

Michael & All Angels (With & Without Wings)
Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1-3; Ps. 103:1-5, 20-22; Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 10:17-20
September 28-29, 2019
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

The Michaelmas daisies are just starting to open in the parsonage garden. You may know them by the name of Montauk daisies. They are late bloomers, autumn blossoms that add a touch of summer, a sight of white, to yards already dressed for fall, festooned in fallen leaves. They are called Michaelmas daisies because without fail they bloom in time for the festival of Michael & All Angels that we celebrate this weekend.

Some people lump angels with leprechauns, garden gnomes, elves and mermaids: a lovely touch of magic, figments of the imagination, the stuff of fantasy. Not so! The Bible and the world are filled with angels, heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible.

What angels and what angel encounters come to mind for you?

- In today's Scripture we have **Michael**, portrayed as God's general, God's military leader, the protector of Israel. It is Michael who leads God's army during the war in heaven, defeating "the great dragon," the Devil, Satan, the fallen angel named **Lucifer** (which means Lightbearer).
- **Michael** is an archangel, meaning he's one of the chief angels, one of the bosses, one of the Grand Poobah angels. The Book of Revelation says there are seven, including **Michael, Gabriel, Raphael**, and maybe **Uriel** who's depicted facing west and blowing the trumpet of judgment on the spire of every Mormon temple, including the one you'll see if you're driving the Beltway around Washington, D.C.
- **Gabriel** we associate with the Annunciation, since St. Luke tells us Gabriel is the angel who visited young Mary in Nazareth, greeting her with those beautiful words, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28) Gabriel announced that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, the power of the Most High would overshadow her and she would conceive and give birth to a son, who would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). **Gabriel** is also the angel who popped in on elderly Zechariah when he was performing his temple duties and announced that Zechariah and his equally old wife Elizabeth (who had given up hope of having a child) should get the nursery ready because they were going to become parents! (Luke 1:8-20)

- The angel **Raphael** shows up in the Book of Tobit, part of the Apocrypha, some added-extra books of the Bible that didn't make the final cut with Luther.
- God assigns two angels with flaming swords to guard the entrance of the Garden of Eden when Adam & Eve are cast out. (Genesis 3:24)
- Angels visit Abraham and Sarah and announce that in a year's time they'll have a bouncing baby boy to share the tent with them! (Genesis 18:10)
- An angel calls out to stop Abraham as he raises the knife to slay his son, his only son Isaac, the child of promise whom God had commanded him to sacrifice. (Genesis 22:11)
- When despairing Elijah lies down under the broom tree, ready to die, an angel awakens him and commands, "Get up and eat." (1 Kings 19:5b) A cake and water are provided. Elijah falls asleep again and the angel rouses him once more: "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey [to Horeb, the mount of God] will be too much for you." (1 Kings 19:7)
- In the Book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into the fiery furnace and King Nebuchadnezzar looks on in astonishment: "'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?... 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.' ... 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him.'" (Daniel 3:24b-25, 28a)
- In St. Matthew's Gospel, an angel tells Joseph in a dream that he shouldn't divorce Mary and should take her as his wife. (Matt. 1:20) Later on an angel in a dream tells him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the Child (Matt. 2:13), and then to return home once it's safe (Matt. 2:19-20).
- Angels announce the birth of the Messiah to shepherds "keeping their flocks by night" on a Bethlehem hillside. (Luke 2:8-14)
- Angels minister to Jesus during his 40 days in the wilderness, according to St. Mark. (Mark 1:13)
- An angel ministers to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before He is arrested, according to St. Luke. (Luke 22:43)
- Angels are present at the tomb on Easter morning, announcing to the women and to the male disciples, "He is not here, he has risen."
- The Book of Revelation is full of angels....

How are angels depicted in art? Wings, right? Maybe a halo. Wings are a mode of transportation. They help birds get from the branch on the tree to the worm on the ground. At some point humans decided that, likewise, wings help angels get from heaven to earth and other assorted destinations. In the Book of Daniel, earlier than today's first lesson, we read Daniel's words, "*...Gabriel... came to me in swift flight.*" (Daniel 9:21) Gabriel flew, all right, but he wasn't parasailing or in a plane.

Angels have to get places because they're messengers. That's what *angel* literally means: a *messenger*. God uses angels to transmit messages. God uses angels to guard not just the entrance to the Garden of Eden, but to **guard** and **protect us**. I do believe we have guardian angels. I don't know if one is assigned specifically to me as a full-time job ☺, but I do know there are times I've had a close call in the car or on a staircase or at the beach, and I've felt heavenly protection. Psalm 91 says:

*He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways,
to bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

Martin Luther ends both his morning and evening prayers with the petition, "Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen." There are spiritual as well as physical dangers in this world, but we have divine aid, heaven's help to overcome temptation, to struggle through the most demanding days, to arrive home safely, to keep our hearts holy.

Angels are **helpers** as well as messengers and protectors. When we say someone is an earth angel, that's what we mean, don't we? That person has helped us in some heartwarming, maybe even lifesaving way. Remember that very important advice from Hebrews 13:1? "*Do not neglect to offer hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels unawares.*" By being an earth angel, even if we picture ourselves with molting wings and a rusty halo, we could be welcoming heaven's angels. Actually, our Lord would say we are welcoming **Him**:

*"...when I was a stranger, you welcomed **me**."
Matthew 25:35*

We can feel so alone and vulnerable in this world. But we are **not** alone. We are **never** alone. This festival of Michael & All Angels reminds us of that, as does the Sanctus, the song

we sing “with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim,” to the glory of God. May we hear the same message the angel Gabriel gave to Daniel:

“Do not fear, greatly beloved. You are safe. Be strong and courageous!”

Daniel 10:18

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham