



SERMON

30. September, 2009

St. Michael and All Angels (transferred)

Title: "Angels Unaware"

J.J.



St. Michael, the Archangel

I love the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels! It is a major feast day in the Church (one of the "white days" on the Church Calendar), and, therefore, is ranked right up there with Christmas and Easter. Since it's that important, when Dorothy came yesterday to ask about the "color" for Wednesday's Eucharist, I said: "Make it white," even though yesterday was the day!

I love this day, because it gives me the opportunity to talk about angels; something we as a church do far too little of, and we as a society do far too much of. Just walk into any Hallmark card shop and you'll know what I mean. I do believe in angels, but not the Hallmark kind. I believe in angels, because I have had a personal experience. Let me share the story.

Some years ago, Jonathan and I rescued two greyhounds. We had been on the wait list for several months, because we wanted a black greyhound, which is somewhat rare. As luck would have it, we ended up with two: a young male who we named "Raeph" after one of our favorite composers, Raeph von Williams, and a well-seasoned female, who we named "Del" after von Williams wife, Adeline. Now, "Del" knew her

way around, and she knew how to get her way without making a pest of herself—let's say, she was clever dog. "Raeph," on the other hand, was a "want-to-be-alpha-dog," but could never quite cut the mustard.

One day Jonathan let the dogs out our front door, as was our custom, in order to run a bit in our fenced in yard, only to discover, but too late, that someone had left the front gate open. Well, if you know anything about greyhounds, an open gate is an open invitation to the race . . . and out the gate they went. Greyhounds can get up to 40mph in seconds, especially when they go through a gate (rabbit or no rabbit), and our two dogs were no exception . . . and there they went, like black lightning, down Lincoln Avenue in Alameda, which looked to them like a fantastic racetrack. And right after them, ran Jonathan, out the gate, lickety split, but he was no match for the greyhounds. As Jonathan came up to the corner, there was Raeph stopped dead in his tracks. Raeph had never encountered a cross-street before, and it scared the peejeebers out of him. So much for wanting to be an "alpha" dog. Jonathan grabbed hold of him, and began to look for "Del."

Just then, a woman appeared, walking down Lincoln Avenue, a woman who was wearing a long black formal dress. She asked: "May I help you?" And Jonathan quickly responded, asking her if she could take "Raeph" back to our yard while he went to look for "Del." The woman said: "Of course I can do that . . . and by the way, the other dog made a right turn and is going around the block." Jonathan thanked the woman, and quickly set off to find "Del." As he turned the corner, there was "Del" sort of lumbering down the street. For her the race was over, and she was just exploring. Jonathan grabbed her, and gently led her back home.

When he got to our front gate, there was "Raeph" barking a friendly hello . . . and the woman, the woman dressed in black . . . well, she was already a couple of blocks away. Jonathan shouted out a "thank you," but she was already out of ear shot. In all the years we had lived in Alameda, we had never seen than woman before, and we never saw her again. This incredible woman, all dressed in black, as if she were the guardian angel for two black greyhounds. Yes, indeed, we believe in angels.

The belief in angels goes back to our earliest Hebrew forebears, and is attested to throughout the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Our Lord himself attested to their existence, and Scripture surrounds Jesus with

ministering angels at critical moments of his earthly life. Now, I'm not going to go into a long discourse about angels, but it does seem as if one of the tasks of angels is the care of God's creation, and in particular, the Archangels, like the Archangel Michael, have long been associated with the protection of God's people (and dare I add, the protection of greyhounds).

Yes, I believe in angels, and for me it enough to know that God's will for them is to assist us in our journey . . . and for me, I find comfort in that. Truth be told, we may encounter angels more often than we will ever know, angels working in our lives in big ways and small ways, but always bearing the message of God's will and love. Our way through life is long and difficult, and I for one will gladly accept the help of blessed Michael, or any of Michael's celestial colleagues, as I would accept help from any one of you.

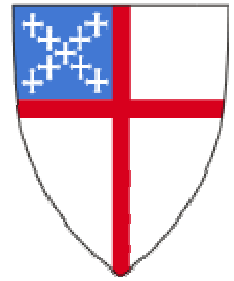
Let us pray: Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all the snares of the enemy; and let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

S.D.G.

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The Lessons Appointed for Use
on the Feast of
Saint Michael and All Angels

September 29



The Collect

Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals: Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Old Testament

Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised

you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

The Psalm

Psalm 103:19-22 Page 734, BCP

19 The LORD has set his throne in heaven, *
and his kingship has dominion over all.

20 Bless the LORD, you angels of his,
you mighty ones who do his bidding, *
and hearken to the voice of his word.

21 Bless the LORD, all you his hosts, *
you ministers of his who do his will.

22 Bless the LORD, all you works of his,
in all places of his dominion; *
bless the LORD, O my soul.

The Epistle

Revelation 12:7-12

War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death. Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

The Gospel

John 1:47-51

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

On the Feast of Michael and all Angels, popularly called Michaelmas, we give thanks for the many ways in which God's loving care watches over us, both directly and indirectly, and we are reminded that the richness and variety of God's creation far exceeds our knowledge of it.

The Holy Scriptures often speak of created intelligences other than humans who worship God in heaven and act as His messengers and agents on earth. We are not told much about them, and it is not clear how much of what we are told is figurative. Jesus speaks of them as rejoicing over penitent sinners (Lk 15:10). Elsewhere, in a statement that has been variously understood (Mt 18:10), He warns against misleading a child, because their angels behold the face of God. (Acts 12:15 may refer to a related idea.)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is occasionally reported that someone saw a man who spoke to him with authority, and who he then realized was no mere man, but a messenger of God. Thus we have a belief in super-human rational created beings, either resembling men in appearance or taking human appearance when they are to communicate with us. They are referred to as "messengers of God," or simply as "messengers." The word for a messenger in Hebrew is *malach*, in Greek, *angelos*, from which we get our word "angel" [Digression: *angelion* means "message, news" and *euangelion* means "good news = goodspell = gospel," from which we get our word "evangelist" used to mean a preacher of the Good News of salvation, and, more narrowly, one of the four Gospel-writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.]

By the time of Christ, Jewish popular belief included many specifics about angels, with names for many of them. There were thought to be four archangels, named Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. An alternative tradition has seven archangels (see Tobit 12:15 and 1 Enoch 20). Sometimes each archangel is associated with one of the seven planets of the Ptolemaic system (the moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn). Michael is associated with Saturn and Uriel with the Sun. The other pairings I forget, but I believe that you will find a list in the long narrative poem called "The Golden Legend," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. (I believe that a pairing is also offered in the opening chapters of the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, by Irenaeus of Lyons, but I have not the work at hand.)





Michael (the name means "Who is like God?") is said to be the captain of the heavenly armies. He is mentioned in the Scriptures in Daniel 10:13,31; 12:1 (where he is said to be the prince of the people of Israel); in Jude 9 (where he is said to have disputed with the devil about the body of Moses); and in Revelation 12:7 (where he is said to have led the heavenly armies against those of the great dragon). He is generally pictured in full armor, carrying a lance, and with his foot on the neck of a dragon. (Pictures of the Martyr George are often similar, but only Michael has wings.)

Gabriel (the name means "God is my champion") is thought of as the special bearer of messages from God to men. He appears in Daniel 8:16; 9:21 as an explainer of some of Daniel's visions. According to the first chapter of Luke, he announced the forthcoming births of John the Baptist and of our Lord to Zachariah and the Virgin Mary

respectively.

Raphael (the name means "God heals") is mentioned in the Apocrypha, in the book of Tobit, where, disguised as a man, he accompanies the young man Tobias on a quest, enables him to accomplish it, and gives him a remedy for the blindness of his aged father.

Uriel (the name means "God is my light" -- compare with "Uriah", which means "the LORD is my light") is mentioned in 4 Esdras.

It is thought by many scholars that the seven lamps of Revelation 4:5 are an image suggested by (among many other things) the idea of seven archangels.



What is the value to us of remembering the Holy Angels? Well, since they appear to excel us in both knowledge and power, they remind us that, even among created things, we humans are not the top of the heap. Since it is the common belief that demons are angels who have chosen to disobey God and to be His enemies rather than His willing servants, they remind us that the higher we are the lower we can fall. The greater our natural gifts and talents, the greater the damage if we turn them to bad ends. The more we have been given, the more will be expected of us. And, in the picture of God sending His angels to help and defend us, we are reminded that apparently God, instead of doing good things directly, often prefers to do them through His willing servants, enabling those who have accepted His love to show their love for one another.

