

Genesis 28: 10-17
Psalm 103: 19-22
Revelation 12: 7-12
St. John 1: 47-51

St. Michael & All Angels 2024

“And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon.”

Revelation 12: 7

Has it ever happened to you that, as a child, you got a glimpse of something which grown-ups did, which you didn't really understand, but seemed intriguing?... For example, perhaps you have been sent to bed before a grown-up party which is being hosted at your parents' house, but you don't want to stay in bed and sleep, because you have a sense that there's an exciting kind of party going on, and you are curious – even though you know you aren't old enough yet to join the party?... What to do?... Perhaps you creep out of your bedroom door, and crouch around the corner, or near the top of the stairs peeking through the bannister rails, hoping to get a glimpse of an intriguing scene...

It seems to me that heaven is something like that, for those of us still in this life... We are a part of the whole redeemed creation as we belong to Jesus Christ, but there are some scenes which (by grace) we anticipate will be wonderful... We can catch glimpses of them; and yet we can't yet fully participate... Our time has not yet come...

Many modern illustrations of the kingdom of heaven suggest a place of tranquility and peace... However, both the Bible and the tradition of the whole Church suggest that the kingdom of heaven is far more dynamic, and dramatic... Yes; the Holy Spirit reveals that finally, one glorious Day, there shall be a perfect union of heaven and earth; there will be the absolute triumph of all that is good; no more darkness of any kind; and everlasting joy... But before we reach the time when all time is past, just as there is the reality of good and evil in the *natural* world, there are battles of good and evil on a spiritual plane as well... In fact, it is the spiritual disruption which contributes to the troubles in *the* world we now inhabit... Writing about human warfare, James 4 begins this way:

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God... Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

So, violence and pride and many other sinful behaviours have a spiritual root. The cure is to be restored to God through Christ...

So, now that we have considered that spiritual good and evil are realities with which we need to be aware of, let's consider the focus of our readings today...

In the Anglican tradition, as in many other churches, days are set aside to encourage us to have a special focus.... The most obvious example is December 25, when we consider the miracle of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus, being born into this world for our redemption... But there are numerous other days of focus as well, about the work of Christ and his people: January 6, the coming of the wise men; the journey of Holy Week; All Saints' Day on or about 1 November; and so on... It happens that, on September 29 (today), we are invited to reflect and to appreciate Michael the archangel, and all the created spiritual order. Today is commonly called, "St. Michael and All Angels..."

There is often a portrayal of angels as cute little toddler-like creatures with clean bare feet and cute little wings, but Church tradition, and supremely, the canon of the Bible within it, offers a far more complex and rich view of the role of angels, and all God's heavenly host...

As Christians, we believe not only in a natural reality – the science and history of this world in which we live and breathe. To believe in God in Christ is to believe also in the reality of a spiritual dimension to life, which we cannot see with our outward eyes, but which is just as real... Supreme by far (of course) is God himself, the Creator and Sustainer of all creation and life, and to whom we will all one day come before, in that coming time of awe and wonder...

But there is also strong evidence – yes, I say; not just belief, but theological and historical evidence – to be convinced that the super-natural world is not just inhabited by God alone, but by the presence of all those who have gone before us (the saints and the not-so-saintly), angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven...

In rugged Western Scotland, next to the Atlantic Ocean, there is a Christian religious community called The Iona Community. "Iona" is sometimes described as a place where the separation between heaven and earth is "thin..." One is easily drawn to humbly bow before the presence of God in all his thundrous glory, amid the rugged rocks and cold waves and prayerful people...

In today's first reading, Jacob, on the run from home and deeply afraid, has a dream. In this dream, Jacob realizes that he is in fact in the presence of God, even far from home! "Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' (Genesis 28: 16)..."

The division between heaven and earth is much closer than Jacob had imagined... In today's gospel reading, Jesus Christ teaches his first disciples that the union between heaven and earth is actually found perfectly in his presence – the presence of Jesus...

So, what are we to make of the reality of angels, of a kind of spiritual battle between evil and good, in which the risen Jesus Christ triumphs; and which the whole creation perceives at the Last Day?...

We are called to be faithful in the present – to shine for Christ, to grow in our Christian discipleship. The perfect presence of God is not simply far away, only to be discovered after we die... The perfect presence of God, and all the saints and angels, are far closer than we appreciate. In fact, when we are Christians, we carry the Holy Spirit; our bodies are a *temple* of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6: 19)... The perfect presence of God is not in far-away Jerusalem or in the skies above. God is at work now; here...

Many years before the birth of the Lord Jesus, the Syrian army invaded the land and surrounded the town of Dothan, where the great prophet Elisha and his servant were staying. The Syrian army intended to invade the town, find Elisha, and kill him! Elisha's servant, understandably, is terrified! We read in Second Kings 6:

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, 'Alas, master! What shall we do?' He replied, 'Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.' Then Elisha prayed: 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (vv. 15-17)

God's presence and the protection of his heavenly army was there all along!... They were just invisible, normally, to human eyes... But they are no less real...

So we are called to be faithful in the present. The presence of the Lord is with us... And God helps us, all along the way. God won't do it all *for* us. We have free will. But he wants to help us to live beautifully for him. That is a gift called "grace" – that God helps us along the way, in every step that we take which is good – not because we are superior to anyone else (we surely aren't!), but because of his love beyond imagination... God helps us, every step in a heaven-ward direction...

God's angels help us too... We see so many examples in the Bible – of the angel Gabriel revealing to blessed Mary that she will bear Immanuel, God with us; blessed Joseph is guided to protect his family from Herod; the great prophet Isaiah is cleansed and knows intimacy with God, as the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy" before his throne...

There are so many surprising stories, even in daily life, when we have eyes to see... Here is just one example: On a remote road on the border of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, a young woman was driving home on New Year's Eve night with her young son, about 12 years ago... Tragically, the car apparently missed a turn, and plunged over steep cliff into the arm of the Atlantic Ocean, the Minas Basin; the mother was killed instantly... It was a terribly cold night, and the accident wasn't discovered until the next day... The little boy was found on the beach near the wrecked car, completely unharmed. When questioned, the little boy said that a good man had taken care of him until he would be found. No one was found in the area, who had taken care of the child... Was an angel at work?... I suspect so...

God the Holy Spirit is our supreme Helper, Advocate, and Comforter... Yet we can be grateful beyond words for the intercession of the saints, and the gentle help of angels.

Angels, we read, contribute to the glorious final defeat of evil at the end of time. May we live in Christ; for Christ; appreciative of the company of angels and all the faithful; now and for ever.

Amen.