

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from the Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen
The sermon this morning is based on the Epistle lesson which we've just heard. We pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The message of this introductory part of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is much more important than the angels. If you are nodding right now, because that seems ridiculously obvious to you, then I'm truly thankful and happy. Nonetheless: This message is desperately needed in our world today. And it's needed for two reasons. The first is that there is a large number of people for whom angels are perhaps too appealing. And, ironically, the other reason is that there is a large number of people who simply refuse to believe in or have anything to do with angels. Consider the first group, probably the larger of the two. For them angels have become popular, trivialized and far too normal—a fact which is reflected in their speech. Children who behave are little angels. Or: In Christian book stores you can find them in all shapes, sizes, colors and flavors, in the form of dolls, jigsaw puzzles and backing pans. On a more serious note, many in this group are desirous of the protection and blessing that angels provide. What are they there for at all—so the thinking goes—if not to keep danger away and help me be happy? At least here in Germany, the belief in guardian angels is as strong as it ever was, even though that's not a biblical teaching. And there's one additional and advantageous trait that angels have. They provide their services in a non-binding way. No angel ever makes demands on you or expects anything of you. Nor do they enter into a personal relationship with you. They are risk-free. We can do as we like, and still those angels are there, close by, blessing and protecting us—or so the thinking goes.

Don't people who have such a superficial, trivialized faith concerning angels need to hear what the author of Hebrews is saying: That angels are just servants, servants of God almighty, servants of Jesus Christ? That it's not due to an angel that you are protected and blessed, but rather to God, who directs the heavenly host? And most importantly, that no angel could ever do for you what Christ can, and that is make you right in God's eyes? Christ even gave his life for you, to be able to do that. Moreover, Christ can give you meaning in life today and hope for life tomorrow, after you die. Angels have never done that and won't ever be able to, either. Yes, of course, Christ is very binding. He gives you life and reconciles you with God, but then he calls you to follow him—and to turn from sin. And he does enter into a close, personal and active relationship with you. Those things aren't always pleasant or wanted. But even then: You are so much better off trusting in Jesus Christ and following him than when you trust mainly in the power of angels. They are merely his servants, his instruments, the means by which his will is done. So: Don't be satisfied with second best. You can have so much more. Please take careful note of that message, because it is desperately needed in our day and age.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, there is another large group of people, that either don't believe in angels at all, because they reject the existence of anything supernatural, or that don't see much use in them. In their eyes angels have become too romanticized, superfluous curly-blond kitsch. But this text can speak to people who think like that, too. A Benedictine Monk here in Germany who's also a psychologist, wrote a book called "Angels for life". In this book he summed up what can be said to these people very nicely: "Angels are a sign of the helpful and healing

presence of God.” In other words, they are yet another expression of the love and care that God has for us, more proof of the fact that he is active in our lives and never leaves us. Each of us participates in their protection and blessing—that is: in God’s protection and blessing—without even knowing it, but we remain thankful for it—thankful to God. That is exactly what the purpose of this festival day is, and also what the name of this church building, St. Michael’s, reminds us of.

One goal of this sermon is to strengthen your faith in Christ and your trust in God. That’s a goal of just about every sermon. But this particular sermon also has the goal of helping you to be able to communicate your faith—both to those who believe in and are taken with angels, and to those who don’t find much use in them at all. The idea is to get them beyond the angels they adore or dislike—beyond them to Christ himself, beyond the servants to their Lord and master. So the next time somebody mentions a guardian angel, you can say: “You know, that guardian angel has a fantastic boss, who’s a lot more interested in you than that angel ever was. And you know what: He’s just dying to meet you.” Or, if somebody mentions how kitschy he thinks all this angel stuff is, then you can say: Yeah, maybe you’re right, but what they really are, are signs of God’s helpful and healing presence. They show just how much God wants to be with you at all points in your life. The main thing is that all these people grasp what the author of the book of Hebrews wrote so many years ago. Christ, the savior is infinitely more important than angels are. They are his servants. He is the one who can give us hope, meaning in life, and who can make us right with God.

And now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.