

“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 himself<sup>1</sup>
- 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 born<sup>2</sup>
- 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: <sup>3</sup>
    - Saint Michael,
    - defend us in battle
    - that we might not perish
    - at the dreadful judgment.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer\\_to\\_Saint\\_Michael#In\\_the\\_Leonine\\_Prayers](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, <sup>4</sup>
- 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? <sup>5</sup>
- A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus teaching in parables<sup>6</sup>
  - One about the lost sheep, another about a lost coin
  - After the lost sheep was retrieved, Jesus concluded with:

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

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How\\_many\\_angels\\_can\\_dance\\_on\\_the\\_head\\_of\\_a\\_pin%3F](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_many_angels_can_dance_on_the_head_of_a_pin%3F)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC\\_RCL/Pentecost/CProp19\\_RCL.html#gsp1](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.