yet they still plunge headlong into it?” If we were in their position we would resent it. We would think, “Here I am a mighty prince of the Light and I have to spend time with these sad, sorry sacks of flesh?”

But even the holy angels know that their Lord is first and foremost the King of love and mercy who has compassion on creatures who don’t deserve it. They don’t question His will. They give Him glory for it. They don’t question that Christ chose to become human and sacrifice His life on the cross to atone for our sins. They don’t question that Jesus continues to forgive us all our sins richly and daily. They don’t question that by His Spirit He has even chosen to dwell in us through faith -wretched, ruined temples that we are -and fill us with the splendor of His grace. They don’t question that one day He intends to transition us to share their home in heaven and to stand before His exalted throne. They don’t question it. They praise Him for it, because they are holy. As they see how much their Captain loves us, they are glad to serve and help us because it serves

Him. And they love Him with a perfect love. That is what it means to be holy. Someday, when we are in heaven, we will have that kind of perfect love for our Lord too.

It is Christ and Christ alone, not His angels, whom we trust for our salvation. It is Christ and Christ alone, not His angels, whom we praise for His grace and mercy. It is to Christ and Christ alone, not His angels, to whom we pray and from whom we seek help in all our troubles, cares and sorrows. It is with faith in Christ and Christ alone, not His angels, that we hope to die. But it is also Christ and Christ alone to whom we are grateful for comforting and encouraging us on our difficult journey heavenward with the companionship, the protection and the assistance of His holy angels.