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Hebrews 1:14

HAVE YOU THANKED GOD FOR THE ANGELS SENT TO SERVE YOU?

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Be honest now! Have you thanked God this morning for the angels he sent to serve you? Perhaps you did when you saw that this day was the celebration of St. Michael and All Angels Day. Perhaps you did because I announced it to you last week in the bulletin, in the newsletter, in an e-mail and after church. Perhaps this is the first time you've heard about it. Even if you haven't thanked God for the gift of his holy angels before this sermon, you will certainly want to thank him afterwards. The angels are here for you. HAVE YOU THANKED GOD FOR THE ANGELS SENT TO SERVE YOU?

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Think about those words! You are the ones who will inherit salvation. This is God's gift to you. Jesus Christ lived for you, died for you and rose for you. He secured your salvation by laying down his life on the cross. Your sins were washed away. You have become part of God's family through faith. In Holy Baptism your sins were washed away. You were marked with the sign of the holy cross. You received the eternal inheritance of eternal life in the presence of God. This inheritance is different from an earthly one. An earthly inheritance usually comes when our father dies. Since our heavenly Father cannot die, this inheritance comes to us when we die.

God sends his angels to serve us. The name angel means messenger. The angels often brought messages from God to man. The angels live in the presence of God and serve him day and night. Since these beings are sent to serve you, it would do us well to learn more about them.

There is an awful lot we can learn about angels, but there is a lot that we don't know and perhaps would like to know. Angels are very mysterious because they fall into the invisible realm. We cannot see them with our physical eyes. They were created sometime during the six days of creation, but the book of Genesis does not reveal exactly when. Many believe that they were created on the fourth day along with the sun, moon and stars, but we cannot prove or disprove that. All the angels came into existence by the power of God's creating Word.

Sometime after the completion of Creation and before the fall of man, a number of angels rebelled against God. Their leader was Satan. II Peter speaks of the fact that God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment. Like man, the angels had free will. They could choose to love and follow God if they wanted. The sin of Satan was believed to be pride. Satan would entice Adam and Eve with that same sin, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." We saw last week what pride did to Samson and why it is called one of the seven deadly sins.

We know that Satan is alive and well here on planet earth. We see his handiwork in the terrorist groups around the world, in the rapes and murders of innocent people, in the robbing and looting during crises. But we also see his handiwork as he slithers in and whispers thoughts to us, tempting us to do certain things that we know are wrong. He once again promises that only good things can follow if we listen to him. We listen to his voice. We fall. Out of our hearts proceed evil words and actions, lying and cheating, hatred and lusts. He and his minions are very good at what they do. We all fall prey to his temptations. Satan and his demon hordes will try to drag you down to the pits of hell with them.

Therefore it is important for us to know that God sends his good angels to assist us. They stand with us as we fight the good fight of faith. We pray in Luther's morning and evening prayers: "Let your holy angel be with me so that the wicked foe may have no power over me." We do sing with confidence, "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged the deed is done. One little word can fell him." We have to remember that the war is over. There will still be skirmishes and battles as long as we are in the world, but our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the victory.

What wonderful creatures God has watching over us. They excel in strength. In Revelation one of them is pictured with the power to hurl a burning mountain into the sea as though it were a pebble. On Easter morning an angel appeared from heaven and rolled away the great stone that marked our Savior's tomb. The Roman guards were so afraid that they stood frozen in fear. The angels excel in knowledge. The angels have been around since creation. They do not die. They observe all things. Unlike us, they know that those who do not observe history are doomed to repeat its mistakes.

The angels excel in numbers. Daniel had a vision of heaven and saw ten thousand times ten thousand angels standing before the throne of God. Jesus told his apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane that he could call on his heavenly Father and twelve

legions of angels would be there at his disposal. That's 72,000 angels. These angels are divided into ranks just as we have generals, colonels, majors and other officers. The highest rank is that of the archangel. We know that Michael is an archangel. It is possible that there are others such as Gabriel. Satan may also have been an archangel at one time. There are cherubim and seraphim, thrones and powers. We don't know exactly how the order is set up, but they are there to serve us. The angels do have names.

The angels are here to serve God. They do that in two ways. They execute judgment upon God's enemies and they show mercy and protection to God's people. The first time we read of the angels in Scripture, they were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were driven out. They guarded that entrance so that man could not eat from the tree of life in his fallen state. They carried out God's judgment upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the nation of Egypt in the Passover and upon the Assyrian army threatening the city of Jerusalem. A single angel destroyed 185,000 men. The book of Revelation has the angels breaking the seals and bringing God's judgment upon his enemies.

But perhaps more comforting are those words that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. Angels led Lot and his daughters through the plains as Sodom and Gomorrah burned. Angels brought food and drink to the discouraged prophet Elijah as he sat under a tree. Angels shut the mouths of the lions in the den so that no harm came to Daniel. Angels announced the birth of John the Baptist to his father Zechariah and the birth of the Son of God to the Virgin Mary. Angels lit up the sky on Christmas, proclaiming peace on earth and good will to men to the shepherds in Bethlehem. Angels ministered to our Lord in the wilderness after he had resisted all the temptations of Satan. They would also strengthen him as he sweat great drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. They announced the resurrection to the women on Easter Sunday. They reminded the apostles at Jesus' ascension that he would return in the same way that he left them. We see angels throughout the book of Acts, helping Philip and Cornelius and Peter and Paul.

This passage from the letter to the Hebrews is not written in the past tense. It does not read, "Were not all angels ministering servants," but rather "Are not all angels ministering servants." They still serve God and us today. They still ascend and descend Jacob's ladder, from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven, performing their heavenly missions.

The angels are with us this morning in our worship. The angels pray for us, but we do not pray to them. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. The angels are the messengers. We do not want to ever confuse them with the one who is the Message. Angels are here as God's Word is preached to its hearers. Angels hover over the baptismal font as faith is created in little children. Angels gather around us as we receive the precious food of our Savior's body and blood in Holy Communion. In the ancient hymn of praise known as the Te Deum, we sing: "We praise you, O God, we acclaim you as Lord; all creation worships you, Father everlasting. To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of heavenly hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory." With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we praise God's holy name and sing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of heavenly hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory." Surely many of our favorite hymns sing of the ministry of angels among God's people. "Angels from the realms of glory," "Angels we have heard on high," "Christ the Lord is risen today! Saints on earth and angels say."

Do we have our own personal guardian angel? It's very likely that we do. There is a traditional notion, always held in the Christian Church, that at baptism every soul has been placed into the custody of a guardian angel who never leaves his charge until he sees that soul safely in Paradise. It would be logical that there would be a particular angel or angels who serve certain people in certain parts of the world. The Psalmist declares: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." I believe that angels have certainly protected me and members of my family and others from great physical harm and danger. I've seen accident scenes where you have to believe that everyone died, yet there were only scratches and bruises. I think that anyone who has children has to believe in protecting guardian angels. These angels watch over us every day and the day will come when we take our last earthly breath and the angels will carry our soul safely to our heavenly home. "Lord, let at last thine angels come. To Abram's bosom bear me home that I may die unfearing."

Yes, angels are with us daily. When we are lonely or tempted or suffering, we should be comforted by the fact that these invisible beings are with us. Think of Elijah under the juniper tree or St. Paul, shipwrecked on the Adriatic Sea. We are never alone. Let the thought of angels comfort you!

The angels carry out God's will in heaven. They want us to carry out God's will here on earth. They want us to repent of our sins. Jesus tells us, "I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Did you ever stop to consider that each day as you say your prayers and renew your baptismal vows, renouncing Satan and all his evil works and ways, brings rejoicing in the halls of heaven by the holy angels? You should.

Thank God for the gift of his holy angels. They are here to assist us, to protect us, to pray for us and bring us safely home. They want us to stay connected with Jesus so that we will confidently pray, "and when my short life is ended, by his angel hosts attended, he shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest." AMEN.

