

Angels

28 8 16

Everlasting God,
you have ordained and constituted the ministries
of angels and mortals in a wonderful order:
grant that as your holy angels
always serve you in heaven,
so, at your command,
they may help and defend us on earth.

Our text today may be found in the Letter to the Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 2:

**‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.’**

In just over a month, we will be remembering the feast of St Michael and All Angels. Given where we are at present, then surely the legend of St Michael and the monastery of Mt St Michel must be a special and cherished story for us. And given that this verse **some have entertained angels without knowing it** grabbed my attention when reading the passages set for today, let me once again ask you – ‘Do you believe in angels?’

Well, let me start by simply reaffirming that a belief in angels is part and parcel of the rich, spiritual world revealed in our Bible. Angels are there in the beginning in the story of creation in Genesis. An understanding of who and what they are and

what they do unfolds through the Old and New Testaments. During our service of Holy Communion, in the middle of the prayer of consecration, we have these words that echo the vision in Isaiah chapter 6 of angels singing praises of God around his throne:

*Therefore with angels and archangels,
and with all the company of heaven,
we proclaim your great and glorious name,
for ever praising you and saying:
Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

The word for angel in Hebrew is malak and in Greek αγγελος (aggelos) and both mean messenger. To be a messenger of God is certainly one of an angel's prime functions - to bear God's word to God's people - lots of examples in scripture but with the Christmas story so much a part of my psyche, my favourite example as such is Luke's account of the young Mary being visited by the Archangel Gabriel who tells her that she is full of grace, highly favoured by God.

But Angels are not only messengers, they are the soldiers, the army of God, and the archangel Michael is Captain of the heavenly host. There is, in the Book of Revelation, a picture of the battle, the struggle, the fight between good and evil. Part of that fight is embodied in the notion of fallen angels: Satan, the Devil,

Lucifer – to give the adversary but three of his names – is chief among the fallen angels who chose not to serve God.

But I guess my favourite named angel is the Archangel Raphael, the angel who stars in the apocryphal story of the Book of Tobit, who leads Tobias on a long journey to exorcise the demon who blights the life of Sarah, the girl he is meant to marry.

And what I value most about angels is the idea that we each have a guardian angel. This is suggested by Matthew 18 v10 which warns us not to despise **these little ones . . . their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven**. The thought that there is out there a divine presence who is looking on, looking after me, cherishing me through good and ill, who will one day lead me home, is part of my optimism, my positive view of the world !

But before I end this morning, let's briefly return to the heart of my text: **'some have entertained angels without knowing'**. Have you ever had an angel encounter without knowing it at the time ? The one occasion that sticks out in my mind is a school trip to India. Sunset at the India Gate in Delhi. One of our party, a sixteen-year-old girl, has an epileptic fit. Protectively, our pupils form a circle around her as she has a fit on the floor. Our teacher in charge of first aid takes appropriate action but out of the crowd steps an Australian nurse who tells us what we're doing is right and, as soon as she stops fitting, to take her to hospital. She does. We do. And a couple of days later, she's able to rejoin us, now in the foothills of the Himalayas. That nurse, to my mind, seemed like an angel in

disguise. Who knows ? But perhaps 'some have entertained angels without knowing.' What do you think ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 34 :Angels

