

The Festival of St. Michael & All Angels  
Edited from the original by the Rev. Jerry Gernander  
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### In Nomine Iesu

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O everlasting God, You have ordained and constituted the services of men and angels in a wonderful order: Mercifully grant that, as Your holy angels always serve You in heaven, so by Your appointment they may also help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for St. Michael and All Angels' Day)

## I. Creation, Titles, and Ranks

The angels are unique creations of God. Though they are often depicted as people with wings and have even appeared as men, they are quite different from human beings. They do not reproduce like people (Mt. 22:30), and contrary to popular ideas about angels, Christians do not turn into angels when they die. As far as we know, no new angels have been added to the ranks since Creation.

Angels are a part of God's creation that is invisible. The Bible says that "*by [the Son of God] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him*" (Col. 1:16). The angels were made during the six days of creation, though we don't know exactly which day. We do know that everything God made was "*very good.*" The angels recognized this too; they "*shouted for joy*" as God completed His work (Job 38:6-7).

But the angels did not all remain good. Satan, one of the angels, rebelled against God, and many angels joined him, perhaps as many as one third of them (Rev. 12:3-4). We commonly refer to these fallen angels as demons. God cast them all out of heaven and created hell for them (Mt. 25:41, 2Pet. 2:4).

But the majority of the angels remained in heaven, and these continue to serve God. The Bible assigns titles to the angels and divides them into ranks; it says Christ is "*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion*" (Eph. 1:21), which are titles for ranks of angels. These names indicate how strong the holy angels are. Psalm 103 calls them the "*mighty ones*" of the LORD (v. 20). They must be quite terrifying and awe-inspiring. In Scripture we notice that the first thing they often said when they appeared to people was: "*Do not be afraid.*" The Bible also describes different types of angels. The cherubim, for example, guarded the way to the Garden of Eden, which shows their great power. The seraphim are angels with six wings who sing the Lord's praises in heaven (Is. 6).

Our first hymn mentions the ranks of the angels as all creation bows before God and worships Him "*evermore and evermore.*" We sing Hymn #181, "Of the Father's Love Begotten," vv. 1 & 5.

## II. Honor and Glorify God

The angels' entire purpose is centered on God's glory and honor. They do not serve themselves, just as God does not want us to serve ourselves. They serve Him and those to whom He directs them. In the book of Revelation, St. John wanted to worship a mighty angel, but the angel told him: "*You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you.... Worship God!*" (22:9).

The main feature of the angels' worship and service is humility. Everything they do points to the Almighty God. The prophet Isaiah described their subservient attitude in the sixth chapter of his book: "*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'*" (vv. 1-3).

Revelation chapter 4 again depicts these six-winged seraphim: "*And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures.... And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'*" (vv. 6,8). Their worship around the throne is never-ending. This is how we will worship the Lord in heaven too. Even now, we join the angels in their song. We sing Hymn #15, "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty," vv. 2 & 4.

## III. Messengers of Salvation

Christ is the Lord of hosts and the King of angels, but He isn't one of them. He is their God; He is above them. We sing of this in the well-known hymn: "Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer, than all the angels in the sky" (ELH 54, v. 3). Hebrews chapter 1 says He has become "*as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs*" (v. 4).

But the holy angels do not resent Christ's exalted position like the devil and the other evil angels did. The holy angels live to glorify God, so they glorify Christ and His work as the Savior. The angels rejoice the most about the salvation Jesus won for us and all sinners. Jesus said: "*[T]here is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents*" (Lk. 15:10). Contrary to the destructive and evil behavior of false teachers who would pull believers from the faith, "*angels... do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against [believers] before the Lord*" (2Pe. 2:11). The angels love us because God loves us. And they love what God prepared for the world through His Son.

The angels show this in how obediently they participated in the history of our salvation. They protected the people of Israel from whose line the Savior was born, especially on the night of the Passover when the angel of death "passed over" the Israelites' houses but killed the Egyptians' first-born. Many centuries later, angels strengthened Jesus after He was tempted in the wilderness and comforted Him when He suffered in Gethsemane. Jesus said "*more than twelve legions of angels*" (Mt. 26:53) stood ready to keep Him from death, but they were held back by His will.

Most importantly, they were "herald angels" or messengers. In fact, the word "angel" means "messenger." We think of Gabriel who announced the forthcoming births of John the Baptizer

to his father Zechariah and of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. Angels returned at three major points in the history of our salvation bringing the Gospel message:

*Christmas: St. Luke 2:8-14*

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" We sing v. 1 of Hymn #125, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

*Easter: St. Matthew 28:1-7*

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you." We sing Hymn #366, "Ye Sons and Daughters of the King," vv. 1-3.

*Ascension: Acts 1:9-11*

And when [Jesus] had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." We sing vv. 2-4 of Hymn #389, "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing."

#### **IV. Carry out God's Will**

The holy angels continually see God face to face. In today's Gospel reading, Matthew 18, Jesus says: "I tell you that in heaven [the little ones'] angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." The holy angels are constantly in the presence of God, just as we will be in heaven. In a dream God showed Jacob that angels were "ascending and descending" on a ladder that "reached to heaven" (Gen. 28:12). The angel Gabriel said to Zechariah: "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God" (Lk. 1:19).

In God's presence, the angels always see His concern for His people and gladly go to help and protect them on earth. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are they not all ministering spirits [angels] sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" At one point, the king of Syria dispatched

his entire army to kill the prophet Elisha, and they surrounded the city where he was staying. Elisha's servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" Elisha answered: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha asked the Lord to open the boy's eyes, and then he saw the mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2Ki. 6:15-17)—not just one guardian angel but many of them protecting this child of God.

Philip Melancthon, the chief co-worker of Martin Luther during the Reformation, wrote a wonderful hymn about the angels. Please turn to Hymn #545, "Lord God, We All to Thee Give Praise." We sing the first 3 verses which teach about the angels' service before God.

## V. Needed on Earth

You and I are always in danger even though we cannot see it. God warns us that "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1Pe. 5:8). The devil tries to take you from Christ back into the kingdom of darkness. After Michael and his angels defeated the devil and his angels and cast them out of heaven, a voice from heaven said, "[R]ejoice, 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!" (Rev. 12:12). Ephesians chapter 6 warns us about "the schemes of the devil" and reminds us that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (vv. 11-12).

The Scriptures record many attacks upon Christians, such as on Lot, Daniel, and Peter. But the Bible says that angels "brought [Lot] out" of Sodom and Gomorrah to safety (Gen. 19:16), "God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths" (Dan. 6:22) so Daniel was not hurt, and "the Lord sent His angel" (Ac. 12:11) to rescue Peter from prison. We sing of this danger and our help again in Hymn #545, vv. 4-8.

## VI. Protect Christians at All Times

God's gift of angels is very comforting because they are stronger than the devil and all his evil angels. Psalm 91:10-12 assures us: "[N]o evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

Christians should know that angels are guarding them, just as baby Moses was kept from harm when his mother set him adrift in a little basket. This is a particular comfort for parents who worry about their children's welfare. Martin Luther once said: "If it were not for the protection of the dear angels, no child would grow to full age, even if the parents took all possible care."

Our guardian angels also protect us when we sleep. Psalm 121 says: "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (vv. 3-4). One of the chief ways God protects us during the night is through His holy angels. This is why at nighttime and in the morning Lutherans pray: "Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me." We sing Hymn #569, "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow," vv. 5-6.

## VII. Bring Souls to Heaven

The angels are the Christian's companion from infancy until death, from the waters of Baptism until their final breath. This means that no believer in Christ dies alone. In Luke 16, Jesus describes the death of the beggar Lazarus: "*The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side*" (v. 22). This inspired another hymn we sing: "Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abram's bosom bear me home, That I may die un-fearing" (ELH 406, v. 3).

The holy angels bear the soul of the believer up to heaven with utmost care and majesty, like the chariots of fire and horses of fire that carried Elijah into heaven (2Ki. 2:11). There, the soul is welcomed by all the heavenly host—the saints and the angels. This is what we sing about in Hymn #541, "Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High," vv. 2-3.

## VIII. Accompany Christ on the Last Day

The angels will serve us one last time, when Jesus returns in glory. The Bible says that "*the voice of an archangel*" will announce Jesus' coming (1Th. 4:16). On the Last Day, "*all the angels*" will be with Him (Mt. 25:31), and "*before Him will be gathered all the nations*" (Mt. 25:32). Jesus will raise the dead, but the angels will bring them before Him.

The holy angels will be a terrible sight for unbelievers. Jesus said that He "*will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers.... The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Mt. 13:41,49-50).

But the holy angels will be a beautiful, comforting sight for every Christian. Jesus promised that He "*will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*" (Mt. 24:31). The believers will hear Jesus say to them: "*Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Mt. 25:34).

What a happy day that will be for all the saints and the angels! The angels will no longer need to protect us, and we will no longer need their protection. We will join their everlasting worship of Christ in His kingdom that has no end. "Oh, where shall joy be found? Where but on heav'nly ground? Where now the angels singing With all His saints unite, Their sweetest praises bringing In heavenly joy and light. May we praise Him there! May we praise Him there!" We sing Hymn #461, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," vv. 3-4.

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