

“Conquering by the Blood of the Lamb” – Festival of Saint Michael and All Angels

Revelation 12:7-12

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

A roaring lion, round he goes,
no halt nor rest he ever knows;
He seeks the Christians to devour
and slay them by his dreadful power

But watchful is the angel band
that follows Christ on every hand
To guard His people where they go
and break the counsel of the Foe.

Angels—they’ve always been a popular topic. Whether it’s telling children about God’s angels or pondering the idea of having them for guardians, both Christians and non-Christians alike seem to be continually mystified by these beings. *Who are they? Do they speak to us? Do they really protect us from danger? Do they appear with important messages from God, to get us on a highway to heaven?*

This morning we observe the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels, and in so doing, we remember the angelic hosts that we know to be real and powerful according to Scripture itself. A glance at our bulletin covers reminds us that the heavenly hosts are not only depicted as the little winged cherubs who play harps and have halos over their heads. Both the picture on the cover and the text from Revelation 12 paint a picture of angels that is often forgotten among Christians — that angels, as God’s servants, will be the victors in a war—a war that is beyond any conflict that could break out here on earth.

Our text begins with a statement that boggles the mind—there was a war in heaven! A war in heaven? How could this be? Heaven is eternal bliss in the glorious presence of God. It is peace and everlasting blessedness—how could a war take place here?

War has raged in heaven as Satan and his evil angels have striven to gain supremacy among the angelic beings. The great dragon, the old serpent, who is Satan the deceiver, was once Lucifer, the light bearer. He and his demons were good in the beginning. For in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, including all the angels, and Scripture declares that the LORD looked upon everything he had created, and behold, it was very good. Thus, all the angels, both the good ones and those who would later rebel, were created sometime during the six days of Creation.

The Bible does not tell us when exactly the devil rebelled against his Maker and took a host of angels with him to become demons, but it definitely was early on in history, as he was able to deceive the very first man and woman who were created in God's own image. The fall of man into sin was preceded by the fall of a certain number of the angels. These minions of Satan are still at work, feverishly trying to impede God's work. They go to battle, marching in a campaign of lies, deceit, and death, led by their champion, who, Jesus tells us, is the father of lies.

We don't talk much about this in our day, and this could be for a number of reasons. The Bible has told us these specifics about the nature of evil and its source, but there are still questions that remain unanswered. And when we can't answer a question, such as why God allowed the fall into sin and why he even created Lucifer if he knew beforehand that he would wreck all of Creation—and other such questions—we tend to avoid such topics altogether. Or, in our day the thought of a devil and a place of hell, even when they are clearly attested to in Holy Scripture, are viewed by some who even consider themselves Christians to be less important, if they believe in them at all.

Put plainly, we don't speak much any more about the work of Satan and his demons—at least not as much as Christians did in times past. Anyone in our day who has read Luther might think that the man was obsessed with the devil and possession by demons. He talked about them incessantly in his sermons, lectures, and writings. This has led many to conclude that Luther was just another man of his medieval day—where people feared evil spirits and devils, the stuff of fairy tales. But the Reformer was merely looking at the world as it is according to God's own Word. He had a much better grasp than we that the devil is real and a force to be reckoned with. Let us not forget that the Bible calls him the prince of this world!

But once again, we're faced in our text from Revelation with a war in heaven—a war involving Michael the archangel, as well as the heavenly host of angels: Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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 the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

In interpreting the book of Revelation, it is of utmost necessity that one recognize that we are dealing with apocalyptic literature. John is telling us about visions he has received from the Lord. We are not talking about plain historical narrative, rather, the events portrayed in this book are highly symbolic. John saw these things happen, but they are not literal events we will witness—rather, they symbolize the events that occur here in this world. For example, we do not see an actual dragon in the sky as John did, but we know that the dragon is the devil that is at work in this world with all of his demons.

This war that arose in heaven, and this great war between good and evil is not an earthly conflict between nations. It is not a battle in the Middle East between the country Israel and those who seek its demise. No. This war that John writes about is the war of words that Satan has perpetrated against men since the fall into sin.

For he is the accuser, who accuses us of our sin and iniquity before God in heaven. Think back to the book of Job, where Satan approaches God and attempts to demonstrate that he can make this upstanding man curse his Lord. It is like a courtroom setting, with the devil standing before the judge as a prosecutor attempting to condemn mankind before the judgment seat of God. This is what Satan the deceiver had been doing from the start. And do you know what, dear friends? He may attempt to lie and deceive you and me, but when he makes accusations against us before our Lord, he is not lying. We are guilty as charged, for the Scriptures declare that all have sinned, and that there is no one who is righteous.

Satan has stood before the bench and attempted to get a guilty verdict so that he might pull God's people down into the pit with him. And he does not need to fabricate or manufacture evidence. He accuses us of our wantonness and uncleanness. He yells at the top of his voice about our godlessness and failure to keep God's Commandments. The evils that proceed from our sinful hearts—our anger, our lust, our covetousness, our grumbling and gossip, our indifference toward God's gifts of mercy, our dishonor of authority—these things Satan wants to be admitted in court as evidence that we deserve not acquittal and eternal life in heaven, but conviction and sentencing to the eternal prison of hell. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

Such a war of words between the deceiver and God's heavenly angels is a shock and awe campaign to which all human military endeavors pale in comparison. For while Satan might lie to us, we cannot say that he lies about us. He might deceive men on earth, but he cannot pull the wool over the eyes of Almighty God. And he doesn't have to. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness.

But as you have heard from our text, Satan does not prevail in this war of words. For Michael and all Angels triumphed over him on account of the Lamb. The devil may have won battles in the court of God's justice, but has already lost the war. For he has been thrown out of heaven and cast down to earth. When we read Revelation, we sometimes forget that not everything in it has to do with the future and end times. Much of it depicts what had already occurred at the time it was revealed to the Apostle John.

So, when was Satan cast out of heaven, where he could no longer stand before God and plead his case for control over the souls of men? The answer to this question is found in the following verses from Revelation: 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.

The accuser has been thrown out of heaven because of the blood of the Lamb, Christ Jesus our Lord. Salvation to us has come; it is not something we hope for in the future. When Jesus died and the blood of the Lamb was shed, and when he rose again and returned bodily to the Father in heaven, there was no longer any place for Satan and his demons. They were thrown down to the earth. And this is not something that happened over time—Jesus himself said in our Gospel text for this day that Satan was cast down like a lightning bolt. His fate was sealed immediately. He can no longer accuse you and me before God in heaven, for he no longer has access to the heavenly courts.

St. Michael and all the angels are victorious in their fight against Satan and his minions. Yet they triumphed over him not on account of their own might, but because God himself sent his only Son to atone for the sins of the world. Your Lord Jesus Christ crushed the serpent's head, as God had promised way back in Genesis, in the

Garden of Eden. The power of sin, death, and hell have been destroyed, for Christ Jesus has already defeated their master, the devil.

As sinners, you and I **can** be accused of sin. But the Lamb whose blood was shed is subject to no accusation, for he is the Lamb without blemish. Christ Jesus lived on this earth without sin and in total, perfect obedience to the Commandments of God. He is our substitute, for he not only lived the holy and blameless life that we have not, he also died in our place. The wages of sin is death, and yet he died even though he was sinless. He died for your sins. He shed his precious blood so that they would be forgiven. He was the perfect Lamb who was sacrificed for you and for the whole world. Satan's accusations no longer are admissible, for all of your sins and all of your guilt are covered in the blood of Jesus. The angel hosts sang praises of joy to God at the time of Jesus' birth, for they knew that the Redeemer of mankind had come. The seed of the woman had come in the fullness of time, whose heel would be bruised by the serpent, but who would ultimately crush the old liar's head, forever destroying his power.

Satan knows he's finished, but not yet. For the prince of this world is still at work on earth. The book of Revelation calls this "Satan's little season", in which he is granted freer reign to wreak havoc on this earth. This is testified to on the nightly news. The pain and suffering, the misery and unrest that this world sees are the work of Satan as he and his minions fight against the Lord's Word to create doubt and unbelief.

Heaven rejoices that the devil has been cast out: 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. Satan knows of his impending doom, but he does not lie down and succumb without a fight. And he certainly has no intention of going down to defeat alone. He still wants to take as many of us as possible with him. And yet God still is mightier and wiser in than he. We thanked God in our collect for this day for his wise planning in which he created men and angels, and we also prayed for their continued service to him in protecting and defending us from evil.

The angels, the heavenly beings whom God created and who are his perfect servants, are also there to help protect his people. The word angel means messenger. It was an angel who brought good tidings to the saints of God in the Old Testament, as well as to Zechariah, Joseph, and Mary. In working for our protection and benefit, they render perfect service to their Lord and creator.

And that isn't all. The angels also support us in our earthly pilgrimage, striving to protect us from the evil foe. As we've learned to pray in Luther's evening prayer, let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. We do indeed have guardian angels, yet they are God's messengers whom he created in the beginning. They are not our dead relatives, nor do we become angels when we enter eternal rest in heaven.

The angels have the purpose of serving the Lord. And it is they who rejoice over one sinner who repents. For they rejoice over one more soul who joins them in the heavenly chorus before the throne of God—you and I join this chorus of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven every time we sing the communion liturgy: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth—heaven and earth are full of thy glory—hosanna in the highest. We join in the praises of God that never end, and when we partake of our Lord's body and blood in the sacrament, we receive a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride, the church.

Therefore rejoice, dear brethren in Christ Jesus, for salvation to us has come. Give thanks to God for his messengers, who brought good tidings of great joy and who serve their Lord in perfect holiness, seeking our

benefit and protection. But above all, rejoice in knowing that you have the forgiveness of all of your sins, and that your names are written in heaven, in the + Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.