In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is the feast of St. Michael and all the angels. I am delighted that this feast has fallen on a Sunday so that we can celebrate it! I happen to like angels! In fact, I think the angels of the Lord are great and I am so glad that God created them!

You know, my husband, Pastor Greg believes that he was visited by an angel. That happened a couple years ago when he fell backwards down the steps near our elevator. Two splendid things happened then. First, he felt no pain from the fall. His body must have gone immediately into shock, protecting him from pain. The other splendid thing was that he was visited by an angel. She was a nurse, just passing by at the needful moment. She dashed down the steps to minister to him. He told her this: “I cannot feel my arms. I think I am going to lift my arms to see whether I can do it.” But she could see that his arms and especially his left wrist were badly damaged, and so she took charge of him. She told him to not lift his arms, lest he damage them. She called 911 and gave them good instructions about the help that was needed. She stayed with him and comforted him, until the emergency truck arrived, and then she vanished.

Pastor Greg believes that she was an angel. She was an angel in the simple, plain sense that she was God’s agent to take care of him. In the time of need, God sent an angel to Pastor Greg.

Now, each one of us is capable of being an angel in this same sense. There may come times when we are the ones in the precise position to help... to help take care of someone as God wants us to do so. Let us be angels then! Let us be like the angels in the time of need.

But this morning, I want to talk about those who are fulltime angels. You and I can be angels as the occasion requires, but also there are beings in this universe who are always angels. I figure that we need them. I am glad that God expresses his love and care for us by sending out his angels. So, let’s talk about these splendid beings — the angels.

According to Scripture and the tradition of the church, there are multitudes of angels – indeed, they seem to outnumber us! Again, according to tradition,
there are various kinds of angels (nine ranks in all) who have differing responsibilities. The details of this hierarchy are interesting but not especially important for this sermon today. I want to focus particularly on the angels that have to do with us, in one way or another. And so I will speak about three ways in which the angels of the Lord are especially connected to us.

You may notice that we have placed an Icon of the Archangel Michael here in the chancel. He doesn’t look like the angels of popular culture - all sweetness and light. That’s because St. Michael is above all a warrior! In fact, whenever an angel appears to someone in the Bible the first words that they usually speak are, “Do not be afraid!” Why is that? Because the angels of the Lord are scary! After all, they come bearing messages from God Almighty and I suspect they bear some of God’s glory in their appearance. Perhaps God sends the angels as His messengers in order to protect us for, as it is said, no one can look upon the face of God and live!

In our Old Testament reading from Daniel, Michael, (whose name means “Who is like God”), is called a great prince and he is the mighty protector of God’s people. Also, the book of Revelation tells of Michael leading the great army of angels into battle against Satan who is thrown down from heaven. Today’s reading reminds us that the devil, no longer in heaven, persists now only on earth. Here is that last verse from our reading from Revelation:

Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! 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)

In the same vein, St. Peter warns us about the devil: “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

Apocalyptic literature in the Bible, such as Daniel and Revelation, proclaims that at the end of time there will be a final battle between good and evil. At that time the Archangel Michael will lead a host of angels in that great battle to defeat Satan and all his demons once and for all! Evil will be completely annihilated and Jesus will reign over a new heaven and a new earth. Then every knee shall bow in worship before our Lord Jesus, and every tear will be wiped away from our eyes. (See Revelation 21:1-4) These apocalyptic readings are meant to give the people of God, including us, encouragement and hope in the midst of difficult times, including times of persecution and oppression. Glad to say, the angels of the Lord are on our side; they are fighting for our sake and they signify God’s omnipresence and providential care to each and every one of us. We have reason to be grateful to God for his
holy angels!

The way I see it, the angels of God have at least three major God-given responsibilities.

**First,** they worship and praise God in heaven without ceasing! We encounter this in Isaiah’s vision when the Lord calls him to be a prophet:

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

> "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3)

I bet you recognize that angelic song! It is the song we sing at the Eucharist following the proper preface. Here is how the preface appointed for this feast goes – it is the preface for Holy Trinity:

> It is indeed right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise to you, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and ever-living God. You have revealed your glory as the glory also of your Son and of the Holy Spirit: three persons equal in majesty, undivided in splendor, yet one Lord, one God, ever to be adored in your everlasting glory. And so, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Notice that the preface always ends with these or similar words: “with the hosts of heaven (that is, all the angels and the saints), we praise your name and join THEIR UNENDING HYMN!” We join **their** hymn! I like to imagine that as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of power and might....” our voices are united with an immense multitude of angels who endlessly sing God’s praises. For just a few brief moments we join them in this most holy song of praise. It is as if we are being lifted up into heaven itself and are surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses including an immense host of God’s angels. This may indeed be the pinnacle of the Eucharistic liturgy. Even so, the angels teach us to worship and praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When John of Patmos has a vision of this heavenly worship, he tries to bow down before the angel who is showing it to him. But the angel says, “No!” Worship belongs only to God – the angels in heaven praise and worship the Lord with endless singing. One day, we will too! In the meantime, we practice here!
Second, the angels are sent by God to guide us and to defend us from the powers of evil, including the devil prowling around looking for someone to devour!

Perhaps this is where we can suggest that God assigns each of us a guardian angel. I suspect that Martin Luther believed in guardian angels. His morning and evening prayers include mention of the angels. Here is Luther’s Morning Prayer: He begins with the sign of the cross:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther’s Evening prayer is very much the same, ending with these same words: Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.

Luther is using a Biblical idea here — this idea of the guardian angels. Jesus speaks of them when warning his disciples to never harm the children. Jesus says this:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10, RSV)

Never harm the little ones! And at various times in our lives, we are among the little ones. We are the ones in need. That is why I am glad that God has his angels. The angels are part of God’s heavenly army. They guard us day and night, keeping us safe and, one day, will escort us to heaven. They also rejoice whenever anyone who was lost has been found.

When Pastor Greg fell a few years ago, he sustained serious injuries to both of his wrists and one elbow, requiring three surgeries and over a year of rehabilitation. However, we were very grateful because his injuries might have been much worse! He could have hit his head on the concrete, broken his neck or back – but that did not happen. At the time someone expressed the belief that, because the Pastor was out there doing the Lord’s work, the devil assaulted him! But the angels protected him so that his injuries were not
as bad as they might have been! Only God knows if that is what really happened, but it is comforting to think that God has assigned guardian angels to guide and protect us along our earthly pilgrimage.

Our guardian angels also escort us into heaven when it comes time for us to die. This too is Biblical. When Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and the poor man Lazarus lying at his gate, he says:

The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. (Luke 16: 22)

In the church’s prayers of Commendation for the dying, one prayer goes like this:

NAME______, our brother/sister in the faith, we entrust you to God who created you. May you return to the one who formed us out of the dust of the earth. Surrounded by the angels and triumphant saints, may Christ come to meet you as you go forth from this life.

In addition, a beautiful hymn called “In Paradisum” (Into Paradise), is often sung at funerals. It goes like this:

May the angels lead you into paradise;
May the martyrs receive you at your arrival,
And lead you to the holy city Jerusalem.
May the choirs of angels receive you,
And with Lazarus, once poor,
May you have eternal rest.

In our prayers for the dying, we often ask God to let His holy angels watch over the dying person, to hold them safely as they are laid to rest, and as they await the day of resurrection.

Third, God sends angels as messengers, telling us many very important things.

Perhaps this third responsibility is the one that is most evident in the Bible, and it maybe it is the most important. How often throughout scripture do we hear the words: “the angel of the Lord came to... or called out to...”

One powerful example is the story of Abraham and his son Isaac. As you remember, the Lord commanded Abraham to take his son, his only son Isaac, and offer him up as a sacrifice. So Abraham, being obedient to his Lord, takes his son Isaac, binds him and lays him on the altar, on top of the wood for the
sacrifice. Here is what we read in the book of Genesis:

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I!” He said (that is, the angel said), “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” (Genesis 22:10-12)

Thanks be to God for that angel! And thanks be to God that Abraham was attentive to his voice!

Of course I could not leave out another of the archangels named in the Bible—that is, Gabriel, who appeared to a young woman named Mary to tell her that God had chosen her to be the mother of His Son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The archangel Michael is the mighty warrior, but the archangel Gabriel is great messenger of good tidings to the whole world regarding the world’s Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. His name, Gabriel, means strength of God, or man of God and his missions are all connected with Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. He may have been the angel who announced the resurrection of Jesus to those who came to the tomb.

So, the angels have a very important role in scripture, and, I believe, in the ongoing life of Israel and the Church of Christ. It may be that we Lutherans are not used to thinking much about the angels, just as we do not focus over much on the saints. We prefer Jesus! We are taught to pray directly to Jesus, rather than asking the saints to intercede for us. So, let me be clear, I am not suggesting that we pray to the angels or worship them, but that we have good reason to appreciate the angels, to learn from them, and to think of them as a holy and mighty company created by God for our benefit.

One day, for Jesus’ sake, we will join their company, not that we will become angels ourselves, but we will be welcomed among them, fellow creatures of God, created to praise and worship our Lord Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto ages of ages. Amen.