

"Sharing in the Victory"  
Revelation 12:7-12

September 29, 2019

St. Michael and All Angels

You've probably seen them – we've all seen them as we traveled along in our cars down major highways and even country roads – these tiny little roadside shrines. They usually consist of bouquets of flowers pinned to a stake or cross, and mylar balloons floating (droopy, if they been there any length of time). We see them so often that perhaps we don't even think about their meaning anymore. However, when they were new and rare, seeing one of these tiny shrines as we traveled along that road would cause us to stop and think: an incredible act of violence occurred here. On this spot, someone's life ended. And then, we would travel on, perhaps taking to heart that reminder of danger and violence, and change how we travel in the world.

This rare feast we celebrate today, Saint Michael and All Angels, could be celebrated with reflection upon the ministry of angels, in general, to all of God's people. We could talk about the angels that brought messages to Zachariah and Mary. We could remember, with fondness and sentimentality, the angels over Bethlehem on that first Christmas. We could celebrate the angels' role in announcing the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All of that would be an entirely appropriate way of doing things. However, I think this text about the work of Saint Michael, in particular, is like one of those tiny roadside shrines: a tiny reminder of an awful act of violence taking place in heaven that we take to heart and use to change the way we travel to heaven.

If you read this text from Revelation in its context, you realize that it is not talking about Satan being cast out of heaven after his initial rebellion sometime near the beginning of creation. Nor is it a prophecy of the final judgment when Satan and all of his followers will be cast into eternal fire. This text and its context are not rooted in heaven, but firmly rooted in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and its aftermath.

In the verses prior to the text, John speaks of a woman (the Virgin Mary) who is pregnant with a son (Jesus) and is crying out in the birth pains in the agony of giving birth. The great red dragon, that old serpent Satan, was waiting for this child to be born so that he might destroy Him even before He gets his ministry going. We think of King Herod being the instrument of Satan in this endeavor. However, Satan fails and he is angry.

The text says that the woman (Mary) gives birth to a male child (Jesus). The Messiah is born and thwarts the old dragon's attempt to destroy him and ruin His ministry. Instead, Jesus accomplishes His ministry of salvation by suffering and dying on the cross. The sins of all people are atoned for by His body being nailed to a cross. Forgiveness for all has been won by His blood shed on the cross. Before Satan can mount a counterattack, the Scriptures say, "the child was caught up to God and to his throne." That is, Jesus rises from the dead and ascends to the throne of God. Satan has failed again to stop the plan of God and he is livid.

But the final and crowning blow to Satan and his efforts to win control of God's universe is yet to come. Up until this time Satan has had access to the courts of

heaven to accuse (“Satan means to accuse or slander) the people of God before the throne of God. The most famous example of that is Job in the Old Testament. But now his time is up. By the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, all accusations against the people of God have been silenced. Sin has been forgiven. Salvation has been secured. No further charges can be brought against the people of God because all charges have been answered for.

Satan has no purpose in the heavenly courts. He has nothing of which to accuse us. It is as Paul writes in the book of Romans, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.” (Romans 8:33-34) The Lord had been more than patient with Satan up until that time – letting him hang around heaven, spouting his slanders.

But that’s all over now after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Satan gets the old heave ho from heaven. War breaks out. Michael and his angels fight against the Dragon. The Dragon and his angels fought back. Michael defeats Satan and his forces. In a very ironic statement, the Scriptures say, “and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” Because sin and death had been defeated, there is room in heaven for us. However, not for Satan. The text says, “And 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.”

Satan is furious. He is seething with anger at his defeat. And since he can no longer oppose God and win, he goes after us, humanity, the jewel of God’s creation. Ominous words are spoken in heaven: “But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.” He is out to get us and he doesn’t have much time. So, he’s going to ratchet up his efforts to destroy us. Like a tiny roadside shrine, the war in heaven which results in Satan’s expulsion reminds us of this horrific violence which has just occurred and helps us to remember of the danger and violence which we face ahead.

How did Saint Michael and all angels accomplish this heroic act? Someone once said that the book of Revelation was obviously not written by a Lutheran. If the author had been Lutheran, then it would not have been Michael fighting and winning but Jesus. It is Jesus who overcomes sin; who overcomes death; overcomes hell; overcome Satan. Yet this account is often portrayed as Michael, clad in armor with a spear in one hand and a shield in the other, courageously and with much might, defeating Satan and his angels.

One preacher suggested that a Precious Moments Michael be made. With its big head, huge eyes, and cute smile, there would be no way – no way – that he could ever defeat Satan with his own power. But that’s just it. Michael is not defeating Satan and gaining the victory. The Lord Jesus allows him to share in the victory that He has already obtained.

There is a war going on against Christians now. I don’t mean just a spiritual war, but actual physical harm. Despite the media’s attempts to ignore it or overlook it, Christians are paying with their lives for their faith in Jesus Christ. The church is under

persecution, hunted by a raging yet defeated Satan. How does the church live in such a world?

The warning of great evil and the wrath of Satan is upon us. There is no way – no way – that any of us, as the Church or as individuals, could ever gain victory over Satan. However, the Lord Jesus Christ allows us to rejoice in His strength and might and to fight against Satan and share in His victory over Satan. There is no way – no way – that Satan can defeat us and gain the victory. He can only deceive us and accuse us, two weapons of his which have been disabled. Do not be deceived into thinking that Satan has any power over you at all.

When Michael shared in the victory of Christ and Satan was cast out, there was great rejoicing in heaven. John heard a loud voice saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our Lord.” We have no reason to fear the future. The kingdom of God has come. Christ’s authority has been established. Rest secure in the assurance that, on account of Christ, all accusations against you have been silenced. The accuser has been cast out

We participate in the victory that Christ has won by participating in the worship of the Lamb. The voice in heaven said, “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they love not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!” We rejoice in the victory which Jesus has won and gives to us by the blood of the Lamb. We bear witness to that victory through the Word of our testimony and by not loving anything more than Christ and His victory, even our own lives.

We are united in our joy, our testimony (faith), and our devotion to Christ, not only with the people who gather here in this place, but with all of the saints who have ever gone before us. As we say in our liturgy, “Now, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying...” We are not alone in the battle against Satan. We have our Lord Jesus Christ who has defeated Satan and we have our brothers and sisters in Christ, this side of heaven and in heaven, who share in that victory with us.

John’s vision of Michael and the war in heaven is like that shrine on the side of the road: brief but powerful. By giving us a glimpse of an event in heaven, it changes the way of our life here on earth. God has given the Church this brief vision to guide it during its journey to heaven. The vision calls to mind the dangers of this world we live in, where defeated Satan rages against God’s people, and encourages us with the victory of Christ so that we value faith in Christ, our victory over Satan, and our eternal source of life more than any other thing. So, we celebrate Saint Michaels and all angels today. However, no more precious and cute angels. No more warrior angels who defeat Satan. Rather, a mighty Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a humble servant, an obedient sacrifice, and a powerful warrior who, by His perfect life of service, His once and for all sacrifice upon the cross, and His glorious resurrection of the dead, has defeated Satan’s deceptions, overcome Satan and His power, and allowed us to share in that victory. Amen