

## Michael and All Angels Sunday

Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3. Revelation 12:7-12. Luke 10:17-20

Today is one of those rare times that a minor festival lands on a Sunday, and we aren't using the readings that coincide with the lectionary but with the celebration of Michael and all angels. How many of you believe in angels? Do you think of them as beautiful delicate white feathery beings? Do you believe when you die you turn into an angel? Do you think they come to earth in human form to help people through difficulties?

Well, if you don't believe in angels, there is biblical proof they exist. We heard it in our readings from Daniel, the Psalm, and Revelation. In the book of Daniel chapter 10, Daniel trembles in the sight of an angel. Although the angel is not identified in our reading, it is the archangel Gabriel whom Daniel has heard from in prior chapters. Today's reading does identify Michael, whom Gabriel had called upon to continue the battle so he could come to Daniel. Gabriel also visited Zechariah in the temple to announce he and Elizabeth would have a son, and name him John. And again we hear from Gabriel when he visits Mary, who agrees to become the mother of Jesus.

Later in the book of Daniel, chapter 12, we learn that the archangel Michael is the protector of God's people. As we heard from our reading from Revelation, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, which is a synonym for the devil. In the gospel reading from Luke 10 we heard Jesus say, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning."

Angels other than archangels include, according to an article from Christianity.com, Seraphim, Cherubim, and those referred to simply just as angels. In Isaiah 6 we find the description of Seraphim. They have six wings: with two they cover their faces, with two they cover their feet, and with two they fly. They stand above the throne where God sits, continuously singing praises.

The first we hear of angels is in the book of Genesis where cherubim guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden, to guard the way to the Tree of Life. Their role is protectors of sacred spaces and divine secrets. Cherubim represent different aspects of creation and their connection to all living beings is illustrated with their four faces: a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. They have a small body, with two to four wings.

And we can't forget the angels who sang to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus.

Perhaps angels are not beautiful, white feathery beings. Often they are described as having eyes that encircle their head. No wonder the first thing an angel says when it appears to a human is, "Do not fear."

As for human beings turning into an angel when we die, that is not found in scripture. What is found in scripture is that we are heirs with Christ, angels are not. Humans are human, angels are angels. Although, there are times in the Bible where angels came in the form of human beings, specifically when the three men visited Abraham, told him he would become a father, and Sarah laughed. Hebrews 13:2 teaches, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." We cannot plan for angelic encounters or simply seek them. God controls when and if an angel will appear to minister to someone in need.

Also, it is important to remember there are not only God's angels, but angels that belong to Satan. We heard in the reading from Revelation this morning, "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." Why was Satan expelled from heaven? Because his desire was to be greater than God. Throughout the books of Genesis, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Revelation we hear how he was a cherub who, Ezekiel 28 tells us, was blameless and the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, however he was consumed with pride over his God-given splendor, becoming corrupt and violent. No longer satisfied with the power and gifts God had given him he was no longer willing to serve under God. He assembled an army of angels and rebelled against God. In our reading from Revelation we heard that Michael and his angels defeated Satan.

Earthly visits from angels are rare, however since there are heavenly angels and angels of evil, how do we determine which one is attempting to contact us if it should happen? We need to know the scriptures well enough to know that what the being is saying is true to God's word, not a twisted form of it. A true angel will not contradict God's word or purpose.

So on this Michael and all angels Sunday we have learned that we are separate beings than angels. Angels are fascinating with their many types and purposes. Angels reveal a tiny glimpse into the heavenly realms, but what do they tell us about God? They show us that God is creative, the few descriptions we have of angels stretch our imagination and understanding. Read the book of Revelation and you will discover bizarre creatures surrounding the throne of God, and you will also find that each of the seven churches listed in the book have their own angel.

Angels and their actions also show us that God values creation. God loves diversity. They show us that all God's created creatures have purpose and value. When angels appear in scripture they are either bringing a message, seeking to protect God's people, or moving toward salvation in Jesus Christ that will return us to a right relationship with God. Finally, angels with their jobs and purpose, show us that order is important to God. They are on a mission toward redeeming the world and the people God loves.

So on this Michael and all angels Sunday let us realize that angels are real, they have a purpose. Sometimes that purpose is protection, other times they are a messenger, always they are sent by God. Humans and angels are a different form of being therefore we do not turn into angels when we die. Angels can come to us in human form however a visit from an angel is rare. With all this being said, the important thing is that God is a God of love who has created far more than what we can understand. As an article in Homilies for the Christian People states: "Angels have something important to teach us about ourselves and God. Angels remind us that our material world is influenced by the world of the spirit, ..... Humanity may rank a little lower than the angels because we are flesh as well as spirit, yet through Jesus who is God's own Word made flesh, we can rise above the angels to share in the very life of God. Look closely, and you will see that angels reveal God's secrets, guard and protect the vulnerable, are witness to miracles, are called to unending praise. Today we celebrate not only their achievements, but also that potential in

ourselves to be and do the same” (Miriam Therese Winter, SCMM, in *Homilies for the Christian People*, 567).  
All glory be to God!