

Feast of Michael and All Angels
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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If you've ever been to a planetarium or stared at the sky in a dark place, then you've probably noticed the stars. Just imagine right now that you're looking at a star. A star is a sphere of plasma held together by gravity that gives off light— how cool is that? Of course, our closest star is the sun, but let's focus on a distant one. That star is likely to have its own solar system of planets around it.¹ That star could be low-mass or high-mass. That light you see could also be from a dead star – after all, the light it emitted could still be traveling to us for thousands of light years away long after it collapsed. As you may know, light travels 6 trillion miles in a year, so if that star died five years ago the light could still be seen by us if it were about 30 trillion miles or more away. Suppose the star you're looking at did die 5 years ago, then that star is a ghost of sorts without a body or mass but with the continued luminous effects – freaky right? That star was also in a galaxy – maybe our Milky Way galaxy or perhaps one of the other one hundred billion galaxies.²

It doesn't take us long to be blown away by the vast, expansive, and unknown spaces of the universe. Our observable universe is 156 billion light years in diameter or in miles that would be 6 trillion times 156 billion – I'll let you do the math.³ From the smallest subatomic particle to intergalactic space to the neighborhoods we live in and the world we inhabit, all that exists is expansive and beyond our brain's limits. On top of all that in 2011 a research team discovered even some evidence that we might not be the only universe; instead we could be a part of a multiverse of bubble universes.⁴ If you believe this theory or not, either way we know our universe is vast, enormous, immense, unknown, unseen, and sometime undetectable.

This is where today's biblical texts enter. These readings and our commemoration of angels bring to mind the breathtaking size of creation, seen and unseen. In all three of our readings we see angels. The word "angels" comes from the Greek word ἀγγέλλω (*angellō*), which means to tell or deliver a message, and it also means one who is sent in order to announce, teach, or perform anything. In the reading from Daniel and Revelation we hear these apocalyptic instances where the angel Michael is present. In John we hear of angels ascending and descending from, in Greek, οὐρανόν (*oo-rah-nahn*). οὐρανόν is used in Revelation as well and can be translated as heavens, air, or sky. Heaven was seen as the

¹ <http://www.universetoday.com/99309/nearly-all-sun-like-stars-have-planetary-systems/>

² <http://www.physics.org/facts/sand-galaxies.asp>

³ <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/space/05/24/universe.wide/>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-14372387>

alternative place separate from the earth – think of the creation story with God making heaven and earth. Throughout scripture we see heaven mentioned in a variety of contexts carrying different meaning based on the context. For today the important thing is that there is this expansive creation – things seen and unseen. Things like mysterious messengers. Things that are unknown to us except by their effects, like the dark energy and dark matter that make up 95.1% of the universe. There are so many things that remind us of how vast and expansive, how unknown and undiscovered, how mysterious and wondrous is all of creation. On this day we remember the vast creation and we're reminded that our God's presence and God's message are in the midst of it all. We're reminded that no matter how vast the universe or universes might be our God is omnipresent and engaged.

This expansive universe is mind-blowing and yet comforting as well. When I stop to think about how expansive creation is and God's presence in it all I can't help but take a sigh of relief - the immensity of the universe actually puts my life into perspective.

One example of this happened to me in college. I was walking out of the registrar's office frustrated in the way that the registrar's bureaucracy and procedures can only incite. Flustered I step out the door and ran into a classmate of mine. We began talking and I told him about my irritation. He stopped me and said, "look." And he pointed far out into the distance of the horizon. I said, "What am I looking at?" "Just look," he said. "Look out as far as you can see and then look up, look as far as you can." So I looked around and we stood there. He then pointed back at the paper and said, "This in the big scheme of everything isn't all that large." He paused. Then said, "Think about it." And he walked away.

At the time I thought it was kind of dismissive and rude, but on further thought there's some comfort. Sometimes we get so limited in our own little bubbles with work, school, projects, family, bills, social lives, and the daily tasks that we forget to take a moment and realize the vast universe. We forget about all of God's creation. We forget about the gifts we've been given just to be alive.

Today our readings open us up to these gifts. As Lutherans we know that we've been given God's love, grace, and salvation for free. That there's nothing we need to do to earn God's love. Instead we experience God fully in the waters of baptism, in bread and wine of communion, in the wind blowing by us, and in the expansive universe. We are then sent to live in that new expansive life, we're sent to share that good news with others, we're sent to be active participants in God's action in this world.

And each week we gather here to be reminded of that expansive world. We're gathered to read the scriptures of our ancestors to bring us beyond our generation. We're gathered to share in story, song, and support to encounter those who are different from us

in our neighborhood. We're gathered to be fed with holy food that sets our mind on things more expansive and inspiring than we can do alone.

It is through your gifts and your offerings that we are able to create this space each day. Today the council is launching the Give. Grow. Restore. campaign and throughout we're going to be reminded how Wicker Park Lutheran already broadens our horizons. We're also going to be challenged to broaden our reach even more by giving more to the community, growing to reach others more significantly, and restoring the gifts we've received to extend our ministries for future generations. You'll be invited to dive deep into the expanses of our faith, and connect folks with the awe of the universe.

Friends, on this final Sunday in September, I hope you hear the gift our God brings today. I hope you're able to stop and ponder the expanses of our universe- seen and unseen. I hope that you'll recognize that our God is present in the cosmic expanses and in the everyday interactions. And then when you recognize it, I hope you can remember that it's a gift of life. A gift in need of a response that gives, serves, and leads others to this good news. Know you're loved and not alone in this vast universe. Amen.