



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

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**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, September 30, 2007**  
*The Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels*

*Festal Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Genesis 28:10-17  
Revelation 12:7-12  
Saint John 1:47-51

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### *ENTERTAINING ANGELS*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Thirty-something years ago, when our daughter was about the age of her son who is now just starting kindergarten, she told me she had seen an angel. She was quite definite about it. She said she had seen him on the roof of our garage.

I have a memory of my own from very early childhood. I heard what I thought were angels talking to each other over my bed. Perhaps the angels were my parents, but I think I would have known. In any case, the memory itself has had a permanent, angelic influence.

Jesus said that we are to take heed for God's "little ones; for I tell you their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 18:10) I was reminded of this when very recently, as I performed a baptism in our chantry, there was a palpable silence and peace, an angelic presence.

I believe all these sorts of experiences are common. I also believe most of you know what I mean. But by the time we get older, with the complications and distractions of adult life, we lose the awareness of the child that Jesus commends. Instead, like the patriarch Jacob in our first lesson, we entertain angels unawares.

Angels permeate Holy Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. They are ministering spirits, spiritual beings who serve God their maker freely, carrying out his will and purpose in myriad ways throughout the cosmos. They move quicker than thought throughout God's creation at his bidding. They manifest God's love through their free will. By the same token, their freedom helps to account for the fact of evil in creation; for Scripture shows also that some angels are fallen, demonic spirits who have chosen not to serve God. If we take a cue from the Book of Revelation, it seems that one third of the angelic spirits are fallen. That is a sizable rebellion, but it also means that two thirds of the spirits are obedient and good, comprising a "super majority" if there be an angelic parliament in God's kingdom. Thus, in the words of Saint Paul, the whole creation, not just humankind, aches and groans with travail for the redemption. (Rom 8:22ff)

Saint Michael is the angel who appears to clean house by driving out the devil and his angels from God's immediate presence. We heard that apocalyptic struggle described today in our reading from the Book of Revelation. Michael's very name poses a challenge to all rebellion against the Creator; Michael means, "Who is like God?" You can see that question in Latin at the War Memorial at the rear of our nave, where Michael pins down the devil with the challenge, *Quis ut Deus?* "Who is like unto God?"

Michael's subsequent career is as patron and protector of the People of God – Israel and, by extension, the Church. Joshua encountered an angel just before the battle of Jericho. "When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you with us, or for our adversaries?' And he said, 'No; but as commander of the army of the Lord have I come.' And Joshua fell on his face and worshipped..." Joshua's angel sounds like Michael or one of his captains. (Josh 5:13-15) Michael appeared by name to Daniel, who was told that he, Michael, the prince of Daniel's people, would struggle with the demonic powers that influenced the national leadership of Persia and Greece during and after the Israelite Exile. (Dn 10:10ff) Holy Scripture clearly implies that the events of nations are influenced by both God's angels and the fallen angels.

If nations are thus influenced, how much more churches? This is exactly the teaching of the Book of the Revelation of Saint John the Divine. Each of the seven churches in that Book has an angel to whom a message is addressed. My ministry as Rector of Saint Thomas is under the patronage of Saint Michael. I was instituted Rector by the Bishop of New York on the feast of Saint Michael and All Angels in 1996.

Michael is also invoked in Requiem Masses for the souls of the faithful departed: "Let Michael the holy standard bearer make speed to restore them to the brightness of glory, which Thou hast promised in ages past to Abraham and his seed." In the New Testament Epistle of Jude, Michael is remembered as having disputed with Satan over the body of Moses, a role which is consistent with the Requiem prayer. (Jude 9)

So old Michael is the heavenly defender and patron who supports God's people, living and departed, against their foes. He is a most excellent patron.

There are other archangels, Gabriel, God's messenger; Raphael, God's healer. There are many kinds and orders of angelic spirits – angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim.<sup>1</sup> But let us remember one supreme truth. It was not to any angel, not even Michael, that God said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In fact it is the Son to whom the angels devote their service. (Heb 1:1-14) The angels ascend and descend upon the Son of man, said Jesus in today's Gospel.

Our salvation has come through the self-emptying of God himself, taking upon himself the form of a servant, suffering in our flesh, even to the death of the cross. Angels are spirits. Our Savior is not only divine but our own flesh and blood. Christ is, as we sang, the "fair glory of the holy angels," not because he is pure spirit but because he is perfectly, fully human. "What is man," says the eighth psalm, "that thou art mindful of him; or the Son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him lower than the angels, to crown him with glory and worship." This oracle is fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord, the fair glory of the holy angels, the maker of all things, the desire of all nations, the Redeemer for whom the whole creation aches and groans in its travail.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "Angels," p. 62. The list was inspired by Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 1:16 and was refined by later theologians into three hierarchies with three choirs each.

So now may Christ's faithful servant Michael and all the angels of God assist us. As I start my twelfth year as Rector I call upon him once again to renew his patronage with grace and power at our beloved Church and Choir School! To paraphrase the hymn: May Archangel Michael, God's blessed peacemaker, drive away striving and hatred, ill will and sowing of discord, so that for God's people all things may prosper.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.