

# St. Michael and All Angels, 2019

## Battle of the Angels

Hebrew 1:13-2:10

St. Andrew's Church, Jacksonville, OR

By Fr. Bill Baker

The early church fathers, modern commentaries, Oxford Christian dictionaries, books, books and more books. Angels, who are they and what is their purpose? This Sunday falls on the day put aside to celebrate St. Michael and all Angels.

My dilemma today is that there is so much written about angels that it becomes overwhelming to condense all the opinions, views and beliefs into a single sermon. There are many speculations concerning angels that are strictly based in fantasy and lore making it difficult to separate fact from fiction. Scholars, on the other hand, have painstakingly divided and classified angels like some kind of school 'bug collection'. But hopefully what I present today will be a clear and simplistic understanding based strictly in scripture, but this too is difficult task. Interpretation has even divided the scholars. So much is unknown to us when it comes to the Angels and who they are.

As I see it there are only two categories of angels: bad angels and good angels. The bad angels followed Lucifer, Satan, the Devil and fell from heaven and will be eternally separated from God at the final judgment. I refer to the bad angels as those described in the book of Revelation 12:9 where we read, *"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.* I feel the necessity to clarify this position because there are those who teach contrary to Lucifer, Satan and the Devil as referring to the same creature. The dialogue in this speculative area is deep and unprofitable for this particular homily. So, for my purposes we will consider Lucifer, Satan and the devil as the same angel who fell from grace, taking with him other angels who represent the demonic forces that fell with him.

The good angels I speak of are the angels of eternal glory who live solely by the will of God, those angels who never faltered in their obedience to the God of Creation, angels whose love is undistorted. Have you ever thought about the possibility of the angels loving us? Because angels can think for themselves and have the freewill to choose we can see the love they have for us by the fact that they will nothing but goodness towards us with no other motive except that we come to Christ and enter heaven.

This chasm that exists between the good and bad Angels leads to what I think is a grand epiphany...there is no possibility of a third category. There are, it seems, no repentant angels fighting against sinful natures. The freewill exhibited in the angels seems to have manifested in ultimate choices that can be seen as examples of extremes that do not quite exist in our own human natures. Angels are either completely evil or they are perfectly within the will of God. There are no angels...like us. What do I mean? There is no person who is completely beyond God's ability to love and there is no person so righteous that they do not require God's grace. Our human natures are pulled in one direction or another without us ever achieving pure evilness or perfect godliness. Humanity lies somewhere within the extremes, what we might call the playing field of the angels where the angels on both sides of the gulf battle for our souls. And this, according to scripture is the purpose of the angels.

Concerning the good angels, we heard today from the book Hebrews, *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"* Is this not a most incredible truth to ponder? The good angels who are above us, who are continually in the presence of God, the angels who ministered unto Jesus himself are also ministering to our needs, drawing us closer to the salvific gift of redemption. We are in the process of holiness being continually sanctified everyday as we learn to listen and follow God's will in our daily lives. The good angels are on our side, fighting for us and fighting with us. Scripture is full of vivid evidence where these angels have entered the lives of mankind pointing the way to safety. It was the angels who came to rescue Lot and his family from the destruction that was coming to their city. It was an angel that brought glad tidings to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds that the savior had arrived, and it was

an angel that sat in the sepulcher to announce the resurrection Jesus Christ attesting to His victory over sin.

Angels...created by God have purpose in our lives. According to scripture it will be the angels who will separate the wheat from the chaff. *"So it will be at the end of the age (we read in the Gospel of Matthew). The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 13:49-50).

The first influence recorded in scripture (and this is highly debated) of an angel getting involved in the affairs of man was a bad angel named Lucifer. In the form of a serpent or the manipulation of a serpent, the angel Lucifer asked Eve, *"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* And the woman said to the serpent, *"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Truth distorted that sin may enter in. And so the battle for our souls began.

Evil angels go by another name...devils. These were good angels who used their freewill adversely against God and fell completely from grace. Their only purpose now is to turn the hearts of God's children against God himself. Our natures, being so weak and inclined to sin had no way back into the arms of such a loving creator. *"Therefore (the writer of Hebrews reminds us) we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"* You see...it is the angles of obedience who are fighting with us AND it is the angels of destruction who are fighting against us! Which angels will you entertain?

It is God Almighty who sends his angels on our behalf, *"For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all his ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."* In case you are of the position that this is a reference to Christ alone,

remember that Christ is the head of the body formed by those who follow Him. What we have experienced...He has experienced. What we go through in our human natures Jesus Christ went through in his human nature and as the angels ministered unto Him so too, do they minister unto us.

When we come to the Holy Communion we are not only receiving the blessed body and blood of Christ with the visible church but, at that same altar, we are united with the blessed angels as well as the saints and our own departed friends. In heaven there is no separation from any in Christ, brother or angel who has chosen Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

I leave you with the comforting words of the Anglican Catechism, *“Angels are spiritual, holy beings created by God. They joyfully serve him in heavenly worship and God appoints them to act as messengers, bringing words of guidance and assurance to the faithful, and assisting and protecting them”* (To Be A Christian: An Anglican Catechism pg. 92 number 213).

May you see the Angels of God as co-laborers with you in a world full of weeds where the angels will one day soon cultivate the righteous in a glorious harvest worthy of the Lord of Lords.

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