

Sermon Draft

Text: Daniel 10:10–14; 12:1–3

Sermon: “Angels Among Us”

Today is the 16th Sunday after Pentecost but it also the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels, that’s why our paraments are red this morning. It is an occasion to recognize (and celebrate) God’s wonderful provision for his people in creating the angels who serve him and us. In hymn 522, we give all praise to God for creating angel hosts. The Gospel tells us God has provided angels for his little ones, and in our Old Testament Reading and Second Reading, from Revelation, we hear how powerful these angels are. The background and necessity for St. Michael and his angel hosts is apparent: our old evil foe, the devil, continues to fight against believers, giving them no relief. The servants of God, the angels—of which the foremost is St. Michael, the archangel—are dedicated to defending Christians against all the assaults of the devil and the fallen angels who followed Satan into perdition.

The time of the Babylonian exile was certainly a time when the Israelites would have wondered if God was in control of his creation. About six hundred years before the time of Christ, the Babylonians under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried off the Jewish people into Babylonia. Things could not have looked worse. About 540 years before Christ, the Persian king Cyrus had conquered Babylonia, and God had used him to send some of the exiled people back to their own land.

Daniel had been one of the captives carried off into the exile. He had been selected by court officials to serve in the royal court of Babylon, and he faithfully served Nebuchadnezzar and his successors until the Babylonian Kingdom was conquered by Cyrus. He then served in the court of Cyrus, king of Persia, as a top official.

The immediate background for the revelation from God comes in the verses preceding our reading from the Book of Daniel. The time is about two and a half years after Cyrus conquered Babylon and sent the Israelites back to Judah.

Daniel was in mourning, although the reason is not told to us. Perhaps he had heard that the construction of the temple was not going well because of opposition from the Samaritans. He was clearly concerned about his own people and fasted and prayed for three weeks. After the three weeks, God spoke to Daniel through a vision, telling him about the present, the future, and the far future.

In the vision, God told Daniel and us much about how God Cares for and Protects His People through His Angels.

The chief angel whom God mentions is Michael, who is called an archangel in the New Testament (Jude 9). It is through the service of his archangel Michael and all the other holy angels that God cares for and protects his people.

The hand that touched Daniel at the beginning of our reading (v 10) belonged to the Second Person of the Trinity, the preincarnate Christ. He wanted to assure Daniel that he had heard his prayers and wanted to tell Daniel how he would take care of his people in the future.

The revelation to Daniel pulls back the curtains on a supernatural reality that we don't usually see. God was not able to come to Daniel immediately because he was fighting against the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" (v 13), a fallen angel—or we could call him a demon—who was working with the kingdom of Persia against God. The archangel Michael came to God's side with help in defeating the fallen angel, the demonic power behind the throne of Persia.

The writer to the Hebrews asks about angels, "***Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?***" (1:14). God created the angels to serve—they serve God, but especially man. Here the powerful warrior archangel works with God to defeat the fallen angel who is pushing the kingdom of Persia to work against God.

God told Daniel that St. Michael came to assist him. So far, we haven't seen a direct connection between St. Michael and God's people. That connection will be made explicit in a moment.

But even here, we can sense that God’s angels work for God’s people. When any of God’s holy creation, the angels, fight against the devil and his ways, they are protecting and defending God’s people from the wrath of the devil. They are defending the people whom God has made his own, those whom the devil hates mightily.

In the remainder of chapters 10 and 11 of Daniel, God reveals to him what the future holds for the people of Israel. What he ultimately wants Daniel to know and trust will come about is “*what is to happen to your people in the latter days*” (v 14). This we also see as our reading from Daniel picks up with that theme at the beginning of chapter 12: “*At that time.*”

The “latter days” is generally used in the Old Testament to refer to the time that began with the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and extends through the entire time of the Church to the Last Day. “At that time,” Michael, the archangel, the “*great prince who has charge of [Daniel’s] people*” that is, the people of God—shall arise and defend those people.

Since this is in *“the latter days,”* this is the time of the Church. The people of God are the believers in Jesus Christ, the *“Israel of God,”* as St. Paul calls them (Galatians 6:16).

St. Michael will defend these people—you and me—against the assaults of the devil. We see some of that fierceness in the way that the prince of the kingdom of Persia, a fallen angel and follower of the devil, opposed God. But we certainly do see the fierceness of the devil in our Second Reading from the Book of Revelation. At the beginning of the reading, we hear about Michael and his angels fighting against the devil. St. Michael and his host defeat the devil, casting him out of heaven. Our reading ends with these words: *“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!”* (Revelation 12:12).

It is that great wrath that the Church of God must contend with until the Last Day. But God assures Daniel that there is one who defends the people of God from the devil:

St. Michael, and with him all the holy angels. God cares for and protects his people through his angels. God does not leave his people defenseless but sends them a powerful defender.

The devil, and the evil angels who followed him in his opposition to God, stand eternally against ***“everyone whose name shall be found written in the book”*** (12:1). Through Holy Baptism, our names are written in the Book of Life. When God put his triune name on you in Baptism, he created the faith in you that received the salvation offered in Jesus Christ, and he wrote your name in the Book of Life.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that Satan knows our names are written there and will be relentless in attacking us. But then the good news again: God sends St. Michael and all his holy angels to defend us against the attacks of Satan. Satan can easily attack us, because we retain the sinful flesh with which we were born.

We still have the sinful nature that separates us from God, and the devil will do everything in his power to make us focus on that, on our sin, on our unworthiness to be in God's kingdom. The devil's goal is to bring us to despair of our salvation.

True, we remain poor, miserable sinners. But in Baptism, God clothed us with the holiness of Jesus Christ, the holiness that he won for us by his suffering and death on the cross of Calvary. We stand before God acquitted of any charge of sin. We have the confidence that God gave Daniel: ***“at that time your people shall be delivered”*** (12:1).

If God and his holy angels are for us, who can be against us? Even death, which came into creation only because the devil brought it with him, cannot separate us from God. We shall be raised from death on the Last Day and will ***“shine like the brightness of the sky above”*** (12:3), as God poetically describes heaven to Daniel.

The ending of the story is indeed glorious—that ending has already been written for us in the Book of Life.

While on this earth, we will contend with the devil, his fallen angels, and our own sinful flesh. As our culture and civilization start to change and begin to look a lot more like the kingdom of Persia, we can confidently trust, as God asked Daniel to trust, that the future is in God's hands. St. Michael and his holy angels defend us against the assaults of the devil, whether they come to us through the inclinations of our own sinful flesh or from world powers. God's power is not limited. God cares for and protects his people through his angels.

Amen