

27 September 2020
Saint Michael and All Angels
Confirmation of Caleb and Eli Malekzadeh

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Our Hope and Blessing in Woe”
Text: Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 12:7-12

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

Angels. Ever since the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, set down his pen, there has been much fascination and speculation about them. Obsession, even. What are their names, how many are there, what can they do, what do they look like, and more. We do not have time for such conjecture. We know what we need to know; what our Lord has told us in Holy Scripture. And that is enough.

And what the Lord has told us, what we heard this morning, is that there are two kinds of angels: the good and the evil, the godly and the ungodly; those who heed the Word of God, and those who want nothing to do with it. All originally created good, but some now fallen. And they fought. There was *war in heaven*. But this was not a war like we think of war - the outcome was never in doubt. This was not a battle like those of earth, of two equal and opposite armies - this was usurpers, invaders, prideful fools thinking they could take what had not been given them. Of course, they could not. Michael and his angels cast them out of heaven and threw them down to the earth. As fast as a bolt of lightning, and as violent as one too. No soft landing for these rebels, but a crashing down to earth.

So *woe to you, O earth and sea*, John said. Woe to you, O men, women, and children, he means, *for the devil has come down to you in great wrath*. Yes, but it is actually much more serious than that. For if the devil has just come to down to earth, *somewhere*, then maybe he is there, not here. Maybe in the East, not the West. But no. He has come down into your homes - your bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms. Into your churches, meeting rooms, class rooms, and fellowship halls. And into all those of your neighbors and friends. Where you work, where you play, and where you log onto the internet. You are not safe, they are not safe, from the wrath and woe of the evil one and his allies.

So yes, woe to us, indeed.

And yet we do not live lives of woe! Nor of fear and trembling. Because another one has come down to earth from the heavenly places. Not crashing down in defeat, but descending of His own will. This one announced by angels and welcomed by them at His

birth in Bethlehem. Another victim, the devil hoped - and a juicy one at that! - because his pride has no end. He blinds himself with his own darkness. Even tossed out of heaven he thinks the outcome here might be different. Home field advantage and all. But that, too, is a lie. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*, the psalmist says (Psalm 24:1) - it does not belong to the evil one.

So our Lord comes. Into this place of woe. The battle in heaven finished, He brings the battle to earth. And again, the outcome is never in doubt. Whether in the wilderness, among the crowds, in the synagogue, in a home, or on the cross, Jesus, the Word made flesh, wins each and every battle. Even when He bows His head in death - this was no victory for the devil, but the fulfillment of the Word of God. And the resurrection the final nail in the satanic coffin.

And so the devil and his minions have not only been cast out of heaven, they have been cast out of your hearts. For there, too, Jesus has come, and made that place His own. Luther's baptismal liturgy says it so wonderfully - twice! *Depart, unclean spirit, and make way for the Holy Spirit*. And, *I adjure you, O unclean spirit, to depart from this servant of Christ, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!* And he must obey. Actually he *wants* to obey! For where Christ is, there the devil does not want to be. So by baptism, joined to the death and resurrection of Christ, you join in His victory over the evil one.

But as John told us today, though the devil's *time is short*, it's not over. He's looking into the abyss with fear and trembling, but he's not there yet. There's still time. But what can he do to you, O Christian? You who have been redeemed and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb? You who belong to Christ, not to him?

Well, *still he knocks*. You are probably familiar with the famous picture of Jesus knocking at the door, and the admonition for you to let Him in. *But truth be told, he's not the only one knocking*. Just open my coffin a crack, another one says. Let me come out and play. Have a little fun. It's just a little white lie. It's not hurting anyone. Everyone is doing it. That's old fashioned. We know so much more - and better - now. Did God really say . . . ? C'mon, live a little! Didn't God say He'd send His angels to protect you? It's okay. You don't have to go to church *every* week. A little anger will help you get your way. A little greed never hurt anyone. It's okay to look. Nothing's going to happen . . .

And how often we do it. And the one whose name is Legion (Mark 5:9) rushes out of that Pandora's Box of death, and a Trojan Horse of demons is let loose in your life. **Woe to you**, indeed.

So repent. For while Pandora couldn't get the evils back in the box - and you certainly can't! - St. John tells us today that ***the blood of the Lamb and the Word of His testimony can***. The seventy-two rejoiced over this, and so do you. When you hear the Lord proclaim

to you, *I forgive you all your sins*, and when you hear the Lord give you His Body and Blood, the evil one is cast down, and cast out, again. For with those words *the ancient serpent and his scorpions and all his power are being tread on* again. For sin and death are his power, but they have been conquered by the one who forgives and feeds and raises the dead.

But there is something even greater than that, Jesus says. Don't rejoice in this, in power; but in this: that *your names are written in heaven*, and Jesus' Name enscribed on you. Enscribed when His Name and forgiveness and life and victory are poured on your heads in baptism, poured into your mouths in His Supper, and poured into your ears through His Word. And not just once, but whenever you heed that satanic knocking, whenever you give into temptation or despair, whenever you do not live in the victory given to you. Still Jesus comes to forgive. Still Jesus comes to give you life. Still Jesus comes *for you*. Not to cast you down, but to life you up.

Now, whenever the topic of angels comes up, people usually like to talk about and think about guardian angels and how they're protecting us. And they certainly do. *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways*, the psalmist said (Psalm 91:11). But it is not their fellow angels that the devil and his demons fear, but Christ and His Word. The good angels may thwart their efforts, but only Christ is their end. So today, while we give thanks to God for His angels, we do not do so apart from Christ and His Word, leaving the Scriptures sheathed on our bookshelves, or ourselves absent from where they are proclaimed. Assuming the angels are enough for us. That would be most foolish, no? Instead, we will *hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures . . . that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life*. That we embrace and ever hold fast to Him who embraced and holds fast to us, even Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Conquerer.

Which is really what you're about to witness again in a moment, in the Rite of Confirmation. Confirmation is about confessing the one who embraced us in Holy Baptism. That's what Caleb and Eli have learned these past few years as the Scriptures have been unsheathed and they read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested them. Yes, they learned the Small Catechism and memorized it. Yes, they learned a lot of Scripture and doctrine, Yes, they learned a lot about the liturgy and the Divine Service. But what they learned as they learned all that **is Jesus** and all that He has done for them, and is still doing for them. That Jesus is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. That it's not about what we do, but about what He has done for us.

So they've learned the Commandments, and they learned how they answer satan's knocking and let him into their hearts and lives with their sin. They've learned of the idols in their lives, and how their best efforts aren't good enough.

But they didn't despair, for they learned of their Saviour. They learned the Creed, of a

good and gracious Father who sent His Son to redeem them, of the Son who laid down His life for them, and who sent the Spirit to work in their hearts and take them to the Son, who takes them to the Father. So there is forgiveness for them, and life, and sonship.

Sons who pray, who speak to their Father in heaven. Who do not want to remain and live in their sin, but pray for help. That when satan knocks they not answer, but hallow God's name, live in His kingdom and will, be delivered from evil, and forgiven every sin.

A deliverance that began when they were baptized, when that unclean spirit was thrown out of their hearts by water and the Word, and they began to live a new life. And they learned to return to that baptism every day in repentance, that the ancient snake which is always trying to slither in and make his home in their hearts again be cast out again and again and again.

And they learned how precious it is that they are able to return here every week, and not to take this for granted - that the one who created them, lived for them, died for them, and forgives them, is here for them to feed them with His Body and Blood. For the devil is always knocking, inviting them, tempting them, to put something ahead of this, before this, as more important or desirable than this - but it's all a lie. For only Jesus can give them the life they want. Only Jesus can give them a life that will be eternal. And that any life they could get or achieve for themselves apart from Him, is not a life worth living. And in the end would not be life at all, but death.

Now they're going to stand before you and their Lord and say YES! to all this. Yes, I believe this. Yes, this is the truth. Yes, I intend to live in this truth and hold to Him who holds fast to them. Not that they're going to do it perfectly, but they are confessing that Jesus *really is* the way, the truth, and the life. *Their way, their truth, and their life.* And they will eat and drink His Body and Blood, the first of what I hope and pray will be their refreshment and forgiveness here each and every week.

And as they do, as we do, it is with the cherubim and seraphim, the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven - those angels still in the heavenly places whose praise we join, singing: *Holy, holy holy Lord God of Power and might; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory! Hosanna in the highest!* And note that: Heaven **and** earth. For as we also sing, *blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.* The Lord who isn't far off, but continues to come to us here, in our need. The Lord who continues to come to fight for us. The Lord who continues to bless. And blessed are we to whom He comes, even in a world filled with woe. For blessed are we not because our life is easy and our desires fulfilled, but blessed are we who are washed, who are cleansed, who are sanctified, who are fed by Him. Blessed are we, even in the midst of the battle. For as in heaven, so on earth, the outcome is not in doubt. The victory has been won.

So today we give thanks for the angels, but even more for the one they serve - who came

and served us. And we give thanks as we witness His work in the hearts and lives of Caleb and Eli. For this is His work today, not theirs. As it always is. His Name written by Him in their hearts, and their names written by Him in heaven.

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.