

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

September 27, 2026 – FEAST OF ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS (TRANSF.) YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: *"Surely the Lord Is in This Place"*

Genesis 28:10-17	(Jacob sleeps and sees a ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending)
Psalms 103:19-22	(The Angels of the Lord do His bidding)
Revelation 12:7-12	(War broke out in heaven and St. Michael defeated the Devil)
St. John 1:47-51	(Nathanael believes in Jesus, who says He will see angels ascending and descending)

There are moments in life when heaven seems very far away. We may find ourselves frightened, grieving, uncertain about the future, or simply overwhelmed by everything that is happening around us. We look at the world and wonder where God is in the midst of it all. And then, once in a while, something happens to remind us: perhaps heaven is not nearly as far away as we imagine. That's one of the things the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels invites us to remember.

Our first reading gives us one of the Bible's most beautiful images of the connection between heaven and earth. Jacob is running away from home. He is alone, exhausted, and uncertain about what lies ahead. He lies down with a stone for a pillow and falls asleep. And then he dreams. He sees a ladder—or perhaps more accurately, a stairway—reaching from earth to heaven. And the angels of God are ascending and descending upon it.

Jacob awakens astonished and says, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" That may be one of the most important sentences in the entire story: "The Lord is in this place—and I did not know it." Jacob thought he was merely sleeping in the wilderness, and that he was all alone. But he wasn't. He had come to a place where heaven and earth meet. And that is one of the great gifts of the Feast we observe today: the reminder that heaven and earth are not as separate, or as far from one another, as we sometimes imagine.

We live in a world that tends to recognize only what can be measured, photographed, tested, or explained. However, our faith believes that reality is larger than what our eyes can see or the rest of our senses can experience. There is a visible world—and there is an invisible world that is no less real.

The writer of today's psalm sings, "The Lord has set his throne in heaven, and his kingship has dominion over all" (103:19). And then, our text from the Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse into that heavenly reality. Michael and his angels fight against the dragon. Evil is not ignored; it is confronted. *And* it is defeated! But the heart of this passage is not the battle. It is the victory, when a heavenly voice proclaims: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah." Then, the extraordinary statement: "The accuser of our comrades [or companions] has been thrown down." The "Accuser." That is one of the more revealing names for the how the devil works.

Because evil often works not only by hurting us, but through *accusing* us, especially with *false* accusations—*lies*. "You're not good enough. You've failed too many times. God could never forgive you. You're all alone, and no one cares about you. There is no hope." Those seemingly subtle attacks can become very powerful, especially in the depths of our hearts and minds. Fortunately, Revelation reminds us the Accuser does not have the last word. The last word belongs to God, and to God alone.

Finally, we come to the Gospel lesson, where Jesus encounters Nathanael (v. 51) and tells him that he will see: "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Notice what Jesus does. He takes Israel's forefather Jacob's ancient dream and applies it to Himself. Jacob saw a stairway connecting heaven and earth. Jesus says, in effect: "I am that bridge, I am that connection." In Jesus Christ, heaven and earth meet in one person, so that God is not somewhere "up there," distant from human suffering and human joy. In Christ, God enters our world. God walks our roads. God sits at our tables. God knows our loneliness. God knows our grief. God knows what it is to be human—and all the ups and downs that come with the human condition.

Here is where I think today's Feast becomes particularly important for us as Christians gathered around this altar. Because every Sunday, we do something remarkably similar to what Jacob experienced. We come to an ordinary place. We bring ordinary bread and ordinary wine. We bring our ordinary lives: our worries, our gratitude, our disappointments, our hopes, our sins, our questions. And then we discover that this is a place where heaven and earth meet. "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it."

The Eucharist teaches us to say those words. Not because the altar is magic. Not because we have escaped the world. But because in the Eucharist, Christ takes the ordinary things of this world—bread, wine, human voices, human hands—and makes them both signs *and* means of God's extraordinary grace. We come to the altar believing that Christ is present among us. And we do not come alone.

One of the most beautiful things about the regular Eucharistic Prayer in our Episcopal tradition, is that, just prior to the Sanctus, we acknowledge that our worship is joined to that of heaven as we say: "we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name." In today's Eucharistic Prayer D, we will hear, "Countless throngs of angels stand before you to serve you night and day; and, beholding the glory of your presence, they offer you unceasing praise. Joining with them, and giving voice to every creature under heaven, we acclaim you, and glorify your Name . . ."

Think about that. When we gather in this sanctuary, the Church is so much more vast than simply the people sitting in St. John's pews. We do not participate in our worship merely on earth; we are joining a hymn that is already being sung in heaven. The angels are not spectators. They are fellow worshipers along with us. St. Michael, along with the nine hierarchies of angels—Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; Dominions, Virtues and Powers; Principalities, Archangels and Guardian Angels¹—and all the saints, are part of a great company gathered around the throne of God. And the great mystery of the Eucharist is that when we celebrate here on earth, our worship becomes united to their heavenly worship.

That means when we sing the *Holy, Holy, Holy*, we are not simply singing a hymn because it happens to be in the bulletin. We are joining with those praising and glorifying God in heaven. When we say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," we are singing along with the saints and angels.² Angels honor humankind (Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:14), for one reason only, namely because Christ became human to redeem human beings. To be found in Christ is to be found in the One whom the angels and Archangels and all the company of Heaven praise evermore in their glorious song.³

When we come forward and receive the bread and wine, we are being drawn more deeply into the life of the Christ who connects heaven and earth. And that gives a different meaning to the altar. It is not a place where we escape the world. It is the place from which we are sent back into the world. And that matters. Because it would too easy to hear today's Scripture lessons and think that angels are simply heavenly beings who protect us while we go about our lives. Yes, they do that. But the biblical picture is richer than that. Angels are messengers (*ángelos*, in Greek) who serve God and carry out His purposes. St. Michael, the Commander of God's heavenly armies, stands against the forces of evil. His name in Hebrew means "Who is like God?"—a war cry of humility against pride. The Heavenly Host consists of messengers, healers, and protectors, including the named Archangels such as Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel.

The Eucharist sends us out to do something similar—not as angels, of course, but as the baptized people of God. We enter carrying the burdens of the world. Then we encounter Christ, we receive Christ, and are sent out in His name to be *messengers* of the good news, *healers* through our prayers and compassion, and *protectors* of the weak and those in need. Even St. Michael's strength is not rooted in human might, but in *radical reliance on God's grace*. That must be the source of our strength, too. And in our daily choices, every small act of love, justice, or forgiveness aligns us with the spiritual forces of good.

The Eucharist begins at the altar, but it does not end there. It ends when we become Christ's hands and feet in the world. That is why the Eucharist is so deeply connected to the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. The angels—who themselves are a separate order of creation with immense spiritual energy—remind us that we are part of a reality larger than what we can see, touch, taste, or feel.⁴ Yet the Eucharist makes that reality *tangible*. Bread. Wine. Water. Hands. Voices. A table. A gathered people.

And through these ordinary things, Christ issues the wonderful invitation: Heaven is open. God is here. You are not alone. The story of God's salvation is larger than the story of whatever you are facing today. Perhaps that is what Jacob needed to hear. Perhaps that is what Nathanael needed to hear. Perhaps that is what the early Christians needed to hear as they faced persecution and suffering. And perhaps that is what each of us need to hear, today.

Because there are moments when we feel as though we are in the wilderness with nothing but a stone beneath our heads. And days when the voices of accusation become deafeningly loud. There are times when evil seems stronger than goodness. And yet the Church gathers. The bread is broken. The cup is shared. The ancient prayers are spoken. Again we sing the song of heaven: *Holy, holy, holy*. And we remember: Surely the Lord is in this place—and we did not know it.

So, on this Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, let us come to the altar with the confidence that heaven and earth meet here in Jesus Christ. Let us worship with the angels and all the company of heaven. Let us receive the Lord who joins heaven and earth in Himself. And then let us go from this table as people who have been entrusted with a holy message: That God's love is stronger than the wiles of the Accuser. That the devil and the powers of evil will *not* have the final word. That Christ is present in the midst of His people. And that wherever God's people gather in Christ's name, heaven is near. For surely the Lord is in this place. And perhaps, by God's grace, after we leave here today, someone else will discover that the Lord is wherever *we* are. *Amen.*

¹ Pat Bartos, "A Celestial Hierarchy," March-April 1996, [EWTN.com](https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/celestial-hierarchy-5350), <<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/celestial-hierarchy-5350>> 22 September 2026.

² Adapt. Claire Woodley-Aitchison, "St. Michael and all Angels," 29 September 1997, [EpiscopalChurch.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons/st-michael-and-all-angels-selected-sermon/), <<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons/st-michael-and-all-angels-selected-sermon/>> 21 September 2026.

³ Adapt. C. J. Armstrong, "Preaching for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels," 22 September 2024, [1517.org](https://www.1517.org/articles/preaching-for-the-feast-of-st-michael-and-all-angels-2024), <<https://www.1517.org/articles/preaching-for-the-feast-of-st-michael-and-all-angels-2024>> 18 September 2026.

⁴ Adapt. Charles Eric Funston, "The Better Angels – Sermon for St. Michael & All Angels Day," September 29, 2013, [That Which We Have Heard & Known](https://www.thefunstons.com/the-better-angels-sermon-for-st-michael-all-angels-day-september-29-2013/), <<https://www.thefunstons.com/the-better-angels-sermon-for-st-michael-all-angels-day-september-29-2013/>> 18 September 2026.