

Order of Worship for September 29, 2024 (Christmas White)

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all the orders of creation. He created humankind to have dominion upon the earth, and He created the angels to serve as guardians and messengers of His holy word of love and salvation.

Opening Hymn: *“Lord God, to Thee We Give All Praise”* – Hymn #522

Confession and Forgiveness of Sins

P: O Lord God of the heavenly army of angels, we confess that we do not put our trust in You.

C: We busy ourselves with making deadlines, getting good grades, saving more for the future, stressing over things that really aren't that important.

P: So we look so seldom to You for help. We forget Your promise:

C: “He will give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. They will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a rock.”

P: We turn our backs on you depending on investments, degrees, salaries, prestige, and how many things we can accumulate.

C: Forgive us, Lord.

P: God the Father withdrew all His angels from His Son, Jesus, when He was nailed to the cross. He then turned His back on Jesus so He could suffer all that we deserve for how we turn our backs on God. Jesus then rose on Easter so that all our sins, all our ignoring of God can be forgiven. By Jesus' promise and command I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

C: Amen.

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

C: and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

P: Bless the LORD, O you His angels,

C: you mighty ones who do His word, obeying the voice of His word!

P: Bless the LORD, all His hosts,

C: His ministers, who do His will!

P: Bless the LORD, all His works,

C: in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

C: and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

Prayer of the Day

P: O Everlasting God, Whose wise planning has ordained and constituted the ministry of Your people and angels in a wonderful order, mercifully grant that, as Your holy angels always serve You in heaven, so by Your appointment they may also help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: “Glory Be To God the Father” – Hymn 506

Old Testament Lesson: Joshua 5:13-15

R: When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Revelation 12:7-12

R: Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 10:17-20

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the tenth chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: “*Christ, the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken*” - Hymn #521

Sermon: “*The Clear Winner*” - Hebrews 1

“Angels”—they make for good story. In the classic film, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” the movie ends with a Christmas bell ringing and little Zuzu sitting on her father George Bailey’s shoulders and saying, “Hear that daddy. Another angel has earned its wings!” Her father’s face lights up as he says, “That’s right, Zuzu!” Then he knowingly looks up and winks towards heaven at the angel who has saved his life and says, “Way to go, Clarence!”

Yet those stories humanize angels. Angels are seen as former humans who have earned and are earning a spot in heaven. But angels are not humans. First they were created before humans or our physical world existed. In that sense they are superior to humans. They have no bodies like we do; they are purely spiritual. But unlike humans, which are the focus of God’s love, angels exist to serve God by serving humans, as Hebrews says: “Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”

In our modern perception of things, there is no big deal that God would relate to us physically. We emphasize that all people have the same rights. A poor man is just as important as a rich one—they both have the same vote. With our science we try to explain things that in the past people just assumed were part of an almighty being.

But people used to see their leaders, their kings, as being greater than them—a step above, whom you didn’t dare approach. Even more this applied to gods who were beyond our mere physical world. And beyond those gods was the ultimate god who could not be anywhere near imperfect, defiled, mortals. As those ideas spread into Christianity, people looked to saints and angels as intermediates between the holy, perfect God and mere humans. It was part of a tendency to “bring God down to earth” by having things like angels to link us to Him. It is like bending over a tree branch so we can reach some fruit. And those angels were often seen as humans in the transition between our evil, physical world and the perfect God in heaven.

Then you have the angels who turned bad—the devil and his entire cohort. They were seen to explain the bad that goes on in the world. As the good and bad angels fight that

battle in the spiritual realm, the violence filters into our own world. We have the classic battle of good and evil.

Maybe we picture that battle today in the war between Russia and Ukraine, or between those who are in power versus those who want equality, or maybe if you are an Iowa State fan, the rivalry between Iowa and Iowa State. But in those battles it so often seems like Goliath versus David. Good seems to be outmatched by evil.

Prior to the coming of Jesus, a named Zoroaster introduced a religion into ancient Persia that spread to the Middle East and then to the Greek Western world. Most of the followers of that religion were wiped out when Islam took over Persia about 600 years after Jesus. But Zoroaster's religion did emphasize the idea that good and evil are equal in the battle of life. It is certainly a prevalent view today. Maybe you have seen those old cartoons where an angel and a devil appear over the head of a character, each trying to convince the character to do he advises. Good versus evil—a 50/50 fight.

50/50 may not seem like bad odds for a football pool or for what you anticipate what will happen to your team in the next game. But how does 50-50 sound coming from a doctor? Do we want those odds when it is a matter of life or death?

The reality for us is that we don't even have 50/50 odds. "The wages of sin is death." We are all doomed to death. Our good stands no chance in the face of the evil around us because the evil is even worse inside of us.

But God didn't stop with sending angels. He sent His only Son. We hear these triumphal words from Hebrews:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. The Son is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and the Son upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"? And again, when God the Father brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship Him." Of the angels God says, "He makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire." But of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions." And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment,

like a robe You will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.” And to which of the angels has God ever said, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet”?

In the battle of good and evil it is God versus evil. That doesn't merely even the odds. It makes it no contest. When David went up against Goliath, Goliath had no chance, because he was going up against God. Our team is Jesus' team. He turns us from total losers to the overwhelming eventual winners.

Martin Luther said about the devil that “he is God's ape.” What he meant by that is not that the devil is just a pawn God controls, but that God is so beyond the devil, that the devil has no chance. In fact God uses the devil's very evil to do His will. He used the devil to tempt people like Judas, Pontius Pilate, and the enemies of Jesus to have Him hung on a cross. He used the devil to bring fear to Jesus' disciples so that they would flee. But through that God brought the great triumph of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection.

That is why it is so important for Jesus to be God, as Hebrews emphasizes. Jesus is not some transition between God and us. He is God. He is the clear winner in the battle between good and evil. St. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians:

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in Him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through Him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

The angels?—they, as Hebrews tells us, are “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” They just add extra encouragement to us. They point us to Jesus, who is the clear winner.

2nd Article of Creed and Explanation

Prayer for Michael and All Angels

P: Almighty God, we thank You for the wonder of Your creation and the variety of orders within it. We thank You for Your servants, the angels, whom You send to us on your behalf.

C: Above all we thank You for Your Son, enthroned above the cherubim, for the salvation which He bought us by His blood.

P: Thank you for Your Word delivered to people by angels:

C: The warning given to Lot to escape from Sodom and Gomorrah, the promise of the birth of a son to Abraham, the angels who prevented Abraham from sacrificing Lot, the angels who appeared in Jacob's

dream of a stairway to heaven, Your angels sent to encourage Joshua as Israel entered the Promised Land.

P: The messages by angels given to Zechariah of the birth of his son John, given to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah, and to Joseph to take Mary as his wife.

C: The angels who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds and even more of His resurrection on Easter to His surprised followers.

P: But most of all we thank You for Your clearest message sent to us in Your ultimate Messenger, Christ Jesus.

C: In Him we have Your Word clearly shown to us.

P: Holy God, mighty Lord, King of the universe, You send Your holy angels to minister to us as they ministered to Jesus in the wilderness. You sent Your angel to go before the camp of Israel to guide them through the wilderness.

C: Send Your angels to guide us in our ways as we journey in life.

P: You sent the angel to protect Daniel from the lions.

C: Defend us with Your angels to withstand the attacks of the devil, who prowls like a lion seeking to devour us.

P: You sent Your angel to release Peter from prison.

C: Give us Your angel to release us from that which threatens to imprison our souls.

(Specials Petitions)

P: Send holy Michael, the archangel, great defender of the faithful, to be our defender in times of trouble and temptation.

C: And at the last, send forth Your trumpeting angels to waken us from our sleep and take us to Your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering

Service of the Sacrament

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

P: It is truly good, right, and proper , , , evermore praising Him and singing . .

Sanctus Hymn: “Holy, Holy, Holy” - Hymn #961

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;

Heav'n and earth are full of Your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed, blessed, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

The Words of Our Lord

The Lord's Prayer

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution

Communion Hymn

“Stars of the Morning So Gloriously Bright” – Hymn #520

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” – Hymn #621

Dismissal

Morning Prayer

All: I thank You, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Sending

P: The God of heaven and earth shower His grace and favor upon you, send His holy angels to minister to you in your times of need that you may stand with the saints and all the angels of heaven before Christ's eternal throne. God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

C: Amen.

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Closing Hymn: “*Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones*” – **Hymn #670**

Postlude