

SUNDAY SERMON – 7TH LUKE – SYNAXIS OF THE ARCHANGELS – 2015-11-08

Fr. Demetri Tsigas, St. Katherine, Melbourne, Florida

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Angels. What do we know about angels? For many of us, our knowledge of angels comes popular culture, from Frank Capra's Clarence Odbody, George Bailey's guardian angel in the 1946 film classic **It's A Wonderful Life**. For others it may be from Michael Landon's Jonathan Smith, the angel on probation helping people in the 1980's TV series **Highway to Heaven**. Perhaps the best popular depiction of angels is Roma Downey's angel in training, Monica, in the 1990's and early 2000's TV series **Touched by Angel**. I confess that I could never watch an episode without tears running down my cheek. These are all positive though perhaps not always accurate depictions. There are a great many more less accurate and less positive depictions which have formed our personal and collective understanding or belief about angels.

Today our Orthodox Church commemorates the Synaxis or Gathering of the Archangels. We have included an extensive article about the traditional Orthodox understanding of angels in your Sunday Bulletin beginning on page 11.

(<http://oca.org/saints/lives/2015/11/08/103244-synaxis-of-the-archangel-michael-and-the-other-bodiless-powers>) I am not going to read it aloud but encourage you to do so with your family, then look up some of the Bible verses to read from the Bible about them.

Angels appear throughout the Old and New Testament. Much of time they are divine armies who appear or don't appear but act on behalf of God and the righteous who seek and serve God. When the people of Israel repented and turned back to God, God blessed them and delivered them from their enemies. If you have an Orthodox Study Bible, look up chapter 19, verses 20 to 36 in the Fourth Book of Kingdoms. (If you have a Protestant Bible, look up the same chapter and verses in Second Kings.) The "all-powerful, all-conquering" Sennacherib the King of Assyria was threatening the tiny tribe of Judah and its king Hezekiah. They had no human hope of standing up to this great army. Fortunately they had a divine hope. Listen to the account of the Prophet Isaiah speaking for God and then God acting in fulfillment of Isaiah's words and in answer to the prayers of King Hezekiah and the righteous tribe of Judah.

Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD GOD OF HOSTS, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. ²¹ This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him: "'The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and laughs you to scorn. The Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head as you flee. ²² Who is it you have ridiculed and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²³ By your messengers you have ridiculed the Lord. And you have said, "With my many chariots I have ascended the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its junipers. I have reached its remotest parts, the finest of its forests. ²⁴ I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt."

²⁵ "'Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. ²⁶ Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up. ²⁷ "'But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me. ²⁸ Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.'

²⁹ "This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³⁰ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. ³¹ For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. "The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

³² "Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria:

"'He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. ³³ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the LORD. ³⁴ I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.'"

³⁵ That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!
³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

For those of us who believe in God, we should also believe in His Angels...as well as the devil and his demons. There is a spiritual warfare going on all around us. Though it is

usually invisible, we should not doubt this reality. Our greatest hope is not in any human messiah but in the only real Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel, and of the New Israel – the Christian Church. We need to do our best to live godly lives, to seek to become holy and dedicated to God. When we fall short, we need to repent and confess our sins to God, then rededicate ourselves to God. We need to work as though it all depends on us and pray as though it all depends on God.

The Gospel of Matthew has a prophecy about the Second Coming (25:31-46):

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

If you still need the fear of God put into you, read Revelation chapter 19, the account of the Second Coming!

Brothers and sisters, God loves each and every one of us more than we can ever imagine. His angels continuously minister to us guiding us and guarding us throughout our lives. If we choose to follow God, if we choose to serve and obey God, we open ourselves up to God's blessing, guidance and protection. If we disobey or reject God, we do so at our own peril, bringing temporal and eternal judgment against ourselves.

I saw this print almost 30 years ago and have had it up in my office for almost all that time. It shows a father on his knees in prayer over his son sleeping in bed. In the background, if you look carefully, you can see an angel fighting off a demon. When we live godly lives and pray to God, we are spiritually strengthened and God's angels are also given spiritual strength.

The Stepbrother of our Lord, James the Just and First Bishop of Jerusalem writes (5:16): *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* Whether you see them or not, please know that we are surrounded by God's Heavenly Host, the Nine Orders of Angels. We can choose to work with them and for God...or with and for the dark minions of the deceiver. Choose your own blessing or judgment. God loves you and hopes you choose well. Pray that God's Holy Angels may be spiritually strengthened to bless, guide and protect us all in accordance with God's Holy Mercy, Justice, Knowledge, Will, Wisdom and Love.

I would like to close today with the Prayer to Your Guardian Angel from My Orthodox Prayer Book: *Holy Angel, heavenly companion of my life, do not abandon me, a sinner, nor leave room to the evil demons to overwhelm me through my weakness. But rather take hold of my weak hand and guide me on the path of salvation. Yes, holy angel of God, guardian and protector of my soul and body, overlook all the things by which I have grieved you. Guard me also during the night and protect me from every influence of satan, that I may not fall into sin. Intercede to the Lord for me that He may grant me forgiveness of sins and help me to be worthy of His goodness.*

To God be the Glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.