

Reformation Day  
31 October 2010  
Pastor R.R. Krueger  
Rev. 14:6-7

I have always been interested in angels; even fascinated by them, their very being, their varied tasks. Could be that part of my interest in angels is due to the Biblical fact that I know that I will spending all of eternity in their company.

Angels are all over the Bible! They are there in the very opening chapters of Genesis and in the very closing chapters of Revelation. And, speaking of angels being there in the Revelation of St. John, the Divine, did you catch that angelic mention in the time-honored Epistle reading for this, the Festival of the Reformation? That Epistle serves us this morning as our text:

*“Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe and people. He said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*

#### We Focus on the Messenger’s Message

##### I. Fear God – Law

##### II. Give Him Glory – Gospel

I suppose it is only natural for us to want to know more about that angel mentioned in our Reformation Day Epistle and text. From Scripture, we know that there are rankings or classes of angels: angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim. We also know from Scripture the names of at least two of them: Gabriel and Michael. So what do we know about this Reformation Day Epistle and text angel?

We remember those 95 Theses that Luther posted on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on this very day in 1517. However, as early as 35 years later, 1552, another Augustian monk, Michael Stiefel, made a clear association with our Revelation angel and Martin Luther. Further, at Luther’s funeral in 1546, Dr. Bugenhagen, a fellow-reformer with Luther and member of the faculty at Wittenberg, said Luther was the Reformation angel because of his clear pronouncement of both Law and Gospel. Then over 400 years later, one of my professors at the Seminary (who also wound up being my father-in-law) would firmly state that Luther was that angel in our Reformation text. So, I figure that I am in pretty good and solid company when I reaffirm to you that Luther was the angel of our Reformation Day Epistle and today’s text.

But it was also Luther who, when asked by his followers what they should now call themselves, said – “Whatever you do, do not call yourselves ‘Lutherans’.” Guess that wasn’t the last time folks did not listen to their Pastor! But we shall now follow Luther’s advice to those followers and we shall focus not on the angel, but on the angel’s message.

And that message, clearly spelled out in our text, is a twofold message. Just listen to it: **FEAR GOD AND GIVE HIM GLORY.**

You children and young people in Weekday school – and all of you alumni from our Weekday School and any and all of us who have been through Confirmation Classes...remember the opening words of Luther's explanation to each of the Ten Commandments? We are to fear God...

Fear God – that's the rumblings we hear rolling down from the top of Mount Sinai. The Law clearly announces what God wants us to do and what God wants us to avoid. But when we consider the Law's pronouncements: 'This is what God wants us to do' and, 'This is what God wants us to avoid,' shudder! Because we have to say with St. Paul: *The good that I would, I do not and the evil that I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?* But it was also St. Paul who reassures himself and us: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us.*

Well, hooray, we are therefore free from the Law! Hold on! Back to your Small Catechism with Luther's name on it. The question is asked: "What, then, is the purpose of the Law?"...seeing that we Christians have been redeemed from the curse of the Law. For us Christians, the Law is still in effect but for different reasons. Remember the threefold use of the Law for Christians? We are to use the Law as a curb – stopping outbursts of sin; as a mirror – showing us how we look in the eyes of God; as a rule – giving us direction for leading a God-pleasing life.

In Luther's time and shortly after the Reformation, there were those who claimed that the Law could be ignored. After all, they maintained, the church of Rome sells indulgences, assigns acts of penance and orders us to do good works (like put such-and-so much money in the poor box)...all of which nullifies the demands of the Law. But even within the followers of Luther, there were those who claimed that because of Christ, the Law has no effect or demands of us. They were known as the Antinomians: *anti*-against, *nominus*-law. And many of you sitting right here are still mindful of those painful days circling around the 'walkout' at our Seminary in St. Louis and the creation of that renegade school called Seminex. They taught that the third use of the Law – a rule – does not apply to Christians because Christians are free from 'rules.'

Now, if all of this sounds like lessons from Church history, and some of it pretty 'ancient' church history, let me alert you to the fact that antinomianism is alive and well in these, the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are still those teaching and preaching that the Law just doesn't apply to believers. They can be spotted a mile off by what they say: 'God wants you to be well'...'God wants you to be successful'...'God wants you to be wealthy'...and here is the grand-daddy of them all...'God wants you to be happy.' Question. Where in Holy Scripture is that written? We don't call it antinomianism today; it's known as "Glory Theology" as opposed to the Biblical and correct theology of "The Cross and the Crown." See...same wolf, just a change of sheep's clothing.

But, fear God – Law is not all that our Revelation angel spoke, is it? He went on to say: And give God glory – that's Gospel! Because of Jesus Christ...His coming into the world, His substitutionary life for us, His death and His resurrection...God is to receive glory...glory from us. Just as those three Christmas angels cried out "*Glory to God in the highest,*" so we also cry out and not just on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of December, but every day of our lives.

However, there is more to the Gospel message of our Revelation angel, isn't there? He speaks of why we should give God glory. Listen: "*and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.*" First hearing of that may well cause us to scratch our heads. How can judgment...judgment day...the

end of the world cause glory to be given to God? For the unbeliever, it cannot! For the unbeliever, the prospect of judgment simply fills him with fear, dread and trembling or, at the very best, it fills him with a sense of trying to bargain with God: "I tried to live by the 10 Commandments; I took care of my children and cared for my aging parents"...and on and on and on. No! And I would repeat: for the unbeliever, the coming of judgment does anything but cause him to give glory to God.

But I am not preaching to unbelievers, nor are you worshipping with a group of unbelievers. Is it not the case – for us – that end-time, judgment is the final, total, absolute and complete vindication of Him and we who worship, believe in, trust and follow Him? Think upon those two concluding statements we make every time we confess our faith using The Nicene Creed: "And I look for the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the world to come." That's anticipating judgment and for us believers, that's Good News, that's Gospel.

I find it more than noteworthy that 'liturgical custom' suggests that at the conclusion of the Nicene Creed, as well as the Apostles' and the Athanasian, the sign of the cross be struck. Why? Because it is the Cross that is very much central to judgment...throughout the Book of Revelation there are multi-references to '*the Lamb who was slain.*' Further, Christ, Himself, makes it most clear that it is through His Cross that glory is given to God. Listen to Him (in Gethsemane): "*Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You.*" Then earlier in His ministry and when speaking to the Pharisees: "*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.*" And what about His introduction to that beloved verse on John 3:16: "*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*"

The crucified and risen again Christ is the exact center to all that we believe and at the judgment, we and our faith are vindicated causing us to give endless glory to God. And that is Gospel.

But I wish for you all to be reminded of still another that bears the 'name' of the Angel of Revelation...and it belongs to this parish. It is a time-honored tradition and custom to give names to church bells. Remember the Hunchback of Notre Dame talking to the various bells in that bell tower and calling them by their various names? Well, on the day that we dedicated that bell at our main entrance, a name was given to it: "The Angel of Revelation!" Want to know why that name was chosen?

You children can answer...but so can you teens and even you adults. What does the bell say? "Ding, Dong." Every time you hear that bell peal and speak you hear it saying: Law and Gospel, Law and Gospel. Not one or the other but both. The Law – Ding – tells me that God hates my sins. But the Gospel – Dong – assures me that God loves me. My God hates my sins, but my God, for the sake of Jesus, loves me. How do I know that? How can I be so very sure about that? The same way that you know it and are so very sure about it! Because of that Eternal Gospel carried by our angel of Revelation. I know that God loves me and I am most sure about that and so are you! How? Why? Because of that clear "Thus saith the Lord!" Or, to put it in the most simple and plainest of words: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!"

Amen.