

“Do angels know how to have fun?”

- Do angels know how to have fun??
 - What a fun question, isn't it?
 - Could we grab a beverage with Michael, Raphael, or Gabriel?
 - I wonder if we would ever want to invite an archangel to a party, or if that might be risky
 - And does this mean anything for a church named after an archangel, St. Michael's Episcopal Church?
 - These fun thoughts hit me last week, to be honest, as I was reflecting on the bishop consecration and celebration
 - It was a fun weekend, a joyful weekend- I don't think I was really expecting it to be so
 - I don't know what I was expecting really, but the service, the music, the people, and the wait finally being over
 - And my joy in Bishop Paula's long journey of recovery, while not over, has had a grace-fueled and grace-filled moment
 - And I was already looking forward to today, our St. Michael's Day and ministry fair
 - And as I have been praying with one key element all week long, a gift from Bishop Budde's sermon at the consecration:
 - The “joy quotient.”
 - Angels, churches, joy and celebration... perhaps today we can connect the dots like one of those kids' puzzles
 - to reveal what message God might be drawing for us today
- Now I have confessed to you before when preaching St. Michael's Day, and preaching about angels...
 - That frankly angels occupy very little of my faith life, of my spirituality, of my working understanding of God
 - When talking about angelic lore, it starts to bring up a certain sense of skepticism in me, living in a post-Enlightenment world
 - It has been placed in me from things like that show “touched by an Angel” back in the 90s

- And more recently the show Supernatural, which is awesome, and in which the angel Castiel shows up,
 - and later even Saint Michael himself¹
- But from a strictly Christian point of view, they are less personable, less “guests at a party” type material
- Angels actually predate Christianity by a long shot- in fact, Michael, the archangel:
 - He was already known by name and a part of Jewish popular belief by the time Jesus was born²
- And we have Hebrew Scripture full of stories:
 - Ezekiel has an angel leading Moses through the wilderness after he had received the 10 commandments (Ex 23:20-21)
 - We have fantastic lessons of hospitality with angelic characters, Abraham welcoming strangers and feeding them
 - And it turns out they are angels sent from God, and Abraham was blessed
 - We have Sodom and Gomorrah, and the inverse of hospitality, where they were not received and treated with respect
 - And Sodom and Gomorra was destroyed
 - We have angels appearing to Mary telling her she will bear a son
 - And angels singing with joy to shepherd when Jesus is born
 - In Matthew, and twice in Luke, we hear the angels say, “Fear Not.”
 - God is coming, and instead of coming to punish, God is coming to save
 - (Did you know that Christmas is less than 100 days away? I know...)
 - And most applicable to you and me today, we have St. Michael the Angel, leader of God’s army of angels, fighting the dragon in Revelation
 - And once and for all defeating evil, completing God’s redemption and salvation of creation
 - Saving it even from itself
 - A prayer used in Ireland went something like this: ³
 - Saint Michael,
 - defend us in battle
 - that we might not perish
 - at the dreadful judgment.

¹ <https://supernatural.fandom.com/wiki/Angels>

² <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/254.html>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_to_Saint_Michael#In_the_Leonine_Prayers

- As time went on, the dogma and doctrine around angels became more intricate, and there were nine orders, each with three traids, ⁴
- And becoming the source of many apocryphal stories
- We also have one appear in our Old Testament reading today, the story of Jacob's ladder
- Most interpretations see this story as God's embrace of Jacob, and the continuation of the covenant through him
- Then in our Gospel, Jesus references the same story, promising Nathaniel that he will see things just as amazing
- And that indeed God is still working to fulfill the covenant, continuing the line from Abraham, to Jacob, and now to Jesus
- In both instances, these Angels are bearing witness to God's presence
- They point to God and God's work in the world
- So Angels:
 - They carry out God's plan
 - Bear witness to God's presence in the world
 - Reassure us by proclaiming "fear not", it is salvation that is coming, not judgment
 - And fight the good fight, working to overcome the powers of evil.
 - Now we are getting somewhere
 - I still may not have this whole thing about angels worked out, but I sure am fond of their mission
 - It actually starts to sound a whole lot like the mission we signed up for, our baptismal covenant
 - It is something we all be doing, than bearing witness to God's work, proclaiming God's salvation and redemptive work
 - And fighting against the systemic evils that plague our world
 - But what about joy?
 - What would make an angel dance, perhaps theoretically on the head of a pin, somewhere? ⁵
- A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus teaching in parables⁶
 - One about the lost sheep, another about a lost coin
 - After the lost sheep was retrieved, Jesus concluded with:

⁴ <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/254.html>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_many_angels_can_dance_on_the_head_of_a_pin%3F

⁶ https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp19_RCL.html#gsp1

- “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”
- And after the lost coin was found;
 - “Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
- Following these in Luke’s gospel is then the parable of the prodigal son
- Showing us just how much rejoicing there is, and how abundant it is, and available to us no matter how far we have strayed
- The angels themselves rejoice over our prayer, our worship, our outreach- all of the things that I hope come together this morning
- And the joy in heaven at our hearts turning to God even just for this moment, they are praying that joy overflows onto us
- That joy may be found in our hearts at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Barrington
- I cannot tell you how important this truly is
 - I have for years tried to describe it as the “emotional temperature” in a church
 - That upon visiting, a new comer will walk away knowing in their bones what kind of church they just attended
 - Warm, or cold? Joyous, or bitter
 - Optimistic, or dissatisfied?
 - The reason music, preaching, and liturgy are all essential components to a Sunday morning experience is because these are the ingredients to our “joy quotient”
 - This phrase is new to me and comes directly from the consecration sermon last weekend
 - I completely stole that phrase, and I am going to keep using it forever now, not “emotional temperature”, but “joy quotient”
 - Thank you Bishop Budde
 - She was discussing Paula’s time on her staff in DC, and said that after visiting parishes on Sunday morning
 - They would discuss the “joy quotient” at those parishes.
 - She said that the joy quotient, more than any other measure, began to indicate the possibilities within that parish.
 - More than size, budget, location, programs, architecture... It was the hearts of the people paved the way

- And I have spent the better part of the week praying with this idea, getting ready for today
- And wanting to ask you, in addition to all of the other things you give and do here at St. Michael's,
- If you might give of your joy today, and in the months to come
- Can we ramp up our joy quotient together?
- Can we make heaven rejoice because we are turned our hearts to God and to each other?
- Can we make an archangel have fun and dance again?
- I know in my bones it has been a tough 3 years, and that after a tough decade before that for this parish
 - There has been much change, new faces, some ministries did not survive COVID time
 - And some new ones are beginning to sprout
 - In person worship attendance is not as it once was, even 3 years ago, a story that each parish in our deanery is experiencing,
 - And even the other churches in Barrington
 - This is why we are kicking off that CAT survey today- you will get an email today or tomorrow about it.
 - And yet, there is still cause for rejoicing, joy, and indeed that joy might just be the critical element in our future
 - So pledge your joy today.
 - And if you cannot, if your joy feels far away thanks to the cares of this world, that's ok- then come open-hearted and received joy here.
 - Allow us to carry you
- I want to leave you with a prayer from our Compline and Evening prayer that I think very much applies today
- The good bishop mentioned it: she said joy was so important, that this prayer asked God to protect it, to shield it
- Let us pray

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this day, and **give your angels** charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, **shield the joyous**; and all for your love's sake [, and for your church's sake].

Amen.