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Festival of St. Michael and All Angels

Luke 10:17-20 – Nothing Will Harm You

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The Bible gives us names for two of God's good angels. Probably the one we all know best is the great messenger of God's grace, Gabriel, the one we hear about most often in connection with the Christmas story. Gabriel's job was to announce to the waiting world the amazing works of God's salvation in the coming of Jesus Christ.

But the other angel that's specifically mentioned in Scripture had a different job. His name is Michael, and he's called the *archangel* – the leader of the angels. The Bible says that he's in charge of the great angel army that God uses to protect and care for us. Well, this festival that bears his name is the day we remember God's great love in giving us these amazing spirit beings, the angels, whose sole purpose for existence is to serve you and me and all those who will inherit salvation.

Today we're celebrating the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. For 1,500 years the Christian Church has celebrated this festival near the Fall equinox, the day of 12 hours of sunlight and 12 hours of darkness toward the end of September. As Christians watched the autumn nights grow longer and the days grow shorter, they were reminded of the struggle between good and evil – between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, between the angel armies of God and the demon armies of Satan. And so, every year as autumn darkened into winter, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Archangel, and remembered that Michael and all the angels fought on our side.

You see, angels are one of God's answers to our fears. As we go through this life, God's message to us is this: no matter what sounds we hear, no matter what dilemmas we face, no matter what tragedies we endure, don't be afraid, because we are not alone.

Jesus' followers found that out firsthand in our Gospel lesson for today. Sometime before, Jesus had sent out 72 of them in pairs to

preach the Gospel and to proclaim the coming of God's spiritual Kingdom. But as you might guess, they weren't always met all that kindly. See, this fallen world had a king already. It was the devil, and he held all of us captive under sin, the fear of death, and the threat of hell. The devil kept sinful humanity in slavery and there was nothing we could do to get ourselves out or to fight back. Until Jesus came. When Jesus came to fight the devil and win back the people he made for his glory and fellowship, he brought with him all the forces of light to destroy all the forces of darkness.

And that battle raged as the disciples went from town to town, doing the Lord's work and carrying out his saving mission in this world. They carried with them the unmistakable message: this world can only have one true King, and the Savior is here to take what is rightly his. And as the 72 went along sharing that Gospel, that great Sword of the Spirit that the devil and his demons can never stand against, that battle played out invisibly, right in their midst. See, the coming of the Gospel of Christ through the mouths of even sinful mortals like these 72 and like you and me meant that Satan himself, once perched so high and mighty as self-proclaimed ruler of this sinful world, was falling like lightning right before their very eyes. Our King, the Lord Christ, was victorious over theirs. God's good angels put the devil's demons to flight. And even sinful mortals, armed with the simple Word and faith in Jesus our Savior, were overcoming all the forces of evil and bringing them into submission in the name of our Lord.

Who would've guessed it? Who would've expected it? Certainly not the 72. "*The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'* [Jesus] replied, '*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*'" While the disciples were marveling at the amazing new things they could do, Jesus had to bring them back into perspective and remind them what was really going on. He was really the one who had won the victory over Satan, and these smaller victories the disciples were experiencing were really just byproducts of his ultimate victory. Jesus defeated Satan first of all in their 40-day temptation showdown in the wilderness when Satan couldn't get him to crack. Then one day soon Jesus would crush Satan's head by giving

his perfect life on the cross and rising again on Easter morning. And just as surely as he came the first time to win our salvation and freedom from Satan's evil clutches, so also Jesus will come again one day to forever destroy the devil and his work so they can never hurt us again.

And that word "hurt" is an important one here, because for Jesus' sake, that's the worst the devil can do to us now. See, the devil and his demons may still scare us and intimidate us sometimes. They may still tempt and threaten us like snakes and scorpions and anything else that might cause us pain or even take our lives in this world. But that's all they can do is *hurt* us – not harm us, not injure us, not do any permanent damage to us. Yes, we "trample on snakes," as Jesus said, in the same way that Christ himself crushed the serpent's head on the cross – not physically, but spiritually.

So when's the last time you did that? When's the last time the demons submitted to you in the Lord's name? Maybe you didn't even notice, but that's because our battles, too, are invisible and spiritual. But the demons submit to you, you trample snakes and scorpions, you overcome the power of the enemy every time you say "no" to the devil's temptations in this world. Every time you prioritize God's Word and worship when you could be doing other things. Every time you take a bold step in your life to serve Christ faithfully with everything you've got. Every time you give offerings to support Gospel ministry and advance Christ's cause that you could've otherwise spent on yourself. And every time you keep your cool when your kids make it hard or every time you love your spouse like Christ would even when they aren't being very lovable. With God's help and with his angels at your side to guard and protect you from spiritual harm and danger, you too can make even the demons submit and overcome all the power of the enemy.

See, if you actually stomp on a snake here in this world, you might get bitten and you might have to suffer for it. But though it might hurt your body, it can never harm your soul – that's what Jesus is telling us here. With Christ's love and care and with his holy, mighty angels watching out for you, nothing will harm you. And even if by chance you do fall to the scorpion's sting in this world, then still by faith you

can rejoice as the angels carry you to Jesus' side, "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

I mean ultimately, it's just like Jesus said, isn't it? "*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*" There is a definite comfort and assurance that our greatest spiritual enemies, the ones who hate us and want to harm us the most, can't anymore. And that's not because we're so great or powerful. It's because by God's grace our names are written in heaven, and because of that, God sends his holy angels day and night to serve us, to guard us, to keep evil away from us, and to finally be there to lift us up on eagles' wings out of harm's way and to our Savior's side forever. Like a heavenly bodyguard or the best secret service the world will ever know, God specifically tasks his angels to watch over you because before you were born your name was signed in the Book of Life, etched in the blood of Christ, and then sealed on his heart in faith through Holy Baptism. You are now a child of the almighty God, and you mean so much to him that he assigns his mighty angels to your care as his personal assurance that just as your names are written in heaven, so you will surely make it to heaven one day to be there with him and all his holy angels forevermore.

Yes, the devil and his demons may still rant and rave and fight with all their might to cling to some semblance of power in this dark world. But thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ and thanks to St. Michael and all the angels who do his bidding and serve the good of his people, we know their power is hollow, their threats are empty, and we have the perfect escort through life to rescue us from every evil attack and finally bring us safely to God's heavenly Kingdom. No, my friends, you are not alone. No matter what happens here, don't be afraid, because with God's angels at your back to guard and keep you, nothing will ever harm you. Amen.