

St Michael and All Angels

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Revelation 12:7-12 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. **8** But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. **9** The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.

11 They triumphed over him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death.

12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens
and you who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you!
He is filled with fury,
because he knows that his time is short.”

“Angelic Courage for the Fight”

Looking over at the passenger seat, I genuinely wondered whether I was really looking at an angel. The previous church I was at was located less than a mile from a major freeway that ran up the entire west coast. And so we had plenty of interesting visitors drop by the church. Some were looking for cash or a place to stay or gas. This particular visitor had run out of gas just a block away from the church. So I offered to take him to the gas station, fill a gas can and help him fill his van up. It was when we were driving back to his van that he informed me he was an angel. As I looked over at him, he flexed all the muscles in his body, his bizarre tattoos took on a supernatural look, and a chill came over me. Either those muscles and tattoos were about to transform to reveal angel wings or my wife would soon be cashing in my life insurance policy.

One recent poll found that 77% of people believe in angels. That’s much higher for Christians than the general population and even higher for people who regularly attend church than those who just call themselves Christians. But more than half of non-Christians and more than 4 out of 10 people who never attend any religious services still believe in the

existence of angels.¹ Of course, what public opinion polls reveal doesn't change what the Bible teaches. But when we wonder if angels are real, it lets us know we aren't alone. But even if they're real, what are they? What do they do? And what difference does it make for God's people today?

According to the Bible, angels are very real. And God enlightens us about their existence for very practical reasons. They are here for us. Well, actually they serve God by caring for God's people. In this particular episode in Revelation chapter 12, we can see angels in action so we can take courage. Think of the book of Revelation as a spy campaign to give us privileged information about the spiritual battles that are being waged. A series of visions tell the account of God's victory over the spiritual forces of evil from beginning to end, in different ways with different details. Revelation 12 gives us a fantastic image of a gritty and realistic battle raging. God wants you to see that his angels are fighting on your side. God's servants the angels give you courage for the fight that is going on right now for your soul.

Some of this espionage information gathering gives us a better picture of our enemy. Your enemy is pictured as a dragon. Dragons are fearful and intimidating creatures. The great dragon is identified as the ancient serpent. He's the same one who deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden. He caused them to doubt God's goodness and the wisdom of God's commands until they rebelled against God and ruined his perfect creation. He is outed by his more familiar name the devil. This name literally means "slanderer." He tells lies about God's people. He takes your love for things and tars you with the label of idolater. He takes your dissatisfaction in your marriage and calls you an adulterer. He watches your frustration with coworkers and paints you as a rage-aholic. He sees your struggles and brands you an addict. Another common name for him is Satan. This name comes from the Hebrew word that means adversary. He is lying in ambush waiting to attack you. He is constantly active, leading the whole world astray, away from God, attempting to damage your relationship with your loving Father.

This intelligence report analyzing the spiritual battle helps you understand the very real danger your soul's enemy presents. The fight is real. You need courage for this fight.

People who observe and comment on our culture notice how fantasy adventures are making a comeback. In a complicated and conflicted society, we want something simple. Good guy verses bad guy. In a world where we aren't sure who are the villains, we want good to clearly prevail over evil. Superman is a great example. Back in the 1930s Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster came up with the superhero to wrap up in one package all their hopes for fighting back against the dangerous and uncertain world they saw all around them. Jerry's father had been shot by a robber. They longed for someone with the power to deflect bullets. The Great Depression left people struggling to find food and shelter. They needed a hero who could rescue an imperiled population in the most basic ways. The growing threat of the Nazis was throwing a dark cloud over world powers and politics. They needed a good guy who could embody truth, justice and the American way.

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-nearly-8-in-10-americans-believe-in-angels/>

God gives us this vision in Revelation so we see his way of handling the dangerous villains out to get our souls. It's not fantasy. It is graphic reality to help us with real dangers. We see Michael and his angel army defeating Satan and his minions. They don't have the capacity to outlast God's army of angels under the command of Michael. They are hurled down in defeat. But that doesn't mean the devil has given up. Even though the dragon, the devil has been defeated, he continues his diabolical attacks. He just employs more sinister tactics. Revelation reveals him as **"the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night."** (Revelation 12:10)

He deceives and slanders, he drags into sin. And then when you have fallen for his schemes, he holds up your guilt and sin, and calls for justice to be done. From the time you snuck a candy bar from the grocery store checkout when you were five years old to the time you were so filled with anger you would have committed murder if a weapon had been readily available, the Accuser acts as a chief prosecuting attorney. The devil dredges up every past mistake you have made and brings it up in God's courtroom. He throws your failures back in your face. He lists off every item on your rap sheet and rests his case before the Judge of all humanity. And then he awaits your eternal condemnation.

Revelation chapter 12 holds before us the heroic actions of God's angels, working on your behalf. But Michael isn't your hero. At least not the ultimate hero who gives you ultimate victory. The reality of our hero has nothing to do with fantasy. In the fantasy realm we like to picture someone with superhuman strength, born on a distant planet or zapped by gamma rays or bitten by a radioactive spider. We prefer our heroes easily identifiable with tights and capes and masks. We clamor for bam and pow and biff, for explosions and x-ray blasts and Metropolis reduced to rubble in epic struggles between good and evil.

What we don't picture is a Lamb. The epic struggle between Satanic evil and heavenly good was launched when God took flesh and was placed in an animal feed trough. Jesus took that most sheepish route to hero status when he took up obedient and respect-filled residence in the peasant home of Mary and Joseph. Jesus was way too docile and mild-mannered when confronting Pharisees and Roman governors. No rage to smash the Sanhedrin, no x-ray powers to reduce Pilate to ashes, no flying away from the cross. Weak and powerless, the most unlikely hero in the record of historians and imagination of superhero sagas, as his life drained away at the cross. And yet, there, on the cross, the Lamb became the Victor.

Every accusation of the enemy is met by the blood of the Lamb. All who stand guilty under the withering accusation of the enemy have been vindicated by the Lamb. Every sinner who hangs their head in disgrace at every accusation that rings true, filling our hearts with guilt and our heads with shame, looks in stunned silence at the Lamb who overcame. Cleansing comes through Jesus: **"the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** (1 John 1:7) The blood of Jesus answers every accusation with his own purity. The ones pictured in absolute holiness, wrapped up in God's righteousness in heaven are **"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** (Revelation 7:14) The ultimate victory by your ultimate hero, Jesus, gives you courage for the fight.

So if the blood of Jesus allows God's people to triumph over the devil and his evil forces, why do we need angels? If we have Jesus, why should we believe in angels? There's a very sensible reason beside the basic fact that the Bible tells us they are real. For practical reasons. Jesus sends them to his people who are caught up in every day battles. Hebrews 1:14 helps us consider "**all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.**" Angels are servants of God who serve you. Angels defeated the devil and now deliver blow after blow against every attempt to accuse and outsmart God's vulnerable people.

There's another reason why superheroes are so popular. Good stories do more than just inspire and entertain. Good stories point us to the truth behind every invented myth and fable.

There is an epic cosmic battle raging between good and evil. Jesus overcame all the accusations of your adversary with his death on the cross. Yet your ongoing struggle is very real. The dragon/serpent/devil/satan is real. On a temporary basis he will claim victories over you. He will inflict damage. The existence of angels doesn't mean God wraps you in bubble wrap. Throughout all of life's defeats, they help you know that all is not lost. When the dragon appears to terrify and intimidate, you have courage through the victory of God's angel armies. When the serpent seeks to deceive, you have the truth as your weapon of defense. When you struggle and suffer, God's angelic servants let you know you are never alone. When it all seems too much, God's messengers give you the comfort that you are not your sin. His slander doesn't stick. You are a child of God. You are forgiven by Jesus. When the devil tempts you and works to lead you astray, your angelic protectors lead you back into the loving arms of your Savior. You have angelic courage for this very real fight.

So rejoice. Rejoice not just because you believe in the existence of angels. Rejoice because your enemy is overcome by the word of the testimony. Rejoice even in the face of suffering and pain because you don't have to be afraid of what you might lose. God's people aren't afraid to lose everything in life because they have true life with the Lamb. Rejoice because you have a victory that can't be taken away from you. God's people are willing to suffer terrible loss on this earth with the certainty of life that will never end. Rejoice in your triumph through the blood of the Lamb. Rejoice even in your struggles because you have angelic courage for the fight. Amen.