

St. Michael and All Angels (observed) and LWML Sunday: October 1, 2023

“Comforting Victory both in the Battle and from It”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is an interesting combination of days for a Sunday. We both are observing St. Michael and All Angels, as well as LWML Sunday. Mission work for the Kingdom of God is what drives both of these days. When we remember that the word angel is a transliterated word, not a translated one, and its translation is one that means messenger, this becomes more clear. At least on some level, what are Lutheran Women in Mission except messengers of God's Word in many and various ways?

Interestingly enough, these two days together don't have a great beginning do they? The first time we see a messenger, an angel, talking with a woman, things didn't end so well. We do not have the interchange between the first messenger to Eve, which would have been Adam, but we do have the second interchange, wherein this angelic messenger was none other than the devil himself.

The devil's message was one that was that spun the truth. It contained some truth, there was knowledge in it, but it wasn't the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The devil's lie was that by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and his wife would be like God, knowing both good and evil.

God had created them to know the good. But Satan convinced them that God was holding out on them by withholding evil from them. He claimed that they would be like God, as if they were not already created in His image and likeness. The image of God is to know God rightly and love Him perfectly. This is what God created Adam and his wife to do. But by giving into the devil's lie and false promise to be like God, Adam and his wife ironically lost the very likeness of God.

And so began one of the fiercest battles in heaven or on earth. The devil's greatest weapon is his lie that we can be like God, if we only figure out the things that God has hidden from us. If we can see what God sees, then we can be like Him. And yet, that is not what God promised. God's will was for us to remain in His likeness and in His very image, knowing the good and having nothing to do with evil.

This will of God never changed. Immediately after Adam and his wife fell into sin, God addressed the devil. God said that He would put enmity between the devil and the woman whom the devil had seduced into sin. In other words, though the devil thought that he had gained the woman and her husband to his side, God would make them enemies.

While God was speaking to Adam and Eve, He was at the same time speaking to more. God was speaking of another woman besides Eve. He spoke of a woman whose Seed, whose Offspring, would battle against the devil. The devil would crush his heel. But in the process, he would crush the devil's head. God was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be born of the Virgin Mary to destroy the power of the devil even as the devil would have Him nailed to a cross.

The devil's lie was that we would be like God, if we became familiar with evil. But all that did was leave us dead in our trespasses and sins. In our fallen, corrupted state, no matter how clever we think we are, no matter how much we think we know about what is right and wrong, we can never begin to scratch the surface of who God is, if we rely on our own methods and understanding. The truth is that no one is like God but God Himself. The very likeness of God is the Son of God, who is himself God. He is the likeness of the invisible God and the very imprint of his nature.¹

The Savior who was to be born of a woman would be the very likeness of God. And here God exposed the great irony of the devil's lie. The devil promised Adam's wife that she would be like God. But God would send one to be born of woman the one who truly is like God. He would be like God by destroying the devil's power of sin and deceit. He would bear this sin in His own body on the tree, turning God's anger away.

And so the prophet Micah says, “*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.*”²

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:15; Heb 1:3

² Micah 7:18

The Son of God has various names, which have to do with what He does. In Isaiah 7:14 He is called Immanuel, which means "God with us," because He would be born of the Virgin, and as true God He would share our own flesh and blood as His own. He would be with us, sharing our own nature in Himself. And He would choose the good and reject the evil.

He is called Jesus, which means, "***The LORD saves***,"³ because He, the Lord in the flesh, would save His people from their sins. Jeremiah calls Him the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, because He would render His own obedience in the place of every sinner, forgiving us of all our sins, and standing forever as our righteousness before the Father.⁴

But there is another name, which we observe today. This is the name of Michael. Michael means, "One who is like God." There is some scholarly debate as to who Michael is, either an angel or the Son of God Himself. Many Christians assume that Michael cannot be the Son of God, because the Son of God is not merely like God; He is God.

However, the name Michael doesn't describe so much Jesus' substance as true God. The name Michael describes Jesus' work of victory over the devil. He is the answer to the devil's lie that Adam and his wife would be like God if they disobeyed him. Michael, the one who is like God, is the one who obeys God perfectly, knowing nothing but good. Jesus, the Son of the Father, the very image and likeness of God, put Himself under the law in the place of Adam and all his offspring. He rendered perfect obedience to God. He thereby proved to be the one who was like God.

So you see that the title Michael -- the One who is like God -- is a taunt against the devil. It's as if God is saying to the devil, "So you deceived my children into thinking they would be like me if they disobeyed me? Well let me show you! I am sending my only begotten Son. He alone is the one who is like me, because He will obey me in every way. And in this way, He will free my children from your power and dominion over them!"

³ Matthew 1:21

⁴ Jer 23:6; 1 Cor 1:30

We hear in Revelation 12 that war broke out in heaven. Michael, the prince of the angels, fought against the great dragon, the devil. The devil and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. In other words, the devil not only deceives us into turning from God's goodness, but he even accuses us before the throne of God in heaven. But by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the devil's accusations have been silenced. He has been cast out of heaven. He is not allowed to say a word against those who take refuge in the image and likeness of God.

And this is why Adam named his wife Eve. He named her this after they fell into sin and after God gave His promise that the Seed of the woman would destroy the power of the devil. Eve means life. He named her Eve, because she was the mother of the living. This promise was fulfilled when the Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ who became obedient to the Father, was crushed for our iniquities, won for us peace by the blood of His cross, and was raised to give us new life.

And yet, even before it was fulfilled, this promise was as good as done. This is because God spoke it. So resting on this promise, Adam named his wife Eve. Eve is her new name given to her after she fell into sin. Eve is the name of the living, not the dead. Eve is the name given to all of those who are in Christ, the Life of all the living.

Earlier in Revelation 12, St. John speaks of his vision of a woman who gave birth to a Son who rules with all authority. The first woman who comes to mind, of course, is Mary, who gave birth to Jesus. And yet, there is more to the vision.

This woman spoken of by John is described as one who is brought into the wilderness where she is protected from the devil who is constantly attacking her and her children. Here it becomes clear that John's vision of the woman is a vision of the church on earth. She, like the Virgin Mary, bears Christ within her. We all, having been baptized into Christ and engrafted into the Church, bear Christ, His cross, and His righteousness on our hearts. And for this reason, the devil restlessly attacks us and tries to deceive us, just as he did to the first woman.

But God has defeated the devil by the blood of His Son. He who is like God, Michael, has cast the devil down. In the meantime, we must face the devil's snarls as he makes his last efforts to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. But his snarls and his anger are only evidence that he has been defeated.

Having baptized us into Christ, God makes us alive in him. Through Christ He has restored us to His image. He gives us His own Holy Spirit through the gospel of His only begotten Son. He gives us faith to withstand the devil's threats.

These things are hard to grasp. They seem very far from us and our ordinary lives. But the Scriptures tell us of them so that we would recognize the true spiritual battle going on and not become distracted by the things of this life and the false peace which the world promises us.

It is important that we recognize the true battle. When your anger against your spouse rises up in your heart, recognize the darts of the devil who first turned Adam and his wife against God. When you are tempted to gratify your own sinful desires, or to speak evil about your neighbor behind his back, then recognize this as the deceit of the dragon who introduced selfishness and evil to our first parents. When you are embarrassed to stand up and confess your faith before your friends and neighbors, recognize this as the serpent who promises you a better life if you just ignore God's Word. And when your sins weigh down on your conscience, and you feel like losing hope in God's mercy, recognize this as Satan who tries to accuse you before the throne of God.

And while you recognize this fierce battle, take comfort in the victory, which has already been won. It has been won by the blood of Christ. By this very blood and by the word of your testimony, you overcome the devil's lies and attacks. When you stand up and confess the gospel, this is when you imitate your Lord and Savior, Jesus who gave the good confession before Pilate. You are like him, not when you try to figure out how to fix everything in your life, but when you take refuge in his righteousness. And when you must suffer because of the attacks of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh, you are being conformed to the image and likeness of the Son.

On this day of dual observations, we give thanks for both the Word of God and His messengers, especially those Lutheran Women in Mission, our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and all who teach by word and example to see, know, and hold onto the peace of God which passes all understanding in our everyday lives.

What a great day to sing together:

“For this, now and in days to be,
Our praise shall rise, O Lord, to Thee,
Whom all the angel hosts adore
With grateful songs forevermore.”⁵ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Lord God, We All To Thee Give Praise TLH 254:8

Prayer of the Church
St. Michael and All Angels (observed) and LWML Sunday
1 October 2023

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Holy Lord, preserve Your Church. Send Your holy angels to watch over her, and bless her with peace and unity throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, remember Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; and Sam, our circuit visitor, all teachers, deaconesses and servants of Your Church. Strengthen them in the true faith, and enable them to teach it well. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, bless all who are gathered here before You. Grant us the company of Your holy angels, order our days and our homes in Your peace, deliver us from the danger of eternal death, and number us among Your chosen flock. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, You have established authorities for our peace and safety. Remember our president; legislators; judges; and all who make, administer and judge our laws. Grant them wisdom and a desire to seek Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, in Your earthly ministry You were loved and served by devoted women, including Mary and Martha in whose home You enjoyed rest and refreshment. Give us grace to recognize and affirm the varied and singular gifts You bestow on women and especially upon the Lutheran Women in Mission that Your kingdom may be extended, Your Church enriched, and Your people lovingly served to the glory of Your holy name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Finn and Pam* celebrate their birthdays and *Steve and Tanner* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *David & Sandy and Joe & Lindsey* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, remember all who suffer for Your name, all who are in prison, the hungry and ill-clad, the poor and the lonely, those who travel, and all who cry out to You in their time of need, especially all who have asked for our prayers *Esther, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Jillian, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts*. Grant that Your holy angel may be with them always, that the evil foe may have no power over them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, we join with the sons of God and shout for joy as Christ Jesus gives to us His true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Let us not doubt but firmly believe Your Word, that You who formed our world and its matter know well how to be present for us and our forgiveness in this Sacrament. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us, heavenly Father, for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**