

Daniel 12:1 (from the OT Lesson)

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

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Do you see them? Some are sitting in the pews next to you, others are standing in the aisle along the wall, and a few are up here with me in the chancel. It's nice to know that they like being here in church, even though they have been sent here to observe and report what they see and hear (1 Cor. 10:11). What am I talking about? (*pause*) I'm talking about the (Gk: *angelos*) *angels*, or *messengers* of God. How do we know they are here? How do we know that angels exist? I saw a postcard on my grandmother's dresser when I was little – it was a picture of two children crossing over a stream on a wooden bridge beneath the outstretched arms of their guardian angel.

It is best to be kind and helpful, especially to strangers. Sometimes we might be showing hospitality to angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2). This is most certainly true.

Little Jimmy went to construction sites near his house to collect empty soda bottles. He did this to make enough money to buy a model of an ocean liner – the blue boat was priced at \$5.95. When he thought he had enough, he went to the store and paid the price on the sticker. What he didn't know at age 9 was the added sales tax of 24 cents. The clerk told him to put it back, but a kind stranger in line behind him placed a quarter on the counter, allowing him to have his toy. He was so excited and happy, he ran off. Only when he got to the door did he realize that he had forgotten to say thank you. When he got back to the counter, there was nobody there. Maybe that kind stranger was an angel!

Christians are not the only ones who believe in angels. There are several religious traditions throughout the world that believe in them, including Islam. Hollywood films have muddied the waters with all kinds of spiritual beings – a few of them good, others really bad – depending on the movie and the director's imagination. The soft, tender creatures we dream about in our sleep are also invented. Most of our images come from our catholic friends, which shouldn't surprise us. Almost everything we think has been influenced to some extent by the medieval art of Rome, including our view of --

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The only reliable source is the Bible.

The Old Testament has recorded some rather remarkable angelic activity. In the picture language of Hebrew, we see very clearly the (Hebrew: *malak*) the great prince, protector, the supernatural being, the *messenger* of God --

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Our text is just one example. Some angels are deployed like special forces to execute divine wrath and punishment, like the ones who detonated the first atomic bomb on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:13). Others are on guard duty like the cherubim wielding swords of fire before the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). A few are positioned on major highways like the one recognized by a donkey, but not his rider, a false prophet named Balaam (Numbers 22:23); that angel was heavily armed to do some serious damage. And then there is the unforgettable angel of death at the stroke of midnight that passed over his target only when he saw the blood of the sacrificial lamb (Exodus 12:29). I know from these reliable records that angels are more powerful than we will ever be, which could be a blessing or a curse when we dare to talk about --

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In the New Testament angels seem to be everywhere. The comforting passage in today's Gospel presents a popular image. But here is something we don't get from the postcards on grandma's dresser or the nice greeting cards at the religious bookstore – one of the most important qualities about angels is their humble service in the kingdom. In the record of Matthew, they are sent to protect even the most fragile of human beings, our children, called (Gk: *mikrons*) *little ones* (18:10). This is how most of us see --

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But there is so much more.

The book of Daniel – if you dare to read it – has some of the most fantastic stories and amazing visions in the whole Bible. And who is dispatched to ensure that the people of God will not be wiped off the map by their seen and unseen enemies? That's right --

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In chapter 12 verse 1, he is *the great prince* and protector of Israel, the archangel of God whose name is **Michael**, a Hebrew name that when translated turns out to be a rhetorical question: *Who is like God?* (And the answer is: no one!) The prophet Daniel is an old man by this time. He needs support. He prays fervently for divine back-up. The archangel comes to his aid, but he is delayed three weeks due to some unfinished business on the battlefield against an evil foe (10:13). But now, as we read our text, help has arrived with a spectacular vision of the future – one of the clearest passages we have about the resurrection of the dead (12:2). This was intended to encourage not only Daniel, but believers like you and me. While things continue to get worse, we have every reason to keep our faith strong in the one who has redeemed us. Not Michael the messenger, but in his boss, the one responsible for this message – Jesus Christ whose life, death, and resurrection have saved us from the wrath to come, and written our names in the book of life with the indelible signature of God to ensure our salvation.

Daniel refers to Michael three times. The tiny book of Jude records how Michael was successful in protecting the body of Moses from the evil one. And the last book in the Bible reveals Michael in command of his angelic army. The reference we heard earlier in this service (Rev. 12:7-12) gave us the highlights of his victory over Satan and his demonic forces driven out of heaven. But then, we know from the rest of the story in the inspired Word, that the ultimate defeat of the devil took place on the cross. The writer of the *Apocalypse* remembered the last week in Jerusalem. There was a voice like thunder. The people thought it was an angel. Then Jesus said something peculiar ...

This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

John 12:30-32

The cross may have looked like the devil won the battle, but in fact he lost the war in heaven and on earth when Christ finished the work of redemption. Now, everyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. Nothing can stop the people of God, no power or problem can overwhelm the Church redeemed by Christ. The devil has been defeated. Now, until the second coming of Christ, we wait by grace through faith. We make disciples of all nations. We move out with the divine protection of Michael --

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- He is merciful, patient, and holy (1 Enoch 40:8)*.
- He is one of a multitude of holy angels, presiding over us and commanding the nations (1 Enoch 20:5)*.

(*-- non-biblical source from Judaism, 20 fragmented copies found in Dead Sea Scrolls)

- He is the leader of the angelic army.
- He is the archangel deployed from the heavenly court.
- He is the supernatural general of our commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- He is the chief prince once deployed in the service of Daniel in the ancient world who now serves all believers in this world redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
- He is powerful, but one of God's spiritual creatures under his divine authority.
- He is a warrior, armed to fight for us against the enemy of our faith.
- He is invisible, but clearly seen by all the company of heaven.
- He is the archangel Michael --

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Thank God he serves our Savior Jesus Christ.
Thank God, he can read *our names* written in the book of life!
Thank God, he is on our side.

In Jesus' Name,
A M E N

*Dr. Thomas Wm. Hirsch, Pastor
St. Paul's Lutheran Church – Grants Pass, Oregon*