

## More with us than with them 2 Kings 6:8-17

<sup>8</sup> Now when the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he would make plans with his officials, saying, "My camp will be at such and such a place." <sup>9</sup> But the man of God would send a message to the king of Israel, saying, "Be careful when you pass this place because the Arameans are going down there." <sup>10</sup> So the king of Israel would send scouts to the place that the man of God had pointed out. So the man of God warned him, and he was kept safe—and not just once or twice. <sup>11</sup> The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them, "Won't you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?" <sup>12</sup> One of his officials said, "No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom." <sup>13</sup> Then he said, "Go and see where he is. Then I'll send men and capture him." He was told, "Dothan is where he is." <sup>14</sup> So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. <sup>15</sup> When the man of God's servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, "Oh no, my lord! What will we do?" <sup>16</sup> He answered, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." <sup>17</sup> Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

In our service today we are celebrating the festival of St. Michael and All Angels. This festival falls on the church calendar on September 29. Now what do you know about angels? It's important that we know the truth about angels, because our world has come up with some strange ideas about angels. Some think that when a person, especially a young person dies, he or she becomes an angel. That's not what Scripture tells us. We remain people when we die. We don't turn into angels. It's important that we get our information about angels from the right source, from holy Scripture. We can't see angels because they are spirits. But on occasion, God did allow them to take on human form. Think of the angels that visited Abraham and later Lot to warn him to flee the city of Sodom before God destroyed it. Scripture tells us, "*Do not fail to show love to strangers, for by doing this some have welcomed angels without realizing it*" (Hebrews 13:2).

We know that angels serve well as messengers. Think of the angel Gabriel appearing to the priest Zechariah, while he was performing his duties in the temple. Gabriel came with wonderful news that he and his wife would have a child in their old age. This child would grow to be the forerunner of the Savior. And that same angel would appear to a virgin girl named Mary announcing that she would be the mother of the Savior. When our Savior was born into this world, angels were sent to shepherds outside Bethlehem announcing the Savior's birth. When our Savior died and rose again, angels were at his empty tomb announcing his victory over the grave.

We know angels are powerful creatures. On Easter one angel had no problem removing the stone that was covering the opening to Jesus' tomb. And when the Assyrian army threatened the city of Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah, one angel was sent to slaughter 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. We know these powerful angels are involved in warfare as we heard in today's readings. They're battling evil angels that once rebelled against God and were cast out of his presence forever. And what are they fighting for? Our souls. God's holy angels are battling to keep us in God's kingdom. It's probably a good thing we can't see these battles being fought. We'd be terrified to witness those angelic battles being fought for our souls. But it is a comfort to know they are fighting for us. It reminds us that God is on our side. We need to know that especially when we can't see it with our physical eyes. The Scripture before us reminds us that it's not important what we see, but what God says. And when it comes to the involvement

of angels in our lives, how comforting it is to know that there are so many more of them with us, than those that are against us. That is shown us in the account found in 2 Kings chapter 6.

This Scripture takes place when the nation of Israel was divided between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah. God had sent his prophet Elisha to succeed the prophet Elijah to minister to the 7,000 Israelites who had not given themselves over to Baal worship, but remained faithful to the Lord. There was still hope for God's people, even though their leaders had failed them. Instead of leading God's people to remain faithful to the Lord and his saving promises, they would often lead God's people to worship false gods like Baal. That would lead God to use a foreign nation like Aram to chastise them. You may recall the commander of the Aramean army by the name of Naaman. Naaman came in contact with the prophet Elisha. He was looking for a cure for his deadly leprosy. The cure came when he washed seven times in the Jordan and a new believer was converted. But Aram still remained Israel's enemy. Our text tells us how the King of Aram made plans to ambush the army of Israel. God would give his prophet Elisha insight into these plans. So Elisha sends messages to Israel's king informing him where the enemy was. You can imagine how this frustrated Aram's king. The king of Aram calls his officials in and wants to know who's the mole? Who's been sharing secrets with the enemy? His officials assured him there is no mole. It's that prophet Elisha. God gave him better surveillance of the Aram's army, than any satellite system today.

So Aram's king decides he needs to capture the prophet. He finds out what city the prophet was staying at. He then sends his army during the night to surround the city. In the morning when Elisha's servant got up, he went outside and saw the surrounding army. He hurried back and frantically warned his master. But Elisha tells his servant, *"Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* Are you kidding? It's you and me boss. You may receive special messages from God. But we're sitting ducks here. We don't stand a chance against that army. What do you mean there are more with us? That's when Elisha prays that God would allow the servant to see what he knew. *Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.* There was no one in the Aramean army who was going to lay a hand on God's prophet. He was completely surrounded by an army of powerful angels that would let no one get close.

So what can we learn from this? We certainly have nothing to fear when God sends his angels to protect us. Sure, we can't see them. But we know they're there. How many have experienced angel protection when they were in some horrific accident and didn't get a scratch. We all have our angel story—something that we can't explain how it happened? It just had to be angels.

It should not bother us that we can't see these powerful creatures that God uses to protect us. Scripture reminds us, *"We live by faith, not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7). We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God who says, *"He will give a command to his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways"* (Psalm 91:11). So why do we fear? Why do parents fret when their children play a contact sport? Why loose sleep when your teenager is out late with friends? *God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble. That is why we will not fear when the earth dissolves and when the mountains tumble into the heart of the sea. Its waters roar and foam. The mountains quake when it rises. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is a fortress for us"* (Psalm 46:1-3, 11). So you're saying,

pastor, that we'll never have to face any tragedies in life because we have armies of angels to protect us. You know well, God does sometimes does allow tragedy in our life. But he never does this to punish us. He does it to draw us close to him and his Word. A few months ago the brother of one of our members was killed in a farming accident. No one was there to witness it. The evidence seems to suggest that his tractor rolled over him and crushed him. You know angels were ready to act to rescue the man. But God had other plans. That day God called on angels to carry another soul to his eternal rest. We don't always know why God allows tragedies. Through his prophet he tells us, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8,9).

"Why?" is never the right question to ask. We should be asking: who? Who is allowing this to happen? It is the God who loves us dearly. Look how much he loves us. He sent his one and only Son into our world to save us. And look at the role that angels had when he carried out our salvation. We already heard how the angel Gabriel announced the Savior's coming to Mary. What about that angel that appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him that Mary's pregnancy was not because she was unfaithful. It was all the work of the Holy Spirit. And following the visit by the wise men, when wicked King Herod sought only to kill the Christ child, an angel warned Joseph in a dream to escape Palestine and flee to Egypt. Several years later when Jesus begins his earthly ministry, he's sent to battle Satan in a desert without any food for more than a month. He fights off every temptation with the powerful word of God. And when Satan leaves him, angels are sent to restore his strength. On the night before his bitter death, our Savior agonizes in prayer while his disciples sleep. That's when an angel is sent to strengthen him. Moments later, legions of angels are ready to pounce and prevent his arrest. But he doesn't call for any of them. His Father's will must be done. So he must go it alone. Heavenly angels had to stay back. Disciples would abandon him. Even his own Father would forsake him as he suffered hell's punishment for the sins of everyone. What a sad day when God's Son died. But did he lose? Did Satan win? Had those angelic battles against Satan and his evil angels been for naught? But wait. It's the third day and angels are called on to serve. One of the angels is sent to roll the stone away from his tomb. He's not in there. He's risen, just like he said. Soon come his saddened followers. There's the women. But they need to hear: *"He's risen. He is risen indeed."* The sight of heavenly messengers might have been a bit much for those ladies. But the message had to be told. He lives. He lives who once was dead. Forgiveness is won for every sin. Now angels get to rejoice over every sinner who repents. What a privilege when they even get to carry the souls of believers to heaven. And what a day awaits when every angel will accompany our Lord as he returns to end this world. On that day death will be swallowed up in victory.

What a glorious scene awaits us all. And as we wait, what comfort to know that our Savior uses holy, powerful angels to guard us and fight for us. And when we have fought the good fight, and finished our race and kept our faith, angels will carry us to heaven where we will wear white robes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. And we will be crowned with righteousness. How glorious will angelic choirs sound who sing God's praises forever. And he will reign forever and ever. Now we see but a poor reflection. Then we shall see face to face. We'll see angels, loved ones who've gone before us, and our Savior Jesus himself—what a glorious sight it will be.