

# The Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels

## September 30, 2018

*And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

*Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:*

*“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority*

*of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

*Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”*



**F**or generations those Christians who worship according to the Christian calendar have spoken fondly of the “Fall Festivals,” which begin with St. Matthew’s Day on September 21 and conclude with the Feast of All Saints on November 1. Among the most-beloved is this festival of the autumn season, the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels. Quite naturally, the focal point of its assigned Scriptures has always been the Epistle just read from chapter twelve of John’s apocalypse. For this passage from God’s Revelation to John on the island of Patmos shows us how the lesser service of Michael points us to the greater service that Christ rendered by offering himself up as the sacrificial Lamb. Michael’s reward for his service is that he gets to join us in surrounding the throne of glory and praising Christ Jesus, the Lamb who was slain but who now rules forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This, then, is the first thing God would have us remember today – that we really keep this festival to give honor to Christ, and through him to God the Father, and not to even the mightiest of his angels. We learn this much just from the literal meaning of Michael’s name – *Mi-Cha-El: Who-Is-Like God?* Later in Revelation, when John is so overwhelmed by what he beholds that he falls down to worship the angel who accompanies him, the angel gives this gently rebuke:

*“You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.”*

**Aha! POINT #2:** These angels who not for us to worship are in truth our fellow servants under the Lord Jesus Christ. The angels of God and the earthly children of God share the same vocation: to confess steadfastly, against all foes, that only Jesus, the Son of God, is Savior of the world and alone holds the keys to death and hell.

**PONT #3: The weapon.** A few moments ago, as you listened to the epistle, you were supposed picture in your mind the battle taking place; to this end we even printed one artists’s interpretation of it on the bulletin cover. Yet in our hearts, in our Christian understanding, we all know that the warfare to which we

are called is not physical. Any mature Christian realizes, if he or she stops and thinks for just a moment, that Michael the Archangel does not have arms of skin and muscle that he uses to wield a sword of steel against Satan. A few weeks ago the Apostle Paul even told us this much at the end of Ephesians:

*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against... the cosmic powers over this present darkness... the spiritual forces of evil...*

So, we should ask ourselves this question: What really is the weapon that empowers Michael to overthrow the might of the devil? Likewise, since Satan has been cast out of heaven, what weapon does he still have on earth that he can use against us?

To identify Michael's weapon, of course, we need only consider the core meaning of the word *angel*, a meaning that it still has in Holy Scripture. An *angelos* is, quite literally, nothing more or less than a messenger. Whatever honor he receives, he owes to the greatness of the message he delivers. And if an angel possesses any power, that power lies in the Word, the message, that he carries with him. What is Michael's message, what is the Sword of the Spirit that the devil cannot withstand? The following should sound familiar to those who know their Bibles fairly well:

*Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered. God was pleased... through him to reconcile to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. God has raised him from the dead, highly exalted him and seated him... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. By his blood he has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.. God has bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.. to the glory of God the Father.*

What I just read to you is a montage of texts from five NT books that together proclaim the Gospel. So, we do not worship angels because they are, under Christ, our fellow servants. The enemy that Michael cast out of heaven is here and now our deadly foe. And Michael's army, which we honor this day for the sake of Christ, is armed with nothing other than the weapon we possess, the Good News of Jesus's victory.

But here is yet one more point: Those passages that I brought together are all liturgical echoes of the early church – evidence that even before the New Testament was written, the Holy Spirit was bringing forth from the mouths of the first Christians creeds & hymns to use in public worship. There is, indeed, no greater use we can make of this sword than to gather here, and to praise and confess with one voice the God of saving grace in the language of worship. Then from this place we can go forth, back into our ordinary stations of life, in order to shine forth this faith in how we behave toward others.

This is truly one powerful weapon. For this message tells sinners, first of all, that through his Son God has taken away their sins. The Gospel also tells people who are terrified by the approach of death, and tells those who later shall stand over their grave and shed tears, that all who believe in Christ never truly die, because he in whom they believed died for them, and is the resurrection and the life.

Some folks think the chief aim of Satan is to tempt people into sinning. Wrong. Yes, he does that, and yes, to fall into committing sin is not only wicked but dangerous. However, whenever the sickness of sin

breaks out among the children of God, we always have the Medicine of Forgiveness, the Gospel of God's pardoning grace. The highest aim of the devil, therefore, is to convince you that there is no Gospel for you.

This persuasion can come in various forms: It can suck in you into the delusion, the false wisdom, that there is no God at all. Or the devil may assure you that there is a God – a God of wrath and demand, so don't look for mercy. Or this trap: Yes, God is merciful; but you already had and blew your chance, so that now not even God would forgive the likes of you.

In his 40-day battle with Christ, Satan is called the Tempter. But when he tried, of course, the Son of God did not even begin to succumb to temptation. We, on the other hand, did succumb, and every day we still succumb. This is why Revelation 12 refers to our enemy by an even more sinister title than tempter: the ACCUSER. But fear not, for as Saint Paul declares:

*If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*

Is it not wonderful to know that, even as God once sent angels to announce both the birth of Christ and his resurrection, he also sent them to serve him in the wilderness? And that he who sent you Jesus himself, still sends to you both his angels and your fellow mortals who know Christ to help preserve you in the true faith?

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