

## St James' Church, Weybridge

The feast of St Michael & all Angels - Evensong 29<sup>th</sup>  
September 2024

### Tonight's readings

#### **Daniel 10: 4-end**

The prophet Daniel has a disturbing vision and encounters with heavenly beings as he is prepared to interpret the dream, drawing together his experiences and a foreshadowing of what is to come.

#### **Revelation 5**

John reveals that all believers in Jesus are like 'kings' because of their royal birth and their destiny to reign with Jesus – in the heavenly places with the angels. They are priests because they need no mediator other than Jesus Himself.

**Sermon** *“you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God.”* (Rev 5:10)

Have you ever entertained an Angel? Do you think that you know an angel? Do you have your own angel, and no, I don't mean the one that you put up on top of your Christmas tree! (Ours was rather fab with moving legs... until the cat laid eyes on it...) In Rome, around the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, a basilica was built and dedicated in honour of Michael and all the heavenly

host of Angels. The ceremony took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> September, and celebrations began on the eve of the dedication, the 29<sup>th</sup>. From this first event came the feast of Michael and All Angels as we know it today, which focuses upon the battle between good and evil, a war waged on earth – one that is still very much evident today.

Throughout the Christian centuries, artists have depicted this struggle to remind us that evil is a clear and present danger. But in the face of such challenge, we are not left comfortless. God has a message for the faithful and to deliver that message he has messengers!

When we look though the texts of scripture, again and again we find people are charged with God's Word, which shouldn't surprise us as that's exactly what the bible is, a record of a myriad of relationships. Michael is placed as the

saint protector of angels, not least because his name derives from the Hebrew meaning, *“who is like God.”* Michael appears in the book of Daniel as one of the chief princes of the heavenly host, and as the special guardian and protector of Israel.

In the book of the Revelation to John, Michael is the principal fighter of the heavenly battle against the great dragon, the devil, with the assistance of all the angels of heaven. The devil is cast down to earth, and his angels are thrown down with him. Michael is also recorded in the Epistle of Jude as having a dispute with the devil, regarding the body of the prophet Moses, and he rebukes the devil in God’s name. So, Michael has a lot to be about as one of God’s messengers.

Although not mentioned by name in tonight’s reading from Revelation Chapter 5, it is “a mighty angel” who speaks with a

loud voice, asking “Who is worthy” – in this case, to open the scroll and break its seals? (Rev 5: 2) Nobody is found worthy on earth, or indeed in all heaven! Some of the dramatic language used by John as he recounts his vision speaks of the scrolls used in worship at the time. As with the rest of revelation, which can seem a bit way out, there is hidden meaning in the pictorial language used. In worship the ancient scrolls were read horizontally, not vertically as we may assume today.

The rolls of the scroll were on the left and the right with the writing in narrow columns about 8cm or in old money, three inches wide. The scrolls were made of a substance a bit like thick brown paper – perhaps papyrus, parchment and bronze. The scroll was held in the left hand and unrolled with the right; as the reading went on, the previously read portion was re-rolled. When finished, the scroll was

fastened with strings and the strings were sealed with wax at the knots, indeed we still use wax seals in the church today for legal documents. In the case of the scrolls there were 7 seals, a number with biblical significance. For the scroll to be opened and read, all 7 seals must be broken.

So, who does John suggest is worthy to open these seven seals and read from the scroll? Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, born in the line of the great King David, the mighty victor over death, the Lion who has arisen – only he is the worthy lamb of God.

This passage has been inspirational fodder to many literary greats over time, not least an influence upon C S Lewis with his famed Aslan in the Lion, the witch and the wardrobe. Once again, the talk of the lamb who was slaughtered speaks of Jesus and his selfless sacrifice upon the

cross, to overcome evil and open heaven to all.

In our liturgy we often repeat sayings from the book of revelation: For example, at the end of some of our Eucharistic prayers we say: Blessing, honour, glory and power be yours for ever and ever... Amen. We acknowledge the lamb and the one who sits on the throne – God's Son, Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away our sins. And the angels of God stand in defence of this truth, that through Jesus, the lamb of God, we are healed and the right order of good and evil is restored. So the angels sing, Holy, holy holy is the Lord.

Yet sin is still all around us as human beings seek to fight rather than reconcile. The world feels like a dangerous place right now. It is all too easy to lose sight of what God is still doing in the face of such struggles between good and evil – and

the grey in between. But God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit is very much active in the world and messengers still speak the truth powerfully and challenge us today. Like the angels of heaven, we are told in scripture that we too are made in the image of God, constituted and ordained to be life-loving and faithful in our everyday living. In thought, word and action we are called to fight against sin and the devil every day; these are our baptism promises.

We are called to proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour, and to minister to others and a world which is so in need of hearing a message of Good News, peace, love and hope.

Through our everyday living out the ministry of Christ in our own lives, we can find that God's desire for us will become our own desire, and indeed we can share in the angelic commonwealth of

messengers and protectors, the angels. We are called, as baptised Christians to serve others, to love others, just as Christ loved unconditionally and to be messengers of the hope and reconciliation.

It's not easy – it's a battle after all! We are sent out from this Church tonight filled anew with the Spirit of challenge, because we are assured of the never-ending love of God, as proclaimed by the angels and archangels, to guard and protect us from the foe, that we may live out our lives in joy and peace, proclaiming the holiness of God with them.

So, have you ever entertained an angel? The four living creatures in John's Revelation said, (or perhaps even sung) "Amen!" Yes, we agree, our Lord is the one who opens the seven seals, who reads from the scroll of life, who breathes



the spirit into our hearts by which we can cry Abba, Father.

If Michael and all the angels have anything to say, it is surely this: God has work for us to be about today, and we must not be misled or distracted from the task. We are called to sing a new song; the song of salvation and bring about God's Kingdom now and for ever as we seek to serve God and one another. Indeed, listen to God's messengers – repent! Love! Seek peace! Proclaim the Good News! Amen.

*Fr Damian Harrison-Miles, September 2024.*