

30 September 2012
St. Michael and All Angels (observed)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Victory by Blood and Word”

Text: Revelation 12:7-12; Matthew 18:1-10 (Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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!

Woe to us indeed. The war that started in heaven, the rebellion against our Lord, His kingdom, His goodness and mercy, and against His Son, has come down to earth. That ancient serpent called the devil and satan, along with the angels that rebelled with him, are now harassing and attacking our Lord's own, His Church, His Christians.

And woe is a good word for it. Starting with the woe in the Garden when satan wasted no time in attacking our first parents, to all the woe that has flowed from that ever since. Sin affecting and infecting not just mankind, but all of creation, and causing woes of nature, man, and beast. Natural disasters and wars among men, discord and strife, doubts and anxieties. Satan desire to, through these things, dethrone God in this world and in our lives.

And how he sets out to do that we heard today as well, as John calls him ***“the deceiver of the whole world.”*** His weapon is his word. His word against God's Word. His *“Did God really say?”* to Eve echoing throughout history and causing us to doubt our good and gracious Father, to take matters into our own hands, to go our own ways, to follow our own desires, to believe that we know better than God, to think that God and His Word cannot be trusted.

It sounds silly, doesn't it? That we - we know better than God? That God and His Word cannot be trusted? Yet that is the genesis of all sin. We hurt others because we do not trust that God will protect. We take because we do not believe He will provide. We lie because we are afraid. We war because we are not content. We deceive because it works. And in all these things and in all these ways we've put ourselves upon the throne, believing the Deceiver when he has convinced us that the most important person in this world is ME. So I will serve me and expect all of you to do the same.

Attacking with words . . . Being thick in the middle of another political campaign season, we ought to be very familiar with that. The TV ads that are now more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore really all sound the same, don't they? Each candidate takes a kernel of truth and uses it to paint themselves in the best possible light and paint their opponents in the worst possible light. I'm not saying we shouldn't expect that - but it is a very current picture of deception.

And so it is with the deceiver. He takes a kernel of truth - something in your life, something in the world, some trouble, or issue, or temptation - and uses it to paint God in the worst possible light, and you and sin in the best possible light. And deceive you that this way, your own way, really, obviously, is the way to go. God and His Word are nice, they really are. But let's get practical; let's get real. That just isn't going to work for you. Maybe, maybe two thousand years ago. But it's a different world now. We know more now. You have to go *this* way now.

And he's good at his job, isn't he? From the high-profile deceptions of abortion and assisted suicide and sexuality issues down to the deceptions that tempt us every day.

So you know the old saw: *The devil made me do it!* Well, I guess there's a kernel of truth there. But the truth is that you did it. You listened. You're guilty.

BUT . . . but just as Michael and his angels battled Satan and his angels in heaven, so also now our Lord sends these angels to fight for us in the war that continues here on earth. The Scriptures are full of such accounts. The angels of God, mostly unseen, but always on the ready. The angels of God protecting Lot and his family, ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder, filling the hills and ready to fight for God's people. The angels of God protecting us from the sin caused by Satan's deceptions.

But not just with might did God's angels fight to protect us, but also with the Word of God that they brought. His Word of truth. The angels of God in the Scriptures also messengers, speaking God's promises to His people in need; speaking the truth against the devil's deception. Proclaiming to, reminding, and encouraging the Patriarchs in the Old Testament of God's promise to send a Saviour, and then proclaiming the coming of that Saviour to Zechariah and Mary. Bringing news of great joy in the midst of a world of woe.

And here is an important truth - that while we give thanks to God for His angels and all that they do for us, and all at His command, for God's angels take no action independent of His command; or as Matthew put it: ***they always see the face of the Father in heaven***; always attentive, always ready to go at His command - while

God's angels fight for us, **it is God Himself who would come to fight - and win - the war.** God created us. God came as a man to redeem us. And it is God who takes hold of us through His Word. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not idle, not watching the angels do all the work, but active; and active *for you*.

That's why in the midst of the reading from Revelation, as we hear about the war in heaven that has now come down to earth - right in the midst of that reading we heard: ***and they have conquered by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*** The angels fight, but the victory is the Lord's.

And that victory comes through the cross where the blood of the Lamb was shed, and by the word of testimony, the word of truth, about the cross. For the antidote to satan's deception is the truth of God's love. The antidote to sin is forgiveness. The antidote to death is resurrection. It would not be enough for the Lord to come and squash satan like a bug. He could have. Easily. No problem at all for the Almighty God. But then what of us? What of us infected and stuck in sin and death? What of us in need of forgiveness, life, and salvation?

For us then, the Lord came. To fight for us. To fight for us with His Word and love and truth. And so He entered the battlefield in our flesh and blood. The *Word* became *flesh*. He endured the deception of satan in the wilderness. And then He shed His blood. The blood of God dripped from the cross, the innocent for the guilty that the guilty may be innocent. The Creator and Life of the world died, that we who are dead in sin may have life. And then buried in the ground like a seed, He burst forth from the tomb in His resurrection, the firstfruits of a great harvest of all who will rise with Him.

And so it the cross that is the answer to the deceptions of satan, and that silences his accusations. *Will God protect? Will He provide? Will He forgive? Is He faithful? Can you believe Him?* Look! See Him hanging there for you? See Him there with your your sin, your millstone, with His hands and feet and eyes cut off for you. The Son of God forsaken by His Father, that we may be children of God.

So while satan was thrown down and out of heaven by St. Michael and his angels, he is thrown down and out of *your heart* by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of God. The blood and word applied to you in **Holy Baptism**, that drowned in *those* waters you be raised to a new life as a child of God. The blood and word proclaimed to you in **Holy Absolution**, that the truth of *those* words fill your hearts and minds with hope and faith. And the blood and word placed into you in **Holy Communion**, that the Body and Blood of your Saviour strengthen and preserve you steadfast unto everlasting life. For here, through these means, is the blood and word you need, to give you the faith you need, the forgiveness you need, the life and salvation victory you need.

For here your Saviour is serving His children. And if God is serving you, His child, then truly you *are* great in the kingdom of heaven.

So today we thank God for His angels, but even more for His Son and the salvation given to us here. And to do that we join with the angels in our liturgy. We sing the song they sang at the birth of our Saviour: *Glory to God in the highest!* And then we join in the song they sing even now around the throne of our God in heaven: *Holy! Holy! Holy!*

And we not only speak these words *here*, but we speak the Word of God *out there*, the Word of truth, in the testimony of our lives, in word and deed. To a world in need. To people deceived. To those who need the hope of forgiveness and the help of love. And so be “angels,” messengers, in our own right. Taking our place in the fight, *knowing* the victory has been won.

And we rejoice today, finally, on this day of St. Michael and All Angels, that the victory has been won for our own St. Michael, whom our Lord called home to his rest a bit over a week ago now. What joy is ours to know that the angels fought for him and that our Lord fought for him, and that the victory is now his. As it will be, too, for you and me. When all woe will be gone, replaced only with joy. And the angels we do not yet see, and our Lord who we do not yet see, and our brother who we no longer see, we *will* then see, with our own eyes. Children *and* angels, gathered around our Father and Saviour, forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.