

## **“Angels: Passing, Protecting, Praising, and Power”**

Liturgical Date: St. Michael and All Angels

Primary Texts: Drawn from all the lessons appointed for the day: Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1-3, Psalm 91, Revelation 12:7-12, St. Matthew 18:1-11, and St. Luke 10:17-20 as well as other Scripture references to angels

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary focus for today, the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, is an overview of angels and their role in the Kingdom of God and is taken from all the lessons appointed for today as well as other Bible references. The title of today’s sermon is “Angels: Passing, Protecting, Praising, and Power”.

Angels. There continues to be a strong interest in angels in today’s society. People speak about appealing to our “better angels” and images of classic cartoons with a good and evil angel on opposite shoulders comes to mind. Bookstores contain titles about angels. In the 1980s one the most popular television programs was “Highway to Heaven” and in the 90s and early 2000s it was “Touched by Angel” as both of these shows dealt with angels sent to earth to interact with people. There are movies about angels or where angels play a prominent role including the Christmas favorite *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Many popular songs speak about angels, often as a metaphor for a beautiful or special girl. And the belief persists that when people die they become angels in heaven. So many people like, are interested in, and believe in angels. But many of the popular notions about angels are skewed or even flat out wrong. So what does the Bible say about angels and what they do?

First of all, angels are real and have a prominent place in Scripture, with about 300 references to them in the Bible. Martin Luther described

angels by saying, “*An angel is a spiritual creature without a physical body created by God for the service of Christendom and the church.*” The Hebrew word *mal’ak* and Greek word *angelos* are translated into English as angel and literally mean “messenger”. Angels are God’s foremost invisible creatures. Angels are not spirits of people who have died, but beings created by God (Colossians 1:16) who do not reproduce. There are a set number of angels. How many? We don’t know exactly, but it is a huge number. David saw 20,000 angels and according to Deuteronomy 33 there were 10,000 angels that came down with Moses and the 10 Commandments from Mount Sinai. Daniel Chapter 7 and Revelation 5 mention 10,000 times 10,000, signifying a huge a number. They are generally invisible but can take on a physical form and been seen at times by people. They are very powerful, as Revelation says that one angel applies the chain to Satan, but not omnipotent like God.

The Bible speaks of different types of angels. Broadly speaking, there are good and evil angels. The good angels serve God and His Kingdom and the fallen angels, known as demons, are in the service of Satan. There are two of God’s angels that are specifically named in the Bible: Michael and Gabriel. In the King James Version it names a third as it translates the chief of the evil angels as Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12). In other translations like the ESV it translates this same word as “Day Star” or “light bearer”. He rebelled against God and fell, or more accurately, was cast down out of heaven when he and his demons were defeated and he thus becomes known as Satan or simply the “devil”.

Medieval theologians divided God’s angels into 10 orders, but there are three specific ones that I will mention: Archangels, Cherubim, and Seraphim. Archangel means “chief angel”. There has been debate over how many archangels there are, and the Bible only specifically names one: Michael whose name corresponds to the Feast Day that we observe today. An interesting fact is that St. Michael is the only saint observed by the Lutheran Church that is not human. In Church Tradition, Gabriel and

Raphael are also considered archangels, although Raphael's name is found outside of the canon of Scripture in the Apocrypha.

Our lessons for today show the key role of the only Scripturally-certain Archangel Michael, in protecting Israel against its enemies and his command of the angels who defeat and cast down Satan (the dragon). St. Michael's prominence is shown by the meaning of his name which is "Who is like God (or the Lord)?" Cherubim are the angels that were atop the Ark of the Covenant and bore a flaming sword to guard the tree of life in The Garden of Eden. Seraphim are spoken of in Isaiah 6 as surrounding the throne of God and praising Him. They are described as having 6 wings, which is where people get the idea that angels have wings, but in fact the Bible does not specifically say that all angels have wings-but we know the Seraphim do.

So now that we have looked briefly at what angels are and are not, what exactly do they do? I have divided this into four categories: passing on, protecting, praising, and power. As I mentioned earlier, angel literally means "messenger". Angels are sometimes sent by God to "pass on" messages to people. We see this in the Old and New Testament. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that when Jesus returns it will be announced by a trumpet and a shout from the archangel. Gabriel is one of the angels specifically named in the Bible. Gabriel is mentioned four times and always brought good news: twice appearing to Daniel assuring him that God's Sanctuary would be restored and his people preserved, to Zechariah foretelling the birth of John the Baptist, and finally to the Virgin Mary that she will give birth to the very Son of God. Angels deliver messages for God and also deliver people to His presence. In Luke 16 we are told that when the poor beggar Lazarus died, he was carried to the afterlife by angels. From this many have concluded that when we die our souls are carried to heaven by angels. Verse 3 of our recessional hymn *I Am Jesus' Little Lamb* reflects this by saying, "*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.*" St. Matthew

13 tells us that angels will gather people at Christ's return for the Final Judgment.

Secondly angels watch over and protect us. This is probably the most common focus on angels by society in general. Our Psalm for today, Psalm 91, said in verse 11, "*For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*" Angels minister and protect God's people on earth. They even brought Elijah food in 2 Kings 19. Angels also ministered to Jesus after His temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Are you familiar with the painting *Heilige Schutzengel*? Maybe not by name, but I am sure that you have seen it (see the bulletin). It is German for "Guardian Angel" and features two small children walking across a rickety bridge with an angel watching over them. This is a popular notion about angels. So does each person have a guardian angel? In St. Matthew 18:10, Jesus says, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is heaven.*" Further support is found in Acts 15 where an angel leads Peter out of prison and in verse 15 is described as "*his angel*". In Revelation we even read that the 7 churches were each assigned an angel.

Luther advises that we teach children from a young age that they have a guardian angel watching over them. His morning and evening prayers both say, "*Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.*" I have tried to teach this to my children. When James was about 3 he actually got a little scared when I was praying that his guardian angel would watch over him through the night! He didn't want some unknown creature coming into his room! But as he got older he began to understand that it is a good thing to have angels watching over him. So angels do watch over us. And not just kids. Sometimes we are tempted to turn angels into something of a "spiritual nightlight" for little ones. But God's angels are real and offer protection at all ages. Martin Chemnitz writes, "*with one hand the angels protect the believers...and with the other they pursue and attack Satan and godless men...As you go about your daily*

*work, the angels carry you in their hands.*” In Hebrews 13:2 it tells us that “*some have entertained angels unawares.*”

And there are those times when something happens that could certainly be the work of an angel. Air Marshall Lord Hugh Dowling claims that during the Battle of Britain in World War II, his airmen saw British planes flying and engaging the Nazis without pilots. His only explanation was that the pilots of these planes had been killed and angels continued to pilot them.

Thirdly, Angels praise! They praise God around the throne. Throughout history some have worshipped angels. In fact, the book of Hebrews takes this issue head on and tells us that this is not what we should be doing. In Revelation 22:8-9, St. John fell before an angel to worship it but was rebuked directly by the angel, as only God is to receive worship. Angels never point to themselves or try to build themselves up in the Bible. They act on the command of God, serving and praising Him-bringing all focus to His power and glory. Jesus in Luke 15:10 speaks of joy before the angels in heaven when a lost sinner repents and has saving faith. Angels raise shouts of praise that echo through the halls of heaven.

Do you join with the angels in singing praises to God? It may surprise you to know that we can do this. In fact we will do it in a matter of minutes. In the Divine Service, God comes to us with His gift of forgiveness. Heaven comes to earth as Jesus has promised His presence with us in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. We receive Jesus’ body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. In the Service of the Sacrament the pastor speaks the Proper Preface and it always ends with, “*Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all of the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising and you and singing...*” We then break into joyous song with the Sanctus, one of the oldest parts of the liturgy dating from at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The Sanctus combines the words of St. Matthew 21:9 at Jesus’ triumphal entry on Palm Sunday with the words of the seraphim that Isaiah heard before the throne of God, “*Holy,*

*holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earthy are full of thy glory. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.*” *Sabaoth* is the Hebrew word for “heavenly hosts” and “hosanna” means “save us now”. So we have a foretaste of the feast to come as we join with the angels and all the saints that have gone before us in praising the God that saves us.

Now finally, we get to the 4 “P” of power. Angels are often depicted as cuddly, baby-like creatures playing harps on clouds up in heaven. However, this is not Scriptural and may cause us to envision angels as docile and weak creatures. This is not so! Angels are great warriors who carry out the battle plans of the Triune God. In fact the term “host” as in “heavenly host” describes an organized, military-type unit. In 2 Kings 19, the Bible records that one single angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians that threatened Israel-in one night! Read through the book of Revelation and you will quickly see that angels play a key role in the events that lead to the final defeat of Satan. Our Epistle Lesson for today from Revelation 12 gives us a glimpse of the spiritual warfare that angels are involved in. The Archangel Michael is certainly not a soft, infantile weakling (see the bulletin). Michael leads the angels against Satan as he is cast down from heaven, along with the demonic angels that sided with him. Jesus says in our Gospel Lesson in St. Luke 10:18, “*I saw Satan fall like lighting from heaven.*” The ultimate destination of Satan and his demons is the Lake of Fire “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Rev. 20:10).

Did you pay close attention to the words of the hymn of the day, *Christ, the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken*? I hope so, as I choose this to prepare us for the words of the sermon. If this hymn didn’t get you blood pumping, you need to check your pulse! It describes Michael and the angels fighting the heavenly battle against the ancient serpent. After his initial rebellion that failed, Satan had some tricks up his sleeve as he tempted Adam and Eve and they fell into sin. But Jesus came and through the cross brings salvation to His creation. He thwarts the plans of Satan’s minions and slams them in their steely cage. He overthrows at last the dragon and sends him to his fiery

grave (Revelation 20:10). You see this is the key. Angels serve God and His people. The Archangel Michael and heavenly hosts battle on behalf of God. Without Him they cannot have victory. Revelation 12:11 tells us how they conquered him: not by the might of angels but by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. The power to forgive sins and grant eternal life, putting the final nail into the coffin of sin, death, and the devil, is in the blood of Jesus Christ and the testimony of that which we have in the Word of God.

Angels: they pass on messages, protect us, praise God, and have power that comes from God to battle against the devil. We can rejoice that we have these spiritual creatures in our corner, but ultimately raise our voices with a shout of triumph for the one true God who comes to us: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

**Angels: Passing, Protecting, Praising, and Power**  
**Sermon Outline**  
**Christ the King Lutheran Church**  
**Rev. Aaron Reinking**

I. Angels Overview

- A. There is a strong interest in angels in society
  - 1. Many of the popular ideas about angels are skewed or false
- B. Angels in the Bible
  - 1. Angels play a prominent role in Scripture, about 300 references
  - 2. Angels are spiritual creatures, created by God-not people who died
  - 3. The exact number of angels is not given in the Bible, but it tells us that there are a huge number of angels

II. Types of Angels

- A. Broadly, angels are divided into two categories: good and evil
  - 1. Good angels serve God and His kingdom (much more on them later)
  - 2. Evil angels (demons) are those that sided with Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12) who is now known as Satan or the devil
- B. Archangel(s) (Chief Angel)
  - 1. St. Michael is the only archangel specifically named in the Bible

2. Traditionally Gabriel and Raphael have also been considered archangels, but this is not specifically spelled out in the canonical books of the Bible
- C. Cherubim
1. Angels on the top of the Ark of the Covenant
  2. A Cherubim bore a flaming sword to guard the Garden of Eden after the fall (Genesis 3:23-24)
- D. Seraphim
1. Praise God around the throne (Isaiah 6)
  2. Described with six wings

*What do angels do? Four Ps: Passing On, Protecting, Praising, Power*

### III. Passing On

- A. Angel literally means “messenger”, as they deliver messages from God
1. The birth of Jesus is announced to shepherds by angels (Luke 2)
  2. The return of Jesus is announced by the shout of the Archangel (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
  3. Gabriel is named four times as an angel delivering important messages (Twice to Daniel, to Zechariah, to the Virgin Mary)
- B. Angels deliver people to God (Lazarus in Luke 16, Gather people for the final judgment in Matthew 13)

### IV. Protecting

- A. Angels minister to and protect God’s people on earth (Psalm 91:11, Elijah, Jesus is ministered to by angels after His fasting and temptation in the wilderness)
- B. The belief that people (and locations) have guardian angels assigned to them has Biblical support (Matthew 18:10, Acts 15, Revelation 1-3)
1. Angels are not only protectors of children, but for all ages
  2. Luther’s morning and evening prayer include a petition for angels to watch over us

### V. Praising

- A. Angels praise God
1. We are not to worship angels (Hebrews and Revelation 22:8-9)
  2. Angels always point to the glory and power of God, not to themselves
- B. We join with the angels in praising God
1. Elements of the Divine Service reflect this (especially the Proper Preface and Sanctus)
  2. Sabaoth is the Hebrew word for “heavenly hosts” (angels)

### VI. Power

- A. Contrary to many popular notions, Angels are not baby-like weaklings
1. “Host” is a term that describes a military-like organization

2. An angel struck down 185,000 Assyrians in one night (2 Kings 19:35-36)
  3. St. Michael the Archangel led angels in casting down Satan (the dragon) in Revelation 12
- B. Angels only have power because of God
1. Satan was defeated by the blood of the Lamb and word of testimony (Revelation 12:11)
  2. Angels have an important role in the Kingdom of God, but salvation is found in Jesus Christ as He has defeated sin, death, and the devil