*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good Morning!

Fellow Church Year nerds have already looked at their calendars and noticed that the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, also known as Michaelmas, was actually this past Wednesday. But there are just sometimes, some feasts that are worth observing and celebrating on a Sunday. For me, Michaelmas became one of them as I used to work at a youth conference whose patron is St. Michael and I fondly remember my matriculation to seminary during the Michaelmas term. And beyond my biographical connection to the day, I think it's worth taking a break from the long green season of Pentecost to pray and reflect on God's great goodness and generosity in appointing the angels to watch over and protect us. So, today, I bid you a blessed Michaelmas, transferred.

And honestly, angels are a topic that comes up quite a bit in my ministry as I'm out and about. People kind of assume they understand angels, because they are a near constant subject of popular culture. This was especially true in the mid to late 90's, and there's all sorts of fun cultural artifacts from that time: from the schmaltzy TV dramas like "Touched by an Angel, to that awesome Nick Cage movie (with that legendary Goo Goo Dolls Song in the soundtrack) called "City of Angels," to the edgy and trippy cult hit Japanese show "Evangelion." But even more recent pop culture has leaned into the angelic with shows like the long running paranormal procedural, "Supernatural" (that's for Meray, who is a big fan I've gathered) and even that show about a *fallen* angel, "Lucifer." While all of these things are (mostly) great entertainment, they are mostly wrong about how angels work, at least as far as the Scriptures are concerned.

It was honestly a little gratifying over the past couple of years when a meme popped up on social media platforms like twitter and reddit that really leaned into the admittedly crazy way that angels are described in the Scriptures. The "Biblically Accurate Angels" meme did actually present a pretty decent depiction of the many winged, multi eyeballed, heavily symbolic descriptions of angels we find in the prophetic and apocalyptic books of the Bible. The thing is, I find what angels get up to in the Bible to be quite a bit more interesting than what they seem to get up to in movies and TV. In the latter, they are usually depicted in ways not too dissimilar as Marvel superheroes: powerful yet flawed in ways that service the narratives in which they appear. Which, as a lifelong marvel fan can be pretty cool, I admit. But in the Bible and the Christian tradition, they have a lot more going on.

Among the most obvious angelic activities we see in Scripture is the one that gives them their name. The Greek word, *aggelos*, whence we get our English word "angel" is a fairly common word for messenger. And think about how many angels we find in the New Testament whose job is simply to announce and guide. Certainly that's true of our dear friend, Gabriel, who made the Annunciation to Mary. But there are more examples besides, especially in the Gospel according to Luke, where we find the angels announcing the coming of the Messiah and leading Jesus' friends to look elsewhere than the empty tomb. Throughout the Old Testament, angels are among the most consistent way that human beings interact with the divine life of Heaven. Examples that come quickly to mind are Abraham's welcoming of three angelic visitors near the Oaks of Mamre or perhaps Jacob's wrestling with an agent of God's intervention at Peniel of Jordan. In most of these cases, human beings are confronted with the power and holiness of God. Once they get over their initial awe, these humans are invited into the ongoing plan and story of God's salvation. In essence, these messengers are agents of God's own desire to be known, and to help us to make Him known.

And if messengers like Gabriel invite us into God's ongoing plan for cosmic redemption, protectors like Michael, help us stay on mission. Now Michael shows up most prominently in literature like Daniel's prophetic visions and the Revelation to St. John. In both, Michael is depicted as God's general in the conflict against infernal evil. In both, God's champion is assumed to have made the ultimate victory over evil, even as the most decisive blow to sin and death were dealt by the cross, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since Michael was long understood to be Israel's protector, the Church throughout the ages have also looked to St. Michael as yet one more way that God protects and cares for us, an important and perhaps even personal aspect of His divine order and providence.

So, if the Bible assumes the angelic order, and the Church's tradition assumes their ministry, I suppose the next question that might arise is "how do we interact with them?" While there are no doubt many little gift books describing anecdotal adventures with angels, most of how we truly understand their work among us is via the Church's life in prayer. When I visit a sick person at the hospital, I always ask God's blessing on the patient and for Him to send Michael and some of angels for some extra muscle. I know that God's Spirit is more than enough for our healing and protection, but it is kind of nice to know there are a few extra heavenly bells and whistles meant for the defense of His people. But the most regular audience we have with the angels is in the context of the Eucharistic prayer. The Church has long believed that whatever barrier we have between us and Heaven (and the multitude of its hosts) melts away as Jesus deigns to be among us in the offering of the altar. I often think of the Eucharist as the culmination of Jesus' promise to Nathaniel, that the prayers and praise of the Church gathered are indeed the stairway upon which the angles ascend and descend; their adoration and worship being collected with ours every time we celebrate the mysteries.

So, once again Happy Michaelmas. In just a few minutes our voices will indeed be raised in the Eucharistic prayer and will once again join with angels, archangels, and all the host of Heaven to pray the hymn of the thrice holy God. So, if you’re still wondering when the next time, you’ll meet an angel will be, remember that the hosts are in full choir every time we celebrate the feast of the Lamb. And as I close so that we can continue to enjoy the company of the Angels, I pray that the glory of the hosts of heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, would reign in our hearts today. I pray that St. Michael would defend us in the battle against the evils we see around us, the principalities, and powers, against the rulers of the world of darkness and the spirit of wickedness in high places.

To God be all glory. Amen.