

Our Victory in Heaven Is Certain! Text: Revelation 12:7-12

God's grace, His mercy and peace are yours this day and forevermore thru Jesus Christ, His Son our Lord. Amen.

Today we celebrate a peculiar little festival in the church year. Most of these Feast and Festival days, which are listed on page xi in the LSB, are assigned to the observance of someone involving a biblical or Christian hero or saint whose witness is important to the life of the Church. But this is not a day dedicated to remembering a person; it's a specific angel and all the rest of the heavenly host whom we remember today. Today is the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

St. Michael himself was a rather obscure and rare figure in Biblical literature, but was wildly popular at certain points in the history of God's people. From the Biblical witness, he appears to be an arch-angel which is simply a way of saying that he exercises great authority among angels. He is credited with being the general of the heavenly armies, or "hosts" as the KJV frequently stated it. He leads these hosts against the forces of Satan and the demons and wins the victory.

Early church father, Thomas Aquinas was really interested in studying the angels as a way he thought, to better understand God. Since about 1700 AD when the age of Enlightenment began, reason and rational thought took over and cast doubt into the very existence of a spiritual reality which includes angels for most of our unbelieving neighbors. To them the world is simply the stuff we can see, touch, experience and most importantly measure mathematically or in a lab. If it doesn't show up on the various instruments there, if you can't directly prove something, it doesn't exist in their world view. We've referenced this in our Wed am, video Bible sessions.

One of the greatest lies the very bad angel - Satan - has succeeded in having people believe in our day is that he is a mythical figure portrayed in Scripture and not a real being. If you don't think Satan exists, he can work under the radar much more effectively. The Scriptures, however, reveal Satan for who he truly is! This is clear from Satan's

presence in the Garden of Eden as tempter of Adam and Eve to his presence in the desert tempting Jesus.

It's the work of Jesus in overcoming Satan and the forces of evil that comes to a climax in our reading from Revelation 12. There we heard of the work of God's good angels, namely Michael and company, in bringing an end to the activity of Satan as the accuser who accuses sinners before our God day and night. Satan is depicted as a prosecuting attorney who argues against sinners before God. He accuses sinners of not being worthy of fellowship with God now and for eternity.

The joyous message of this text is that this accuser of all mankind, Satan, is no longer in heaven to bring accusations against us. This text unveils this truth for us: the **Victory in Heaven Brings Hope on Earth!**

Satan's rebellion and removal from heaven is one of those mysteries of which God tells us very little in His Word. We do know that Satan led a substantial rebellion of angels after creation and before the fall of Adam and Eve. Revelation 12:4 indicates that up to a third of the angels listened to the temptation that Satan later used on Adam and Eve: "*You will be like God.*"

Our text is one of the few places where certain details of this mystery are made clearer. The book of Job and Revelation 12 both make it clear that after Satan's fall he still had access to the presence of God for some time. His primary activity was to bring accusations before God against sinners, as our text states: "*The accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God*" (v 10). The scene is not a pretty one; the powerful angel Satan kept reminding God about the sins of mankind day and night! The one who deceived Adam and Eve continued to remind God of the ongoing pattern of sin in Adam's descendants, including you and me.

The prophet Zechariah's vision shows Satan engaged in such accusation: "*Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan*

standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?' Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And to him he said, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments' " (Zech 3:1–4).

The picture here is clear: Satan reveled in the power to stand before God accusing and condemning sinners. The Angel of the Lord, who is the preincarnate Christ, has to defend Joshua the priest against the accusations of Satan.

The good news proclaimed by our text is that this accusation activity of Satan is no longer effective due to his defeat in a great a war—cast out of heaven, thrown down to earth: *"Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him"* (vv 7–9). No longer does Satan have his day in God's court to bring accusations against us. Michael, one of God's archangels, and his fellow good angels did battle with Satan and his angels and threw them down to earth.

It appears, from first glance, that the source of this victory is the power of Michael and the other good angels of God, almost as if Satan and his angels were not as strong. The source of this victory in heaven, however, is not found solely or primarily in Michael and the other good angels. Our text tells us how the martyred Christians overcame Satan and the rest of the evil angels: *"And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even to death"* (v 11). If this is how these Christians overcame Satan, it is also how created angels overcame him.

The song of praise in our text puts credit where credit is due: *"the blood of the Lamb."*

This is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ as the unblemished, perfect sacrifice whose blood makes payment for all sins of mankind. The basis for Satan's removal as the accuser before God is the blood of the Lamb. Satan can no longer accuse sinners because Christ paid the price of all sin and has taken His place before God as the Advocate of all sinners, interceding for us. John writes of this wonderful work in his first epistle: "*If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1 Jn 2:1–2). The apostle Paul also tells us of Christ defending us before the Father: "*Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*" (Rom 8:34). **The source of this victory in heaven, then, is the blood of the Lamb.**

This victory in heaven brings us hope on earth. Our text states: "*Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*" (v 12). These words do not, on first hearing, seem very reassuring. Yet in spite of Satan's wrath, we who dwell on earth have hope because Satan can no longer effectively accuse us before God. When your sins are drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism, or forgiven in the Absolution, or pardoned through the eating of Christ's body and the drinking of his blood in this Holy Sacrament, you stand forgiven before God in heaven. Christ is your advocate; Satan cannot accuse you! Moreover, we are reminded that the same angels who cast Satan out of heaven are the very angels who guard and watch over us each day on this earth. Michael and all good angels have the victory of Christ on their side; they do not meet Satan as equals but as angels who are superior in the Lord, their Creator.

Lest anyone think that we do not have hope in the midst of the evil that Satan furthers on this earth, we need only fast-forward to chapter 20 of Revelation, where we read of Satan's destiny: "*And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day*

and night forever and ever” (20:10).

We thank God for this victory in heaven, won by Christ on the cross and carried out by Michael and the angelic hosts. This victory fills our earthly struggles with hope as we press toward our heavenly goal. Surrounded and protected by these angels, we join their voices in praising the Lamb: “*Worthy are you . . . for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth”* (5:9–10). Amen.

And the peace of God which does far more than our hearts and minds can do, keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.