

“Michael & All Angels: With and Without Halos”  
Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 10:17-20  
September 28-29, 2024  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

[Don halo.] If I’m not a Tellatubby, who am I?? Hint: this weekend we celebrate “Michael & All Angels.” It’s interesting that Michael gets top billing, because he’s not the **only** archangel and there’s another angel we hear about more often. Who would that be?

Yes, **Gabriel!** When does Gabriel show up in Scripture?

- The **Annunciation**, the announcement of **Jesus’ upcoming birth!** *Angel* means messenger, and in St. Luke’s Gospel Gabriel delivers an astounding message to a young teen in Nazareth, greeting her with those now-famous words: “*Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus....*” (Luke 1:28, 30-31)
- It’s also Gabriel who delivers the message of **John the Baptist’s upcoming birth!** He visits John’s father-to-be Zechariah in the Temple as he performs his duties there, and tells the incredulous senior citizen that he and his elderly wife Elizabeth are going to have a baby.
- Gabriel shows up in **Hebrew Scripture**, too. In the Book of Daniel we read, “... *Gabriel... came to me in swift flight.*” (Daniel 9:21) Daniel was written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. so Gabriel did not arrive quickly on a jet plane. Descriptions and artwork of angels have usually included wings, whether in Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Angels are spiritual beings who move between heaven and earth, so the

ability to fly is important. This makes wings make sense. Sometimes they have halos, too, a nimbus of light symbolizing an aura of holiness.

But on September 29 each year we don't celebrate "**Gabriel** and All Angels," we celebrate "**Michael** and All Angels." It's Archangel Michael who shows up in our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> lessons this weekend. He is a warrior angel, general of God's army, nearly always depicted in armor, often with sword and shield. It is Michael who leads the heavenly legions that defeat diabolically proud Lucifer and his minions, casting them out of Heaven and down to earth where they wreak havoc as fallen angels. The religious section in a jewelry store is sure to have medallions with Michael's image on it, perhaps engraved with the words, "Protect us, St. Michael." He is the patron saint of military, paratroopers, paramedics, police, anyone who protects others and works to establish and keep peace. He is also the patron saint of bankers and bakers, because of the tradition that he holds the scales that weigh the souls of the dead. In Hebrew Scripture Michael is the protector of Israel. In Roman Catholic tradition he is the protector of the Church.

The theme of **protection** is why angel nightlights, angel plaques are popular baby gifts. Winnie the Pooh and Peter Rabbit may be cute, but every parent wants to ensure a child's safety. **Visible** images of angels remind us of the **invisible** presence of angels. Their images are marketed like leprechauns and mermaids, but the difference is that angels are real. Scripture is full of angels. They can be like Western Union, they can be like Door Dash, they can be like Rambo, they can be like: guardian angels! The beautiful evening prayer in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer includes this lovely petition: "Give your angels charge over those who sleep." Martin Luther's morning and evening prayers both end like this: "**Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me.**"

The wicked foe is also called, as in today's reading from Revelation: *the great dragon, that ancient serpent, the Devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world* (Rev. 12:9). I'm reading *A Fever in the Heartland* by Timothy Egan, about the Ku Klux Klan's spread and influence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. The subtitle is *The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them*. Since I've also been in the midst of preparing this weekend's sermon and learning about the symbolism of *the great dragon*, I couldn't help but notice that the title of some of the higher ups in the KKK hierarchy is "Grand Dragon." The author describes how contingents of white-hooded Klansmen would interrupt worship in various Protestant churches on Sunday mornings, filing in, not to sit and listen to the sermon or sing the hymns, but to hand over a bag of money "for the good work of the church." Of course, it was a bribe, not an offering, a gold-plated invitation for the pastor to echo the hateful opinion of the Klan that anyone who wasn't born in America, didn't descend from northern European countries, didn't look like them, should leave, be shunned, or be lynched. It **should** have been transparent that the money was a bribe, but the devil is, after all, *the deceiver of the whole world*.

The action in the book largely takes place in the Midwest (Indiana, in particular), but we know that our neighbor Wall Township was also once a gathering ground for the KKK. Kinda close for comfort, but a good reminder that evil is everywhere. Evil often masquerades as good. Lucifer means Light-bearer, and it is the name given to the beautiful, vain, diabolically proud angel who fought to usurp God's authority. We **all** face daily temptations to do what is **self**-serving rather than to serve God and neighbor. We're all tempted to trust in worldly power rather than God's grace. We're all tempted to do what is expedient rather than to ask, "What would Jesus do?"

Because I believe angels protect us from both **physical** and **spiritual** harm. I pray, morning and night:

**“Let your holy angel be with us, so that the wicked foe may have no power over us.”**

I also believe that every one of us has a vocation to be an earth angel in this world: no wings, no halo, but plenty of opportunities to be a messenger of hope, a protector of the vulnerable, a speaker of truth, a rejecter of evil. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

P.S. There are Michaelmas daisies from the parsonage garden. (They are also called Montauk daisies.) Michaelmas is a word similar to Christmas: short for Michael Mass, Christ Mass, religious celebrations. Michaelmas daisies always bloom in late September, on time for the Feast of Michael and All Angels on September 29. Like Easter lilies reminding us of trumpets announcing the resurrection and the rusted edges of dogwood blossoms reminding us of the nail-stained cross, these daisies remind us of our faith proclaimed in the beauty of God’s good creation.