



HIS ANGELS AT OUR SIDE

The Feast of Michael the Archangel

Father Deacon Howard

"We thank you Lord for this Liturgy which you accept from our hands, even though there stand before you thousands of archangels, and tens of thousands of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim". **The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom**

At each Divine Liturgy we profess that we "believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen". Today we celebrate the unseen thing that God created – angels. The Church speaks of the existence of the angels as purely spiritual creatures. They don't form a separate universe but rather are an integral part of our world. They are mighty spirits sent by God to bring us his message. They are servants of Christ in the mystery of the Church. They have intelligence, memory and will. They are

personal and immortal creatures and surpass in perfection all other visible creatures.

We know from Scripture who angels are and why they were created. They look back at us from the pages of the Bible, where they are mentioned 230 times. They look down at us from the iconography on the walls and windows of our churches. The Church Council of 869 declared "what the Gospel proclaims to us in words, the icon proclaims for us in color". Together they tell us the 3-fold angelic mission: angels serve as messengers of God or accomplish particular tasks; they carry out his will and as a host of angels or choirs of singers they are in constant adoration and praise of God in Heaven.

One particular task is to be angelic guardians. Angel guardians are chosen for us by God. They are beloved servants of Christ who placed them at our side to watch over us and to care for us. They protect us. They help us to understand how we might grow in holiness. They defend us against temptations; warn us of impending evil and inspire us to remain faithful to God in prayer.

At Divine Liturgy we petition our Lord "for an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies". We pray that they will intercede for us and help us to understand the plan and the providence of God and to see things in light of His will and in the power of His grace. It's reassuring to know that our guardian angel will continue their journey with us until we come home to our Father's house. And that they will always be by our side, even in the joys of Heaven.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we find angels in constant adoration and praise of God. In fact, their primary mission is the adoration of God Almighty. They exist to praise his splendor as revealed in all the works of his hand. Psalm 148 calls upon the angels to give praise to the creator of the Universe. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from Heaven; Praise him, all his angels, and all his heavenly armies". Psalm 19 speaks to the splendor of God's glory in creation. "How clearly the sky reveals God's glory. How plainly it shows what he has done".

Isaiah experienced the splendor of the Lord when God called him to be a prophet (Isaiah 6: 1-8). He saw the Lord sitting on his throne. Standing around him were the seraphim, calling out to each other "Holy, holy, holy! The Lord Almighty is holy. His glory fills the world". Isaiah said, "There is no hope for me. I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful". One of the angels flew down to him carrying a burning coal taken from the altar. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said "This has touched your lips and now your guilt is gone and your sins are forgiven." At Divine Liturgy the priest takes a particle of the consecrated bread, bows his head and silently repeats the words of the seraphic angel "This has touched my lips and shall remove my wickedness and purge my sins."

Isaiah went on to say "Then I heard the Lord say, 'Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?' I answered, 'I will go! Send me'!" Throughout salvation history God has used messengers. The Jews fled from Egypt fearing for their safety and God said: "I will send an angel ahead of you to protect you as you travel and to bring you to the place which I have prepared (Exodus 23: 20-22). An angel announced the Incarnation of Jesus to Mary. When the women went to the tomb where Christ was buried an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled the stone away. An angel prepared the way for the Mother of God in her apparitions to the children of Fatima and a seraph appeared to St. Francis when he received his stigmata.

Angels also adore God in the liturgical mysteries of the altar. At the Little Entrance the priest standing with the deacon at the Royal Doors silently prays: "Lord God our Master, who established in Heaven the ranks and armies of angels and archangels for the service of Your glory, grant, that as we make our entrance, the holy angels may enter too, serving with us and joining in the praise of your goodness." These awesome creatures then enter the sanctuary of the Holy of the Holies, to join with us in the Eucharist celebration. But despite their splendor they cannot partake of the Eucharist banquet. Angels don't share in our human nature so they cannot receive Jesus' Sacred Humanity – body, blood and soul joined to Jesus' Divinity.

At Divine worship when the deacon calls you to approach the banquet table, "with the fear of God and with faith", remember that these magnificent spiritual beings are filled with wonder and awe at the privilege that is ours as children of God to be united to Christ in this way.

Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be forever.