

A Homily for the Sunday in the Octave of Feast of St. Michael and All Angels  
2 October 2016  
Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC  
Fr. Zachary Braddock

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

If you ever ask my wife what my theological pet peeves are, she will tell you that one is when people say that heaven has a new angel when someone has died. It is a nice sentiment, and for some people, it helps them to grieve, but the truth is that you do not become an angel when you die. You remain human, and when you are resurrected, you are not a human with angel wings, but you are a resurrected and glorified human. In that moment, you become fully human. Human, as a human is supposed to be, reflecting not fallenness and atrophy, but God himself, and Life itself.

So having taken this position, the question is begged: What *is* an angel? Let me start by telling you this: Don't believe Hallmark. They are not sweet little cherubs plucking harps and shooting would be lovers with magical arrows. Angels appear throughout Scripture... to Abraham, to Jacob, in Egypt, to Tobias, to Our Lady at the Annunciation, in the Revelation to St. John, Michael, the prince of the Angels fights against Satan when he rebels against God.

So what do we know about them? Angels, like all other created things, are good (at least at the first moment of existence). We know from Job 38, verse 7, that Angels were made prior to man. When they appear in scripture, they usually

(though not always) appear as a human being... with no wings. The first time we hear of an angel is when Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden, and a cherubim who bears a flaming sword stands guard. These Angels are beings of power: immortal beings that always, even when they are standing in front of us, always behold the face of God.

In scripture, we can see five things that Angels do. First, they are messengers of God. In Luke 1:26, The Archangel Gabriel brings tidings to Mary, telling her that she will bear the Christ. Second, Angels guard God's children. We believe that every person has a guardian angel. We get this belief from the Gospel, when Jesus refers to the angels which belong to the little Children, and from the Acts of the Apostles, where an explicit reference is made to the Apostle Peter's angel. Third, they bear the souls of the righteous to heaven. We see this in Luke 16:22, which says, "the poor man died and was carried by the Angels to Abraham's bosom." Fourth, as we see in the Revelation to St. John, chapter 8 verse 3, Angels bear the prayers of the saints, of the church, you and I, to God. And fifthly, and also from the Revelation to St. John, this time from chapter 12, we see that the Angels fight against the Evil One and his angels, which are called demons.

"There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was

there place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Rev. 12)

The Devil is himself an angel, a fallen angel. There are different traditions as to the cause of his fall, but the outcome is the same: he is an angel, who chose to fight against God. We see in the Revelation to St. John that when he did this, he and his demons (who are other fallen angels) were thrown out of heaven. Since angels and demons have free will, just as we do, they are free to wander around the universe. After being kicked out of heaven, they have done all they could to tempt us. The old cartoon with an angel on one shoulder and a demon on the other is not that far from the truth. They can manipulate the physical world, but they are bound by its limitations. And they are most affective when invisible, out of sight, and out of mind, whispering into our minds and hearts that we *want* this or that, or that we want *to do* this or that, regardless of what God has commanded. They can, and do, whisper things to us which should horrify us.

The good news is this: The Devil has already lost. All he can do is take us down with him. Do not let him do that. God is on our side, and so are the Angels. And God's angels will bring you the Good News. They will guard and protect you, they will, if you die in the communion of Christ, bear your soul to the Father, and they will fight for you in the day of battle against the Evil One.

Invoke the angels to come to your defense. Ask the Lord to send down your guardian angel when you feel tempted, when you feel uneasy. Ask him to surround you with the legions of angels that behold him face to face.

Pray with me. And, if you know this prayer, feel free to join in.

St. Michael Archangel, Defend us in Battle. Be our Strong Guard against the malice and snares of the Enemy. We humbly beseech the Lord God to rebuke him, and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into Hell Satan and all evil spirits, which roam the world, seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.