**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Angels”**

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September 29, 2024

*Revelation 12: 7-12*

Today, September 29th, the church celebrates the feast of St. Michael and All Angels. This feast has been celebrated since at least the 5th century. It is one of the chief feasts of the church year. In chapel on Wednesday, I asked the children what a feast was. I wasn't sure if they would know the answer.

We don't really do feasts in America. We can make any meal a feast pretty easily. Maybe you even have a feast planned for this afternoon as you watch the football game. Feasts are pretty commonplace, so the idea of a feast day probably doesn't mean a lot to most Americans. The kids, however, knew exactly what it is; it's a special day set apart to celebrate something.

On September 29th, the church celebrates St. Michael and all the angels. Michael, as you see from several of our readings for today, is an angel. Michael is found in several books of the Bible, and he is the commander of the Lord's army of Angels. It was he who led the battle against Satan and his armies.

There are many common misconceptions about angels that float around our popular culture, and as many get farther away from a biblical Christianity and more into a cultural Christianity, things will get worse. The biggest misconception that some hold is the belief that people become angels when we die. There is no biblical support for this position, and a myriad of Bible passages clearly point to angels as being a different creature altogether than man.

Angels are, however, creatures. They are not gods, and no part of the Trinity is an angel, not the Father, not the Son, not the Holy Spirit. The book of Job seems to suggest that angels were created before the foundations of the world, perhaps on the first day of creation along with the creation of light. Lucifer, a name we often give to the great enemy, the devil, does mean light bringer. But the Bible is not clear as to when, exactly, angels were created.

Being creatures, angels have limited powers; they are not all powerful, they cannot create as God creates, and they are also not omnipresent. This should serve as some comfort to us. As I said before, the devil is an angel. He is a fallen angel, an angel who sought to become God, and as a result, was cursed by God. He is still just an angel, he is no God; he is not all powerful, he is not all-knowing, he is not everywhere.

The angels’ primary role in this age seems to be warfare. They are constantly battling against Satan and his fellow fallen angels. But it is important to note that they do not fight to protect God. Sometimes we make it seem as if the battle going on is between God and the devil.

The devil is not fighting against God; our texts show us that battle is already done, Satan was defeated. His battle, his fury, his anger is no longer directed against God, it is directed against man. The conflict in this world is between us and Satan. That is why God has sent His angels to this world, to fight for His people.

Angels are ministering spirits in this world. They minister to and care for God's people. They protect us from the devil. The word “angel” in Hebrew and in Greek is translated from a word meaning messenger. Angels fight against fallen angels with God's Word. Recall Jesus in the dessert being tempted by the devil. What weapon does He use? How is Satan so easily defeated? With God's Word.

Angels are extensions of God's good will. They carry out His desires in this world and in heaven. They use the truth of God's Word against the lies of the devil and his associates. Yet, it seems as though God has given them free will. For instance, Satan used his free will to tum away from God.

A few more words on the devil. First of all, there is a devil; he is real, and he is dangerous. He is an angel, but a fallen angel. We use a few names to refer to him; in the Old Testament, he is referred to as Satan. That name is a Hebrew word meaning "adversary." The word is used many times in the Old Testament to refer to things other than the devil as well, but the devil is THE adversary. He is our enemy.

We also call him the devil. This name comes to us after a two thousand year-long game of telephone, originating with the Greek word "diabolos." This word means slanderer; perhaps think of this the next time you think about spreading an unkind rumor about your neighbor, lest you be another "devil." Another name which gets thrown around that I mentioned before is "Lucifer." Lucifer is a Latin word meaning "light bearer."

Many churches have candles flanking the processional cross, and the term for those who hold the candles is "lucifer." The name "Lucifer" is not in your Bible; it was a Latin translation of a Hebrew word we translate as “day star.” Isaiah tells of this star falling from the heavens, and the church has often interpreted this passage to be referring to the devil, essentially another telling of what John sees in our reading for today.

Whatever we call him, he is our enemy; he is a real and a dangerous enemy, but he is a defeated enemy. He has no power over you until you give it to him. This leads us into another misconception some people have about angels. There seems to be a movement in popular Christianity that would have you believe that a Christian can be possessed by a demon, otherwise known as a fallen angel.

This is not true; in your baptisms, you have been given a Spirit far greater than any angel. You have been given the Holy Spirit, God's own Spirit. God's Spirit cannot be removed by a demon, and if you look at the New Testament, time and time again, demons flee from the presence of the Lord. Those who become possessed by a demon have either never been baptized or have forsaken their baptisms seeking after another power.

The devil doesn't need to possess you to control you; angels know how we work, and they are constantly watching. They use evil people to do evil things all the time, or they help feed the Original Sin inside of us which wants us to sin more. They tempt us, putting things in our path which would lead us to sin. But they do not do so unchecked.

Back to angels. God sends His Holy Angels to protect His people. We fight against the devil and his associates, but we don't do it alone. We have angels fighting for us, fighting with us against the devil and his ways every moment. That is why we remember Michael and all the angels, because they are a gift that God uses to protect us. We ought not to pray to the angels as some do, but it is good to pray for the angels, and to pray to God to send more to us.

Angels are extensions of God's will and power. If God sends them for a purpose, they will not fail. You are never alone. God's angels are always surrounding you, protecting you and praying for you. When you feel afraid, whether it be for your own safety or the safety of a loved one, pray for the angels around you, pray to God to use them to protect you and your loved ones. God has used His angels to do more than just defeat angel armies; He has used them to defeat the armies of men as well.

The battle around you will continue to rage because Satan and his angels know that their days are numbered. In Jesus' death on the cross, they have already been defeated. Forgiveness has been bought for all people. Their only weapon is lies; they want you to doubt God's Word, to doubt His forgiveness, to doubt His love for you. Their weapon is lies, but the weapon of the angels, the messengers of God, is truth; the truth that Jesus has died for you and has forgiven you of all your sins, the truth that although the battle rages on, the war has already been won for you on the cross.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.