

ARCHANGEL

A Publication of St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Raleigh, NC • Vol. 6, Issue 2, Winter 2023



HELP US TO ADORE HIM

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Large angel: Lee Hayden.
Susan Rountree photo illustration.



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The Archangel Michael
stabbing the dragon. Martin
Schongauer, 1475. The
image was first used by
St. Michael's in *Chronicles of
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Our Holy Michael

Words: The Rev. Samuel Gregory Jones, Rector

OF ALL THE HUMAN SAINTS, OF ALL THE HOLY BEINGS OF HEAVEN, CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM, WE HAVE THE BIG ONE LOOKING OUT FOR US. OUR PATRON IS NOT CLARENCE ODBODY, ANGEL SECOND CLASS FROM IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE — THE SEMI-COMPETENT ANGEL WITHOUT WINGS — OR SOME OBSCURE ANCIENT SAINT LIKE SWITHIN, CHAD OR ILTUT. NO, WE GOT THE BIG ONE. AND I DO THINK HE HAS LOOKED OUT FOR US.

Angels are mentioned in many places in the old and new testaments. But only four are named. Our church was dedicated at its founding to one of them — Michael — whose name in Hebrew means, “Who is like God?”

Michael is one of only four angels mentioned by name in the whole Bible. And only two of them are good. Michael and Gabriel are named as angelic servants of God's will, as God's lead messengers and intermediaries. The other two named angels are Lucifer and Apollyon – fallen angels, servants not of God but of their own pride, cast down from heaven. [Two others, Uriel and Raphael, are named in the Apocrypha, and they are good angels.]

In the book of Daniel, Michael is identified as the guardian angel of the people of Israel. He guides and protects them in their conflict with the Persians. Interestingly, in the book of Revelation, Michael has a almost military role as the captain of the angelic host and the one who defeats the dragon in the Bible's last book. Thus Michael is depicted historically in this way as a superhuman warrior being entrusted with guardianship over God's hosts, on heaven and earth.

Following a 4th century tradition of dedicating churches to saints, our own parish was offered to the Archangel Michael to be placed under his care. This applies to the building and grounds as much as the congregation within. I am not sure why St. Michael was chosen by our charter members as patron saint, but they chose wisely.

Wisely, because it means Michael is our guardian angel. And that's a big deal. Of all the human saints, of all the holy beings of heaven, cherubim and seraphim, we have the big one looking out for us. Our patron is not Clarence Odbody, from “It's a Wonderful Life” — the semi-competent angel without wings — or some obscure ancient saint like Swithin, Chad or Iltut. No, we got the big one. And I do think he has looked out for us.

And thus, we have angel imagery everywhere, from stained glass windows to a children's chapel, to the wings on our old white processional banner.

I am glad the founders of our parish picked an Archangel to dedicate the church to. Because I believe Saint Michael — or Holy Michael — looks over this house of God, which is not merely a symbolic building in Raleigh's leafy suburbs, but is a gate, ladder and entrance into the celestial realms of heaven. And I've said it before: I believe Michael, and other angels and spiritual beings, descend and ascend from here to heaven and back all the time – every day. I really do.

I think you can see this sometimes, and feel it, too. In certain moments, whether in our gardens, labyrinth, nave, transept, children's chapels or even the kitchen, I feel the presence of holiness. When we gather to pray and sing, I feel a holy presence here, and of course it is God, but also the angels and saints of God, too.

It is here that heaven opens up, and angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man whose people are here gathered. In the All Angels and Beckwith Chapels. In the youth room. In the choir room, library, conference rooms and parish hall. In all the places we gather to study and pray. In the Canterbury Shop. In the memorial garden.

In Scripture and prayer, heaven is opened up. In organ and song, heaven is opened up. In the breaking of the bread, heaven is opened up.

When we are inspired to God's mission of justice and mercy, reaching out to the world around us, heaven is opened up.

Have you ever sat in the nave in the late afternoon after the sun has warmed the slate roof tiles for a few hours? Try it one day. When nobody's here and it's real quiet, you can hear the slates on the roof making noise. It's a constant

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Gabriel the Subaltern

Words: The Rev. James L. Pahl Jr., D. Min., Vicar

WE ARE REMINDED THAT ANGELS ARE PART OF GOD'S CREATION, AND THEREFORE ARE NO MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUMANS IN THE CREATED ORDER OF GOD'S ECONOMY — EQUALLY CREATED BY THE LORD IN THE BEGINNING. HOWEVER, ANGELS SERVE A LARGER PURPOSE THAN SIMPLY REFLECTING THE MAJESTY OF GOD.

The Epiphany is a singular event we commemorate in the Church as the moment when the Magi encountered the Christ child. Hence the meaning in Greek: “Manifestation or Appearing.” In most Christian traditions, including our own (Anglican), the observance of Epiphany is on January 6, and it is often referred to as “The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.” This Christian observance has fallen on this day since the second century A.D. In the earliest of times, the feast of Epiphany combined commemorations of the visit of the Magi, being led by the Bethlehem star; the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan; and Jesus’ first miracle, changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Galilee.

All three of these were seen as manifestations of the Lord. Therefore, the season of Epiphany signifies for us that, just like the Wise Men, we are called to follow the star of life; and in following this holy star we, too, discover unbelievable treasures.

Matthew’s Gospel tell us, the Wise Men “saw that the star had stopped, [and] they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they knelt down and paid him homage ... having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” The implication here is they were under the protection of an angel; and this angel appears to them in their dreams (as often is the case) — for they had just encountered “life and hope itself” in God Incarnate. And providentially, these pagan astrologers who came by one path go home by another.

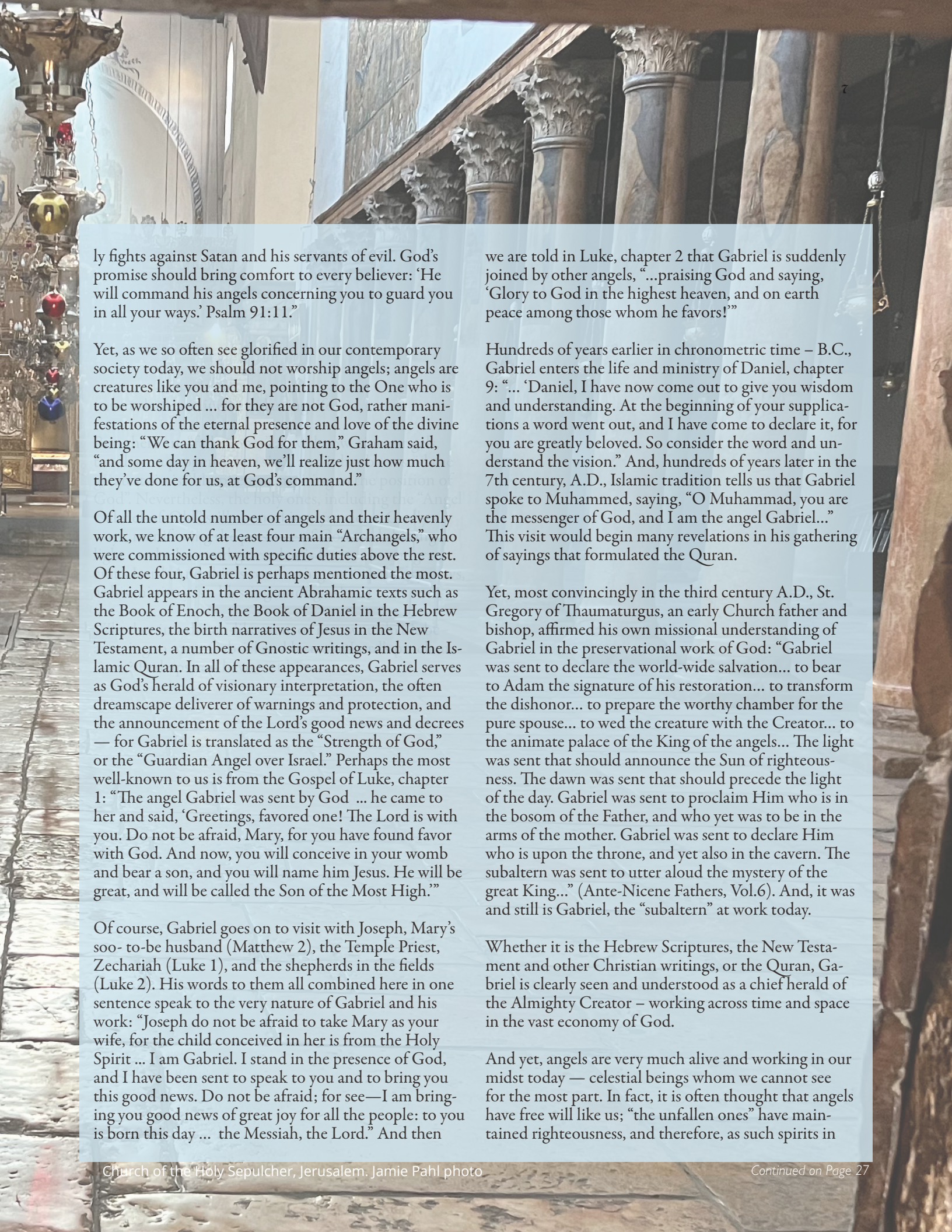
Now, we can’t know for sure if their lives were changed in any way. But metaphorically, the message here for us is that we, too, are compelled to go by another road when we encounter the Christ. And seemingly, this is the significance of the season, as Epiphany is an ideal time to contemplate the very real and powerful role of angels and their guiding presence in our midst.

Growing up in Raleigh, I lived right down the street from the Rev. Billy Graham’s grandchildren. In fact, we made our way through grade-school together; and their father was my dentist! It wasn’t until I matured and reconnected with the family when I realized the power of the connection — recalling numerous occasions where Graham’s influence and proclamation manifested itself among us schoolmates — perhaps even with the assistance of unseen angels?

It was my understanding that Graham had his own well-thought-out theology of angels, as he wrote a book or two about them. Yet, how transformative were his simple answers in response to numerous “angel” questions, including the Religion section of the *Kansas City Star* in 2016: “Yes, angels are real, just as real as you and I are. Although they are largely unseen by us, they exist in great numbers. The Bible speaks of ‘thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly’ (Hebrews 12:22). When Jesus’ birth was announced to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, ‘a great company of the heavenly host appeared ... praising God’ (Luke 2:13).” Graham says we are mystified by angels because they have no physical bodies, rather are more spirit-like in nature — except on occasions where they take on physical form. All in all, we can understand them as “celestial beings that reflect the majesty of God.” And just like our own human fallibility, they, too, can fall from God’s grace.

We are reminded that angels are part of God’s creation, and therefore, they are no more important than humans in the created order of God’s economy — equally created by the Lord in the beginning. However, angels serve a larger purpose than simply reflecting the majesty of God.

Graham said he believes their purpose in creation (like us) is to serve God: “They work in hidden ways to carry out God’s will and protect God’s people ... even when we are unaware of them, they are still part of our lives. They also are part of a great unseen army that constant-



ly fights against Satan and his servants of evil. God's promise should bring comfort to every believer: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.' Psalm 91:11."

Yet, as we so often see glorified in our contemporary society today, we should not worship angels; angels are creatures like you and me, pointing to the One who is to be worshiped ... for they are not God, rather manifestations of the eternal presence and love of the divine being: "We can thank God for them," Graham said, "and some day in heaven, we'll realize just how much they've done for us, at God's command."

Of all the untold number of angels and their heavenly work, we know of at least four main "Archangels," who were commissioned with specific duties above the rest. Of these four, Gabriel is perhaps mentioned the most. Gabriel appears in the ancient Abrahamic texts such as the Book of Enoch, the Book of Daniel in the Hebrew Scriptures, the birth narratives of Jesus in the New Testament, a number of Gnostic writings, and in the Islamic Quran. In all of these appearances, Gabriel serves as God's herald of visionary interpretation, the often dreamscape deliverer of warnings and protection, and the announcement of the Lord's good news and decrees — for Gabriel is translated as the "Strength of God," or the "Guardian Angel over Israel." Perhaps the most well-known to us is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1: "The angel Gabriel was sent by God ... he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High.'"

Of course, Gabriel goes on to visit with Joseph, Mary's so- to-be husband (Matthew 2), the Temple Priest, Zechariah (Luke 1), and the shepherds in the fields (Luke 2). His words to them all combined here in one sentence speak to the very nature of Gabriel and his work: "Joseph do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit ... I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day ... the Messiah, the Lord." And then

we are told in Luke, chapter 2 that Gabriel is suddenly joined by other angels, "...praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'"

Hundreds of years earlier in chronometric time – B.C., Gabriel enters the life and ministry of Daniel, chapter 9: "... 'Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So consider the word and understand the vision.' And, hundreds of years later in the 7th century, A.D., Islamic tradition tells us that Gabriel spoke to Muhammed, saying, "O Muhammad, you are the messenger of God, and I am the angel Gabriel..." This visit would begin many revelations in his gathering of sayings that formulated the Quran.

Yet, most convincingly in the third century A.D., St. Gregory of Thaumaturgus, an early Church father and bishop, affirmed his own missional understanding of Gabriel in the preservational work of God: "Gabriel was sent to declare the world-wide salvation... to bear to Adam the signature of his restoration... to transform the dishonor... to prepare the worthy chamber for the pure spouse... to wed the creature with the Creator... to the animate palace of the King of the angels... The light was sent that should announce the Sun of righteousness. The dawn was sent that should precede the light of the day. Gabriel was sent to proclaim Him who is in the bosom of the Father, and who yet was to be in the arms of the mother. Gabriel was sent to declare Him who is upon the throne, and yet also in the cavern. The subaltern was sent to utter aloud the mystery of the great King..." (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol.6). And, it was and still is Gabriel, the "subaltern" at work today.

Whether it is the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and other Christian writings, or the Quran, Gabriel is clearly seen and understood as a chief herald of the Almighty Creator – working across time and space in the vast economy of God.

And yet, angels are very much alive and working in our midst today — celestial beings whom we cannot see for the most part. In fact, it is often thought that angels have free will like us; "the unfallen ones" have maintained righteousness, and therefore, as such spirits in

Raphael: Agent of God

Words: The Rev. David Nichols, Associate Rector

If you are like me, the name Raphael might bring to mind a vague religious valence, even if you couldn't say exactly who he is. Perhaps you thought of the artist or his namesake Ninja Turtle. The only-partial recognition is because the archangel Raphael features in the book of Tobit, which was removed from most Protestant Bibles about 500 years ago. Our relative lack of knowledge about Tobit and the other wonderful books of the "Apocrypha" is a shame, but a discussion for another time.

Tobit is an entertaining tale about people going on a quest. Tobit, a righteous man who has become blind as a result of his good work in burying the dead as prescribed by the Law, sends his son Tobias on a journey a few days away to fetch some money held by a family friend. As he seeks a companion to show him the way, Tobias comes upon the angel Raphael, disguised in human form. Raphael has been sent by God to help several righteous Jews living in exile in the lands near Nineveh, including Tobit's family. Together, Tobias and Raphael capture a giant fish that tries to eat Tobias, and they find its various parts useful in all kinds of ways on their quest. Raphael has

been sent to do more than just arrange for the delivery of money to Tobit.

Along the way, Raphael and Tobias also come near the home of Tobit's kinsman, Raguel. Raguel's daughter, Sarah, had had seven husbands, and each had been killed on their wedding night by a demon who was in love with her. Raphael convinces Tobias to speak to Sarah's father about marrying her and all are agreed. With Raphael's help, Tobias defeats the demon and Raphael pursues him all the way to Egypt where he binds him. After a time of feasting and merry-making, Tobias and Raphael return home where the money is delivered, and by Raphael's advice Tobias cures Tobit of his blindness. Raphael then finally reveals himself as an angel.

The Book of Tobit has probably most often been read by those in the Church as a kind of instructional folk tale and not as a strictly historical account. Read as either, though, there is much to learn, and for our purposes much to learn about the ministry of the angels. Raphael does not meet Tobias and journey with him because he wanders around in human form looking for adventure. Raphael is sent by God in response to the prayers of

the righteous Sarah and Tobit. In fact, Raphael tells Tobit and Tobias that it was he who brought the prayers of Tobit and Sarah before the Lord. This is a fascinating idea and is a place where reading deuterocanonical works like Tobit is helpful in better understanding the New Testament. In the Book of Hebrews, the author is at pains to ensure his listeners understand that Christ is superior to the angels, great as they may be.

Hebrews also explicates Christ's role as humanity's great high priest and mediator with God, seated at the Father's right hand. It is likely that the author of Hebrews is working with an audience that understands the ministry of angels to be similar to what Raphael describes, and now proclaims that we are no longer reliant on the ministry of angels to bring our prayers before the Lord. Rather, Christ, both our God and brother, is seated at the right hand of the throne and he who has worn our flesh and lived in a human mind and soul now intercedes for us directly through the great gift of his incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Still, Raphael and the angels surely act as agents of God in response to the prayers of the faithful, even after the



coming of Christ. Raphael protects and gives advice to Tobit, helping him survive the attack of the giant fish, to find the kinsman who has the family's money, and to defeat the demon who has haunted Sarah. Raphael seemingly has great power from God to do these things.

But, when Raphael reveals himself to Tobit and Tobias, he states emphatically that his ministry, actions and will are not his own, but that he serves the will of God who sent him: "Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God forevermore. As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises." (Tobit 12:17-18)



Tobias And Archangel Raphael
In Church Chiesa Di San Benedetto By Matteo Desiderato
(1780) Wall Mural.
Adobe Stock photo

the being of pure spirit, is greater than a human.

However, notice how Raphael's ministry is identical to the one to which people are called. When Raphael reveals himself, he makes clear that his coming to Tobit, his help along the way, and all of his actions are done because they were willed by God. Raphael will accept no reward or thanks. He tells Tobit and Tobias repeatedly to bless God for what God has done. Raphael is His willing servant and agent.

This is exactly the way that people are called into ministry. We are to seek out God's will and God's will alone. The angels being pure spirit are not given some great power of self-determination because they are not weighed down with sinful bodies. The great and holy archangels are great and holy because they find their joy and being in the will and goodness of God. This is the same holiness to which humans are called in both flesh and spirit. Raphael's holiness and ministry as an angel are strikingly similar to the holiness and ministry to which all Christians are called. When we, through the grace of Jesus Christ, attain sainthood, we too will, like Raphael,

seek only God's will and God's glory, pointing all praise and thanksgiving to Him, and so find our joy.

Raphael and the archangels teach us about holiness and about sainthood. We may enjoy the stories about them and about the wonderful miracles and works they do and have done on behalf of God. I happen to think many of these stories are true. But their primary lesson for us pertains to the goodness of God, and our journey to union and friendship with Him, accomplished through the saving work of Jesus Christ our Lord, King over angels, humans, and all the creatures of God.



Angels are classically understood in the Christian tradition as beings of pure spirit, whereas humans are a combination of spirit and flesh (the animals then being pure flesh). This was the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas (who drew heavily from earlier teachers), and is born out in Raphael's own words. Raphael tells Tobias that when he thought he observed Raphael eating or drinking he was only seeing a vision. He is a being of pure Spirit after all, even if he can take on a fleshly appearance as in other accounts of angels in the Bible.

Despite his status as pure spirit and archangel, though, what we find in reading about Raphael is that he serves God in much the same way that people

do. It is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking it is only the spirit which is good, and that the flesh and the created world are inferior or even evil. We could certainly read St. Paul this way in places, though I would argue this is not at all what he means when he speaks negatively about the flesh (an article for another day). Given angels' existence as pure spirit, we might assume that Raphael's ministry is far superior to our own. In some specific aspects that may be the case: Raphael seems to have a power to contest with the demons — the fallen angels — that humans on their own do not possess. B

eing one of the great archangels, he can even go before the heavenly throne of God. In these ways Raphael,



The Archangel Uriel, found in the Roman Catholic tradition, is often depicted as the keeper of beauty and light and the protector of the northern sphere of the earth. (Adobe Stock photo)

Uriel: Ke

Words: The Rev. Holly M. Gloff, Associate Rector

In the Bible, Michael and Gabriel get all the press. But Uriel, another archangel, is mentioned in the post-exilic rabbinic tradition (which ended around 538BC) as well as being found in some early Christian traditions. He is popular in the Russian Orthodox tradition and is recognized in our own Anglican tradition as being the fourth archangel. Other religions that revere him include Eastern Catholicism, Oriental orthodoxy and Esoteric Christianity.

Uriel is known as a “master of knowledge and archangel of wisdom” as well as being an archangel. His other attributes include being a patron of the arts (which makes him my personal favorite), but he is also patron of Confirmation, sciences, poetry and judgment. In 745, Pope Zachary in the Latin Church condemned what he viewed as angel worship and struck many angels, including Uriel, from the Catholic canon.

Over the years, poor Uriel has been either equated with, or confused with: Uriel, Nuriel, Jeremiel, Vret, Sariel, Suriel, Puruel, Phanuel, Jacob, Azrael and Raphael. It’s difficult to get a good historical read on an angel who is confused with 10 other angels!

Four angels represent the four cardinal points (North, South, East and West) They are referred to as the angels of the four directions or corners or winds. Uriel is the protector of the Northern segment, with Michael, Gabriel and Raphael as protectors of the other three directions. (Michael protects the South, Raphael the East and Gabriel the West). The idea of angels being assigned different directions is referenced in the “Kabbalah” — a part of Judaism that deals with mysticism. God created the four corners or directions to encompass the earth. The angels are sometimes said to have “cherubim” aiding them as security guards of God’s metaphysical kingdom.

eeper of Beauty

Uriel, as the representative of the northern direction, concentrates in helping humans with wisdom and knowledge. Some practical ways Uriel can help you include discovering God's wisdom, helping you develop confidence in yourself, and motivating you to serve others by giving you "sparks" of wisdom, or insight.

There is a charming Jewish prayer often said by children that goes,

"To my right Michael and to my left Gabriel, in front of me Uriel and behind me Raphael, and over my head the Shekinah (God's presence through his Holy Spirit)."

And this from the Jewish book of Enoch, "[Uriel], whom the Lord of glory hath set for ever over all the luminaries of the heaven, in the heaven and in the world, that they should rule on the face of the heaven and be seen in the earth, and be leaders for the day and the night."

While Uriel did not make it into the traditional Christian Canon, he appears in the Second Book of Esdras (also called Esdras IV in the Vulgate). The story goes that Ezra goes and asks God a series of questions, and God sends Uriel (remember, angels are messengers), back to give Ezra instructions.

In other Christian apocryphal gospels, Uriel rescues John the Baptist from the Massacre of the Innocents by King Herod. In the story, he carries John and his mother, Saint Elizabeth to join Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their flight to Egypt. Leonardo da Vinci famously painted this scene in his painting *Virgin of the Rocks*.

Sometimes, Uriel is depicted as a cherub and the angel of repentance. He stands at the "Gate of Eden" with a fiery sword. In other stories, he checked the doors of the Israelite's houses when they were enslaved in Egypt, checking for blood over the lintels before the Passover. In William Longfellow's "Golden Legend," Uriel is the angel of the planet Mars. In

art, Uriel is often shown holding a papyrus scroll to stand for wisdom. Uriel is credited for warning Noah about the upcoming great flood. The Book of Watchers tells us that the four archangels were present before God to testify on behalf of all humans. As you can see, Uriel has had many roles over the ages, and there are even more stories found in literature.

In closing, I will mention how the Anglican tradition views him. He is our patron saint of the sacrament of Confirmation and is viewed as the keeper of beauty and light and regent of the sun and constellations. In icons, he is shown holding a Greek Ionic column, which represents perfection in man-made beauty. In his left hand he holds a staff topped with the sun.

Uriel has his own Anglican intercessional prayer:

"Oh holy Saint Uriel, intercede for us that our hearts may burn with the fire of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

Assist us in co-operating with the graces of our confirmation that the gifts of the Holy Spirit may bear lots of fruit in our souls.

Obtain for us the grace to use the sword of truth to pare away all that is not in conformity to the most adorable will of God in our lives, that we may fully participate in the army of the Church Militant."



Liturgical Moment

Angels Permeate Li

Words: Chip Chase, Verger

Most of us first learned about angels at an early age because of their part in the nativity story. But there is a lot more to angels than just Christmas.

What are angels and what do they do? When and how do they appear in our liturgy?

“Angel” comes from the Greek, *angelos*, or “messenger.” A fine example of this is in the first chapter of Luke. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell the Virgin Mary that she had found favor with God and would be the mother of God’s son. The church commemorates this announcement in the feast of The Annunciation on March 25. We hear it again in the Gospel reading on the third or fourth Sunday of Advent, when we often sing the hymn, “The angel Gabriel from heaven came.”

Of course, we find in the second chapter of Luke the appearance of the angel of the Lord to shepherds announcing the birth of the Messiah. This is followed by a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

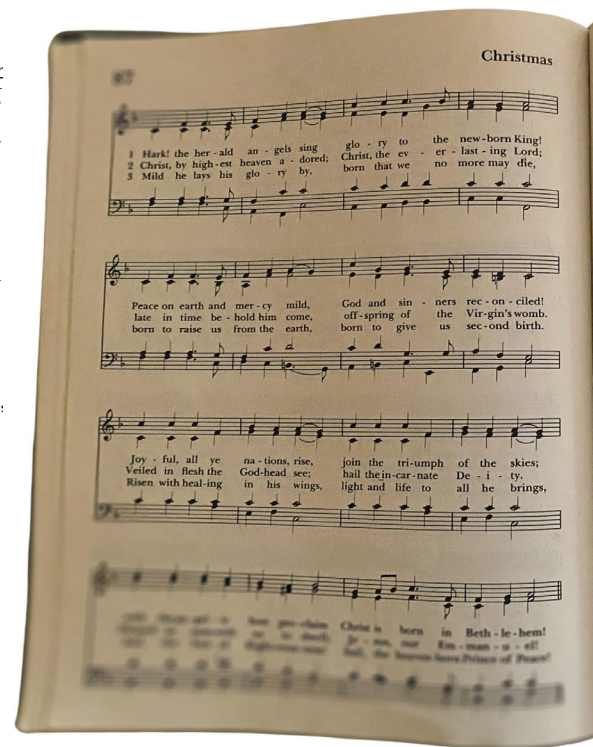
At Christmas, we remember this in numerous carols — “Hark! The herald angels sing,” “Angels, from the realms of glory,” “Angels we have heard on high,” and “The first Nowell the angel did say.”

While all translations I’ve read of Luke 2:13-14 say “praising God and saying,” it is often referred to as the “Song of the Angels,” or the “Angelic Hymn.” Year-round — except in Advent and Lent — it is also the opening verse of the *Gloria in Excelsis* in the Eucharistic entrance rite. The current prayer book also designates use of the *Gloria in Excelsis* at Morning or Evening Prayer, except in Advent or Lent.

The Book of Common Prayer includes numerous references to angels in heaven praising God. In the Eucharistic Prayer, we hear the words, “Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name.” This is immediately followed by “The Sanctus,” the hymn of praise which begins, “Holv. holv. holv. Lord God of Hosts” (Rite I), or “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might” (Rite II). Another “Angelic Hymn,” “The Sanctus” is based on the song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3.

In the Easter Vigil, the Exsultet, the ancient song of rejoicing sung after the lighting of the Paschal Candle, begins with the words, “Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels, and let your trumpets shout Salvation for the victory of our mighty king.”

In addition to their role as messengers and singing God’s praises, Hebrews 1:14 tells us angels are “spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” But Colossians 2:18 warns us that



turgy & Music

angels are not to be worshipped like Martin Luther’s description: “An angel is a spiritual creature created by God without a body, for the service of Christendom and of the Church.”

It is in the liturgies of Evening Prayer, Compline, Daily Devotion, Ministration to the Sick, Ministration at

the Time of Death, and Burial of the Dead, where angels take on the role of guardians watching over us— leading and comforting us.

In Evening Prayer, and again in Compline, we find the well-known Second Prayer for Mission, “Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch,

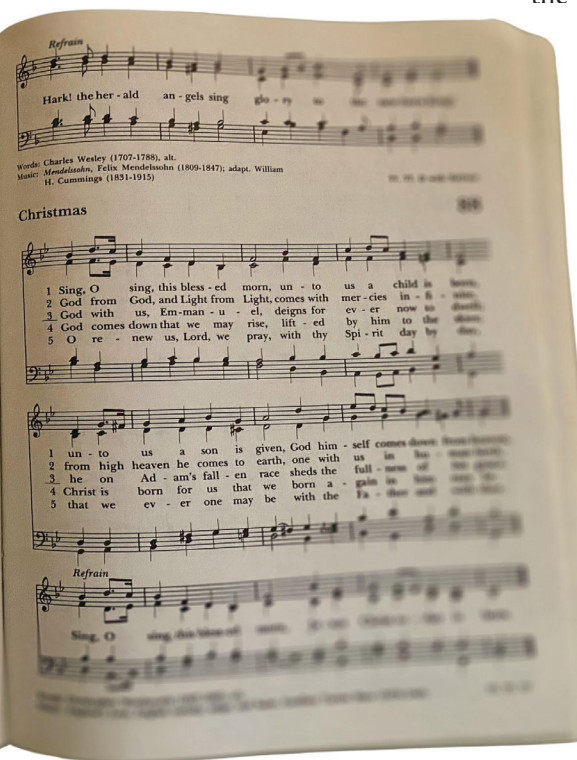
or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep.” I take comfort in these words.

And, the final anthem of The Commendation in the burial service, “Into paradise may the angels lead you. At your coming may the martyrs receive you, and bring you into the holy city Jerusalem.”

Angels are commemorated by the Episcopal Church at the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels on September 29. St. Michael’s observes this feast day on the Sunday following September 29, when we often sing the hymns “Ye holy angels bright who wait at God’s right hand” and “Christ, the fair glory of the holy angels.”

The Collect for St. Michael and All Angels perfectly sums up the roles of angels:

“Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals: Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.”



MESSENGERS FOR THE FAITHFUL

Words: Susan Byrum Rountree

In the 1998 film “City of Angels,” actors Nicolas Cage and Andre Braugher hang out on the tops of freeway signs, in airport control towers averting tragedy, at tables in the Los Angeles Public Library, while listening to prayers from the people they observe.

In the opening scene, Cage recounts with Braugher how a dying little girl asked him for wings.

“They always want wings,” says Braugher. “Tell her the truth. Angels aren’t human. We have never been human.”

Angels. Popular culture portrays them as winged, fall-



bumbling, angry, comical, slovenly and chain-smoking, and prone to mistakes. (Think The Escort in 1978’s “Heaven Can

Wait,” or Michael in the movie of the same name.)

But that’s not at all what the Bible teaches us.

Whatever angels are, Braugher’s character is biblically correct: Angels have never been human, despite that popular belief might say otherwise.

“It’s very interesting that we live in the secular age when science and technology dominate our modes of explaining reality, but there is an underlying fascination with the supernatural and specifically angels,” Jeff Hensley, St. Michael’s theologian-in-residence, tells me. “Guidepost runs a story about an angels in every other publication that they have.

“There is a general human longing for and explanation for beyond what we can see and touch,” he says. Searching for angels in our midst seems a very Christian thing to do.

Angels are much older than Christianity, and in fact are part of early Judaism.

“Angels appear in Genesis, Exodus, Zecharia, Joshua and Judges,” Anatheia Portier-Young, associate professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School

tells me. “And they appear across a range of genres and historical periods.”

Dr. Portier-Young teaches courses in preaching, Old Testament and early Judaism, and she finds angels inevitably sprinkled throughout her courses.

The Hebrew word *mal'akh* is the general word for “angel,” and means “messenger.” It is also related to the words for “angel” in Arabic, Aramaic and Ethiopic. The book, Malachi, literally means “my messenger,” she says. “The Hebrew word for angel is most consistently used for the figures we refer to as angels,” she says.

Angels function as a designated agent, she says, sometimes relaying a verbal message, but often they are doing things or have delegated authority.

“There is a real sense of needing comfort and hope and that’s what angels often do,” says Hensley, “at least in some of the biblical narratives. And then there are personal stories of people who feel they have had an encounter with an angel that has comforted them, saved them, or blessed them in some way.”

The ancient writers, according to Portier-Young, were imagining the world inhabited by humans, angels and God, all of whom operated in spheres. In the tradition known as Enochic literature, she says, some of the hierarchies of angels are mapped out. “What we find about angels in later Christian traditions will be formed by this stream in early Judaism,” she says.

One term for angels found in Genesis is “sons of God” or “children of God,” she says. “In Genesis 6, for example, is the story of the sons of God who saw human women and desired them and came down for them and had sex with the human women and gave birth to giants.” This is a transgression, she says, because the angels have transgressed the boundary between heaven and earth, mixing categories in the way they weren’t supposed to.

This story takes place before the flood destroys the earth and its inhabitants, all save Noah and his family.

In Enochic literature, she says, those who had chosen to violate the boundary became a group referred to as “watchers,” or fallen angels — a term used in the Book of Daniel as well, in the early Jewish period — the idea being

that angels are supposed to be watching over human beings.

This Enochic literature maps the cosmic scape in which angels are thought to reside in the heavenly realm with God, and humans have been created to reside in this earthly realm, Portier-Young says.

Jacob’s ladder is a case in point. Jacob’s dream highlights a feature that would become how they are portrayed — they are mobile. In Jacob’s dream, it’s a ladder. Later they develop into wings.

“The ability to move between realms was very important,” she tells me. “When God might be too overwhelming [to us], the more you have a theology of transcendence, the more likely you are to see these delegated agents sent to do something by God, similar to the way prophets get sent.” Angels, then are super-human agents for God.

How angels are portrayed in art and literature is a different story, says Hensley. “You have the Renaissance paintings of angels as babies that have nothing to do with the biblical narratives. They might be good art, but I’m not terribly fond of them. They are not good theology.”

The “Touched by an Angel” view is of angels who are like us but with wings, he says. “That’s not biblical either. When angels are described by Isaiah and Ezekiel, they have six wings and four heads. They are almost grotesque.”

People are also fond of thinking of angels in terms of guardians of our own well-being. “I would suggest that that’s not the biblical view either,” says Hensley. While there is the guardian aspect of angels, angels that bring comfort — think the night of Christ’s birth, angels administering to Jesus in the wilderness and guarding his tomb at the resurrection — “If we reduce angels to merely that, it means that we miss the bigger picture,” he says.

It’s important to understand that angels are “qualitatively different” from human beings, Hensley tells me, however popular they might be to us. They can appear in bodies, he says, but they move about as spirits. Another important point: Our futures aren’t in becoming angels.

See ANGELS on the next page



Angels

Continued from the previous page

Though it's part of popular myth, and perhaps even a point made by some Christian traditions, particularly at the death of a child, "We don't become angels after our deaths, and our guardian angels are not our past parents or relatives or friends," he says. "There is a danger in thinking of angels as beatified humans or our next level of existence. We are all creatures of God, but we are created for a different purpose by God, and that's clear in Scripture."

Throughout the Old Testament, angels are active, busy beings. "In Exodus, they are sent before the people to lead them out of Egypt, similar to Moses," Portier-Young tells me, "and there is an interesting parallel between angels and prophets. There is some scholarship, where we can look for small-scale theophany: The first thing they say is 'do not fear.' The reason they say that is because angels are frightening. In Daniel chapter 10, an angel appears and everyone runs away."

Angels, in fact, are a small-scale manifestation of God, Portier-Young says, performing a range of tasks.

In Joshua, we first see the idea of angels as warriors, like Michael. "One of the angels is a soldier, then general of the heavenly army," she says, and that connects to the idea of the archangel. "You're the 'captain of' the heavenly hosts. The angels were an army."

In much of early Jewish imagination, she tells me, the stars were understood to be the angels.

"So when we talk about the host of heaven and might associate that with the angels, in Jewish imagination they were one and the same," she says.

"In Daniel, when Daniel meets Gabriel, Gabriel flies to Daniel and says he's been fighting alongside Michael against the princes of Persia and Greece.

"What scholars infer from that passage is that what was being imagined was a heavenly battle was being fought at the same time as a battle among people. Angels were fighting on behalf of people assigned to them," she says.

"We are connected to [the angelic] world even in this one," Hensley adds. "It's not as if they exist in a faraway place and are out of touch with what God's doing in the world. They are connected to it. The whole point of the narrative in Jacob is that he is wrestling with how much he is going to be a part of God's salvation in history that God has called him to be. We don't talk about that a lot."

— JEFF HENSLEY, THEOLOGIAN

"It's not wise to consider angels as simply literary devices, says Portier-Young, because that's not at all what they are. "Angels are a real part of the cosmology. We attempt to construct belief from the texts and the texts are literature. [The early Jewish people] believed in them in the same way they believed in God. That they are just an idea is a modern sensibility, wanting to de-mythologize the text. That's not right."

In her research, Portier-Young has given equal weight to Gabriel and Raphael (an angel who takes on human sensibilities in the Book of Tobit, from the Apocrypha — and less to Michael).

Michael is portrayed in the canonical literature as more of a bruiser, she tells me. Raphael is crafty and he interacts with people, teaches them medicine, exorcism, recipes.



And then there is Gabriel. We know him best as the angel of the Lord, and his message to Mary about the birth of Christ. He presents Mary with a choice, says Portier-Young, though with others, Joseph for instance, he is giving instruction. Gabriel's message is about knowledge, explanation, interpreting — and sometimes about action, about being God's hands in the world, she says. Named in the Book of Daniel, he interacts directly with Daniel. "He is not just telling Daniel what the dream means. He touches him and helps him get back up."

"Gabriel is a prime example of angels as messenger in the visitation of Mary and the annunciation of the birth of the Christ child in her," Hensley says. "Is it necessarily a message of comfort to her? She is a young girl, unmarried, and an angel appears to her and says 'You're going to bear the Messiah... there the message isn't one of comfort, but an announcement of the salvation of the world through her.'"

That had to have been frightening.

Angels also call us to action, Hensley tells me. "Think of angels and their appearance to the shepherds. 'Go and find the Christ Child.' Mary has a call to action, and she answers that. The angels direct the wise men to go a different way, and they protect and guard the Christ Child in the flight to Egypt." The best illustration, he says, is as a witness to the resurrection. "They find the angel, they might not know this person as an angel, but that's how we the reader understands it. 'He is not here. Go. Find him.'"

Angels have been key witness to significant moments in God's work: They are present at Christ's birth and life, his death and resurrection.

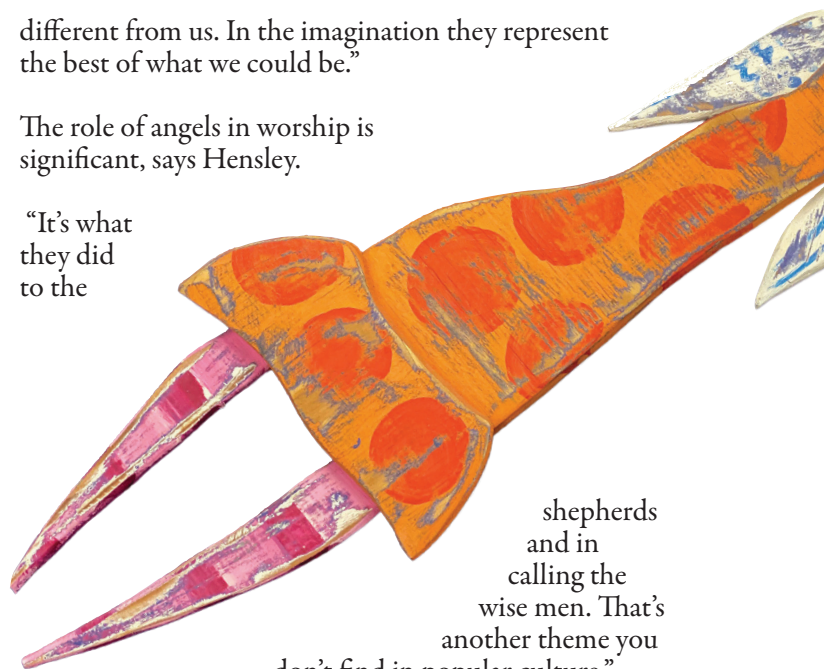
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Portier-Young agrees. "Angels do mediate the divine and they interact with people. In the narratives about them, it's much less likely that God in the sense of the first person of the Trinity is going to show up, but angels keep showing up. There is an access point to the divine that is more immediate. They do have a range of responsibilities and functions." Angels give us a clear sense of who to go to, she says. "They are portrayed as both like us and

different from us. In the imagination they represent the best of what we could be."

The role of angels in worship is significant, says Hensley.

"It's what they did to the



shepherds and in calling the wise men. That's another theme you don't find in popular culture."

Hensley has met people who talk about the guardian angel function, as a presence that said: don't go there. "It's a presence in the hospital or medical situation that they can't describe naturally. There are personal narratives that really do point to the reality that God is at work in the world in supernatural ways. Some things are beyond our physical and natural explanations."

The fact that we believe in angels and their work as "part of God's salvific act, makes us more attuned to God acting in the world, he tells me. Did the angel find the parking space? Maybe not. But did you experience an encounter in a hospital room, in a moment of prayer, a deep sense of the divine, that there is something a lot more than the reality of what we see, touch and feel. That's part of the angelic in our faith. It's grace toward us, not something we can control."

One thing is certain. No one has proven that angels don't exist. "Angels are so integrated into the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection," Hensley says. "If we have reason to believe in that — and we do — then we can believe that angels are at work in that."

"Why limit God to a particular way of acting? Dreams, personal encounters — be attentive to that."



From the Senior Warden

Fill the Space Betw

Words & Photos: Katherine Bird Poole

The first time I knew I felt it was as a young camper at Camp Kanuga. After evening activities, everyone would gather in the field by the paved rec shelter. We would form a circle, cross hands, sway, YES SWAY, and sing “Kumbaya.” (Sidebar: It was the late 1970s and “Kumbaya” was cool.) The enchantment of our young voices floating above the natural notes of the night, the warmth of our closeness in the chilled mountain air, the rising moon and occasional lightning bug shining us on. The invitation:

*Kumbaya, Come by here, oh Lord.
Come by here.*

I felt it as a teenager when our small, super tight-knit EYC drove up to Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to hike and camp. Windows down, crammed into a groovy conversion camper van, we blasted The Police’s album *Synchronicity*. (Could the picture get any more 80s? Why yes, it could: I had a mullet.) Following my friend’s committed air mic rendition of the song “Walking In Your Footsteps,” a contemplative silence fell upon us as the next song began, a B-side, meh kind of song, titled, “O My God.” In that quiet I heard the lyrics and leaned my head on my friend’s shoulder.

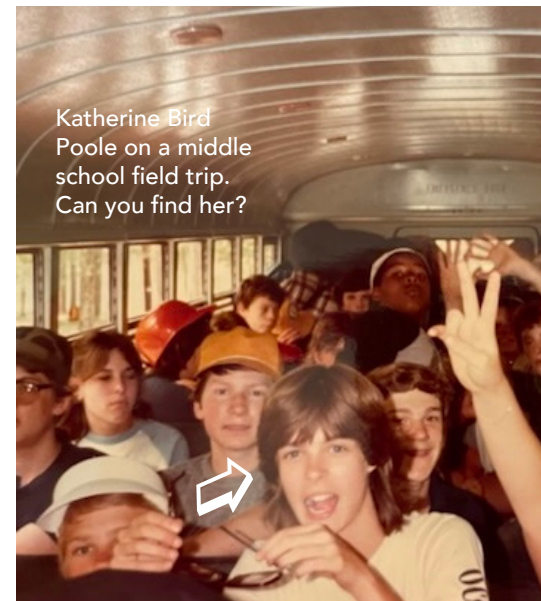
*Everyone I know is lonely
And is so far away
And my heart belongs to no one
So now sometimes I pray
Take the space between us
And fill it up some way
Take the space between us
Fill it up
Fill it up*

(Another Sidebar: When I say our EYC was small. I mean 8 people small.) I grew up in a rural-ish town in East Tennessee right in the big brass Buckle of the Bible Belt. Saint Paul’s Episcopal is the sweetest, little white clapboard church that is literally down the hill from and in the shadow of First Baptist Church, which my mother affectionately dubbed the BBC, which stands for Big Baptist Church. I do not mean to disparage the BBC, I spent many an enjoyable afternoon and evening there as the youth group was off the chain. Everybody went to

that youth group: Methodists, Presbyterians, Church of Christ, Church of God, and the odd Lutheran... Which brings me to a time when I unequivocally did NOT feel it. When I was in high school, First Baptist held a teen revival and the guest speaker was Elvis’ step-brother. Rick Stanley. Google him. (Not now.) Rick was an evangelist of the born again recovering drug addict variety and he brought his message of hellfire and damnation down hard, whipping a bunch of kids into such a lather that—mesmerized—they flocked down the aisle to be saved. Again. And again. And again. It seemed so empty—more performative than redemptive. Sorry that was a long Elvis-adjacent ramble.

I felt it once again on a very cold December evening in Greensboro. It was Christmas break and I was visiting my college boyfriend and meeting his family for the first time. We went for a walk in his neighborhood stopping at a playground to hang out and make googly eyes at one another. He told me the story of a Christmas a few years previous. The family was to surprise his father with a jon boat on Christmas morning. The boat itself was “hiding” way down the street at a neighbor’s and his mother could not figure out how to subtly get the boat to their house for the big reveal.

So my dear boy, unbeknownst to anyone, rose before dawn and snuck out to the neighbors. He pulled that boat by himself all the way home. His father, a normally reserved man, was absolutely shocked, as were his tearful mother and sisters. Boyfriend wistfully recounted this story as this was only the second Christmas his family had celebrated since his father’s death. And it was the first memory of his father he had ever shared with me—still gripped as he was in the pain of that profound loss. I



Katherine Bird Poole on a middle school field trip. Can you find her?

een Us

knew at that moment I loved that boy. For my Christmas gift that year, he gave me a copy of *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran—his favorite book at the time.

*And let your friend be your friend.
If he must know the ebb of your tide, let him know its flood also.
For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours
to kill?*



*Seek him always with
hours to live.
For it is his to fill your
need, but not your
emptiness.
And in the sweetness of
friendship let there be
laughter, and sharing of
pleasures.
For in the dew of little
things the heart finds
its morning and is
refreshed.*

I felt it the day I married that boy at that Kumbaya camp surrounded by all the people we love most in the world.

I felt it the day Joe was born. Like 9 lbs 12 ozs felt it. I felt it the day Davis was born. I even felt it the day before Davis was born. Sitting about halfway back in that pew right over there with my family.

It happened during the Eucharist. Communion Hymn #335. I am the Bread of Life. Gets. Me. Every. Time. Big pregnant lady with tears streaming down her face. It started a chain reaction of tears right on to the back row.

*And I will raise him up
And I will raise him up
And I will raise him up on the last day*

I felt it right over there in the chapel sitting in the dark late one evening with some mighty special women who had gathered to arrange flowers on the eve of the service of our dear friend who left us way too soon.

And I have felt it at every Christmas pageant, children's chapel, pancake supper, Spooky Spaghetti, The Gathering, ECW spring event and Vestry meeting I have ever attended.

Oh wait, right. Vestry. That's why I am here. Here's the part where I say: So in conclusion, it has been my profound honor and privilege to serve as your senior warden. I do mean it. This church. And you, you... We do good stuff here. We might not proselytize or reborn people on the reg, but I bet there's not a single person here that has not been saved by a word, a verse, a touch, a smile, a hymn, a feeling.

You've felt it too. It happens in a moment of pure joy or naked vulnerability. Holding hands or leaning in. Singing or sobbing.

Matthew Chapter 18, Verse 20: *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Come by here, my Lord.

Take the space between us.

And fill it up some way.

For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.

And we will raise him up.

Amen.



Katherine Poole was Senior Warden in 2022. She joins our staff as director of communications in January.

Angels Take the Wheel

Words: Elaine Bayless



Elaine Bayless is a Rex Hospital chaplain. She writes frequently for *Archangel*.

As a child, I read many stories about angels in Reader's Digest. The angels were always there to save someone in dire straits, noticeably different from the messenger angels in the Bible. As I grew up I noticed more and more differences between the terrifying Biblical angels — hundreds of eyes, blazes of fire! — and the soothing feathery angels of popular culture. But while I cast a skeptical eye on guardian angels, I continued to believe in God's miraculous action in the world.

My favorite miracle story is quite mundane — not a healing, not an announcement — just a quiet blink-and-you'll-miss-it story of God handling some logistics. In Acts 8, Phillip is walking along with an Ethiopian eunuch, teaching him about Jesus, and they come to a stream. The eunuch gets baptized by Phillip, and then the Holy Spirit whisks him away! The eunuch rejoices, seemingly unfazed by Phillip's disappearance, and Phillip just starts preaching in his new location. But what was that like for Phillip? Was he confused? Did he look around himself and wonder if he was going crazy? Was he conscious? Terrified? Traveling via tesseract or strong wind or angel? We are given no details. And then it happened to me.

At first I couldn't believe what had happened. I reviewed the events of the day over and over, convinced that there was some rational explanation. Finally, God gave me a gentle nudge. You wanted a miracle, didn't you? Didn't you pray for protection as you were fainting? How can I show you my glory if you won't believe something as small as this?

It all started on Westgate Road. I was driving home in the middle of the day, and as I drove, my ears filled with a rushing noise, like the ocean. My thoughts became disconnected, bouncing around my head like an echo chamber, and I knew that I was about to faint and needed to pull over.

The road had no shoulder, but there was a right-hand turn lane entering a neighborhood. I drove into it and put the car in park. An ocean filled my ears and my vision closed in with static. I hit the hazard light button and unbuckled my seatbelt. My last memory is of praying for protection.

The first time I fainted was in 2005, in the luggage claim of an airport, and after I lost consciousness I experienced a seizure. When I awoke, I didn't recognize my husband, Dale. Granted, we had only been married a year, but most people recognize their spouses! For the next year, I worked with doctors to determine that I didn't have epilepsy, just low blood pressure and a heart that was sluggish to compensate. The convulsions, tongue chewing, and hours of disorientation afterwards were just a fun set of side effects. That day in 2006, on Westgate Road, I followed my doctor's instructions for fainting while driving: pull over, unbuckle, activate hazard lights, recline the seat.

When I awoke, it was a beautiful day: sunny, 70s, breezy. I drew in a deep breath of fresh air and smiled. I heard my hazard lights clicking, yet I was in a parking lot. Where was I?

Answering the question should have been a simple retracing of my steps. But the steps were missing. I noticed pain on my tongue— raw all along the left side. I looked about more urgently, puzzling over my location. I still didn't remember that I had passed out.

A fence rail stood immediately in front of me — I was in a parking space, my car neatly aligned. On the other side of the fence cars zoomed through an intersection.

I squinted at the road signs, and then pulled out my map. But reading the map was impossible — my head hurt, my tongue hurt, and my thoughts were slow and sticky, like maple syrup.

How had I arrived here? What should I do?

Dale was at work. I couldn't call him away. Blurrily, I looked around, noticing a large wooden sign to my left. I called a friend to pick me up, sounding out the letters on the sign like a kindergartener: Woo-ten Park. We deduced that I had fainted, but we had no explanation for how I had fainted at the entrance to a neighborhood and ended up in a parking lot *four miles* away.

Angels? Maybe. A miracle? Surely.

But accepting the miracle raised more questions than answers. Why would God intervene to protect me especially on that day? Phillip was busy spreading the Gospel, but I was just driving home. I had given God some very specific prayer requests for miracles, but this event wasn't on the list. It is a question that I will struggle with for the rest of my life: the question of how God makes decisions about when to intervene and when to stand by. In my work as a chaplain, I hear more requests for miracles than anything else, and I have no answers for those who grieve the death of their loved ones, wondering why God didn't intervene.

And yet.

Perhaps this was not about protection. Perhaps this was not an intervention designed to save my life, or even protect my car. Maybe this was just a visible mark of God's love for me. Whenever I read Acts 8, I would ask God what that was like — what did Phillip think? It was such an extravagant use of power in such a small matter. Perhaps my understanding of angels as messengers rather than guardians was closer to the mark than I realized. Maybe what happened in 2006 was not a miracle to save my life. Maybe it was a message. A simple "I love you," wrapped in a miracle that only God knew I wanted.

Entertaining Angels Unawares

Words & Photo: Beth Grace

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.—Hebrews 13:2

Some say angels don't exist. Others say they do, but you can't see them. I, myself, swear by them, visible or invisible. Otherwise, how could it be true that every time a bell rings, an angel gets his (or her) wings?

Angels are all around us. The Bible tells us so ... and so do our moms and dads in bedtime stories, as do the script writers of the great old movies we watch from under the quilt in front of the fire, and the weavers of the greatest fairy tales ever written. Angels are THE star attraction of every Christmas pageant ever.

Angels show up when you least expect them, but need them most. Some arrive incognito, their true identities known only to powers with more security clearance than you or I could ever hope to have. They have been known to break cover, heralding and singing, floating above shepherds and the flock over which they rule ... that sort of thing.

They have even occasionally been spotted dancing on the head of a pin. Nobody really knows why.

I think we can all agree on this: Angels are cool.

Angels are neither always female or male. They very infrequently flap around in handsome wings, shiny halos or wielding comically large trumpets.

Real angels are more likely to show up in wrinkled clothes, huffing and puffing from the exertion of hurrying to get to your side. They look like the neighbor who checked to make sure old Mr. Kowalski was OK after that big storm last night.

An angel bears a remarkable resemblance to the friend who took care of your dog when you were called in to work at the last minute.

Angels were well-represented in that church group that spent hours making blessings casseroles, a fresh one of which was dropped off when you had your baby.

It was an angel who brought you chicken soup after hearing you croak, "Hello," on the phone, who came to sit with you post-surgery, held your hand as you kept vigil at the hospice.

The wings were invisible, but I spotted something very angelic about that perky Harris Teeter checkout lady who smiled and called me "Love," that long ago dark day I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

I am no angel, but have been blessed by many. I sometimes wish I was like those people — a nicer person, a better one, who just goes into angel mode without a second thought.

They inspire me. To earn my wings. To make that bell ring.

And to keep it ringing.



The uber-angelic Beth Grace writes frequently for *Archangel*.

Listen Louder than You Sing

Words: Cherie Vick

Editor's Note: It has often been said that listening to St. Michael's choir sing a Sunday anthem or Evensong is akin to hearing angels sing. But what does it take to make this angelic sound? Chorister Cherie Vick gives us a glimpse.

Asking why I sing is like asking why I breathe.

Singing lifts my mood and centers my spirit. Throughout my life, I've sung in many choirs. Merging my voice with others creates a collective hug that we give to our listeners and each other. In this moment our hearts beat together. In this moment we offer our praise to God for just being alive. That's one of the key reasons why I sing in the St. Michael's choir.

You know from being part of our congregation the wonderful worship music Kevin selects for Sunday mornings and sacred holidays. What you may not know is what it means to actually sing in the choir.

First, learn the music. That doesn't mean memorizing it, since we have the scores in our folders. It means becoming familiar enough with each score that we can look ahead at the next phrase, then look up at Kevin to begin singing. Watch his closing gesture. Look down again for the next phrase. All the while measuring out our breath to sing through the phrase as Kevin has marked it. Like any skill, it improves with practice.

Second, follow Kevin. As with most conductors, Kevin has gestures that help us keep the pulse, whether 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/8 or, heaven forbid, 7/4 (1 and 2 and 1-2-3). Sometimes it is a challenge to read the entrances and exits, so at rehearsals we ask a number of questions about that. "Are you giving us the downbeat? Are you giving us the cutoff? Where do you want the closing consonant?" When singing Anglican Chant, we also watch Kevin's face. He is speaking the words with us, and if we glue our eyes to his lips, we will all stay together. After we perform really well, he smiles.

Third, practice. Because we cannot possibly learn the more complex music during rehearsals, Kevin gives us the scores well ahead of time, sometimes months ahead. We usually rehearse two weeks ahead on the Sunday music, and even further ahead on Evensong, Christmas and East-

er. In our weekly, 90-minute rehearsal, Kevin (or assistant organist Phil Valera) plays through the music as we sing it. We need to recognize our parts within the context of other parts and the accompaniment. We mark where we have issues and ask Kevin to play a few measures where we are uncertain. At times Kevin asks for a single section or two sections to sing so he can listen. His keen ear picks up any false entrances or flat pitches. Many times we need to do some homework. I play my part at home on a small keyboard. For challenging choral music, such as the Parry "I Was Glad," I sing with a recording on YouTube.

To sing well and for a long time means to care for the voice. Shortly after Easter this year I began losing my voice to chronic hoarseness. At first I blamed pollen. But when there was no improvement by May, I began to think it was time to stop singing. Was I ready for that? I decided I was as ready to stop singing as I was to stop breathing.

Because some other choir members had recently recommended the Duke Voice Clinic, I made an appointment. The doctor and one of the voice coaches scoped my larynx and recorded a video of it as I sang. When they returned with their report, I was relieved they found no abnormalities and no reason why I couldn't keep singing. I needed to stop clearing my throat—a bad habit I acquired during allergy season. They sent me home with a pamphlet outlining alternatives to throat clearing and made three scheduled sessions with a voice coach to build vocal stamina. In a matter of weeks, I could sing an entire rehearsal again without strain. I felt lighter and joyful again.

Finally, we need to commit to producing the best choral sound together. During the pandemic, many of us made individual voice recordings so Kevin could piece together anthems for the Sunday broadcast services. In those home recording sessions, we got to hear both the good and the bad of our own vocal production. Recording captured every false start, every slide into a pitch, every flat or sharp note—it was all laid bare to our ears. I know I was not alone in recording several takes before the sound, and the words and tempo, were correct enough to send to Kevin. It taught me to more carefully listen to myself when singing in the choir.

Last summer, Three other choir members and I attended the Conference on Church Music at Trinity Center.

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I found our parish on a late-October Sunday in 1989. My husband, Rick, and I had moved to Raleigh from Winston-Salem, leaving St. Paul's Episcopal Church — which I loved — and I was not happy.

That morning I slid into a back left pew (pretty much where I sit now), praying for some sort of sign that this would be the place I'd settle with my family. I didn't want to go anywhere else (except back to Winston-Salem). I slid back into the pew and waited.

I was a young stay-at-home mom then, looking desperately for an hour to myself — time to sit and think. As I recall the sermon was mediocre, the music familiar, yet neither felt like the sign I had prayed for. (A few weeks before, when I found out my husband was being laid off, I headed straight to church and asked that we not have to leave there. So in theory, I suppose, my prayer had already been answered.)

As the service ended, service ended, I stood and turned to face an unfamiliar crowd and yet I found a familiar face — that of a woman from my home town. "I know you," she said.

She did indeed. Our brothers were best friends, as were our dads. Hers was the first wedding I ever attended.

Of course this is what we all most want isn't it? To be known? Particularly in a strange land. When she found out my kids were 2 and 5, she led me down the stairs to the chapels.

When I was a child, I sat for many a minute before a child-sized altar at Trinity, my home church in Scotland Neck, so I knew in that moment at least my children would have a church home. So on the next Sunday I brought them with Rick, beginning what would become a 34-year-and-counting history here.

In those early years, I taught Sunday School and led Beckwith Chapel (where I first met Stella Attaway, another young mom), and joined the ECW.

Later, I baked rolls for Gifts of Grace (LOTS OF THEM), brought spiritual questions to the clergy when I was troubled, attended funerals of friends. I even said yes when former associate rector Claudia Dickson asked me to help create a little Advent meditations book for the congregation.

But one thing I never thought I'd do was make church work a career.

When that call came almost 15 years ago, I was liking my life. My fledgling journalism career that had started with newspaper photography had grown into a thriving freelance writing adventure. I'd written a couple of books, had a column in the newspaper and was writing for fun magazines like *Southern Living* and *Elegant Bride*. I'd worked my way from teaching fourth graders how to write personal stories to helping high school seniors write their best college essays. My kids were almost grown, Rick was sailing his umpteenth sailboat, and I had started writing a novel that, though set in church, was not the least bit *churchy*.

When I found myself sitting not in the pew but across from Greg Jones at El Rodeo, he was saying things like: "It's a ministry," "a calling," "lots of flexibility," and I thought, ah, well, so this is what my mother had in mind when she had me baptized into the Episcopal Church. "I want you to tell our story," Greg said. Well, I've known how to do that since kindergarten. But Church Lady? That was Hanna, whom we called "Mother Superior" at Trinity — the essence of Church Lady — and so not me.

But I shoved the novel into a drawer, hung up my freelance hat and abandoned my home office for a small, file-cabinet-stuffed room next to the chair lift (it's now a rest room) and tried to imagine what being a director of church communications might look like.

In truth, I've never felt very churchy, though the





The metamorphosis of communications at St. Michael's.

facts of my life probably convey otherwise. Growing up, the words: “I have done those things I ought not to have done,” rang quite clear to me when I came to church with my every-Sunday family. But church drew me, nonetheless. The first thing Rick and I did when we moved to middle Georgia as newlyweds was to find a church. At St. Timothy’s in Perry, Georgia, I was unemployed, so I taught Vacation Bible School and joined the altar guild, learning to press the corporal without a wrinkle. “You are doing this for God,” I remember my altar guild mentor saying, and the tenor of that church voice in my head changed.

We kept moving, kept finding churches: from St. Timothy’s to St. Martin’s, Atlanta, to St. Paul’s and finally here. And now with a church lady job, it looked like I might be staying put.

In the beginning, I really didn’t know what to do, so I surrounded myself with people who did: writers and photographers, artists and editors and web people — and especially my incredible cohort Ann Garey. We took our time and changed a few things. The church image used on *Chronicles of Canterbury* was so fuzzy you couldn’t tell what the actual building looked like. Thank parishioner Alan Sibert for the line drawing we use today.

We needed symbols for our many ministries, and with the help of parishioner/artist Louise Orr, we found them hiding in plain sight — in our glorious windows — and within them pretty much every iconic image we needed. And through the years, graphic designer Katherine Poole added her flourish to our stylesheet.

We kept going with the Advent project, adding a writer’s workshop to the mix to draw more writers from the pews. In the safety of our gatherings, people shared stories of God’s grace in their lives, sometimes with the class and sometimes only with me — grace found in folding laundry for a husband with dementia. Forgiveness, despite leaving a terminally ill newborn behind during World War II because choosing otherwise would break a family apart. (We kept a box of Kleenex in the middle of the table, so often the words brought us to tears.)

And after years of dreaming, we launched *Archangel*, a publication that tells the story of this parish the way I

imagined, and the Holy Spirit is truly doing within her. I looked no further than the pews for writers: Beth Grace, Will Lingo, Elaine Bayless, Anna McLamb — only a few of the gifted parishioners who shared their talents with us.

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019, the job kept this church lady going. And you — all of you — held me up. Knowing you are prayed for by the members of this parish is humbling and powerful and oh, so healing.

There is such richness in church work, such joy — even when you’re paid to do it. And frustration and anger and heartbreak and questioning and love and lots of laughter, too. Just like in any job.

But the Holy Spirit isn’t always apparent in a secular job, like she is here: when organ music drifts down the hall, or someone stops by the door after a funeral to share a memory about the deceased. Or when the whole staff sings the theme song from Mary Tyler Moore.

I’ve learned a bit about myself in these years. I will always make typos. I will always wish I’d written it a little bit better. And I will always cherish these cinderblock office walls, for what they hold within them. And as I leave this work that is an amalgam of every professional job I’ve ever had, I will never find with words to thank you for trusting your stories with me.

I am now that old church lady I never thought I’d be. But in many ways, I’m still the 32-year-old young woman sliding into the pew, hoping God will answer her prayer. “Please show me a sign,” I remember saying that day. And oh, honey. One thing I can tell you for sure is that God most certainly did.



Susan Rountree is the author of *Nags Headers* and *In Mother Words*. In 2023 you can find her trying to organize the maelstrom of her home-office and making Playdough angels with the grands. She’ll also be writing at susanbyrumroutree.com.



A Place To BELONG



A preschooler at BELONG NC paints with a refugee mom. *Adrienne Morton photo*

The pandemic, for many, proved to be a time of great creativity, and Adrienne Morton proves that point. But that's not how it started out. In reality, after being laid off from Lutheran Services Carolina's refugee resettlement department, she wasn't sure what she would do. "They laid off a handful of staff, she says, and based on her job in community outreach and engagement, "No one knew what that would look like during the pandemic," she says.

So instead of helping refugee families find their footing in our community, she found herself a stay-at-home mother, trying to figure out how to teach her 10-month-old son, James.

"For the first couple of months, I felt really lonely and isolated," she says. "I missed working with the refugee population. And I also found myself trying to navigate how to teach my own child. Did I have enough skill sets? It's a question a lot of parents were asking at the time."

As they moved through the pandemic months, mother and son created a new bond in their isolation. But Adrienne, who is the daughter-in-law to parishioner Pansy Morton, couldn't let go of the bond she'd created in her years working with our area's refugees. And in her own isolation, a spark. "I recognized a new element to refugees resettlement that I was able to put my shoes in," she says, "and that was access to early education programs, primarily preschool, and the loneliness and isolation anyone would face as a stay at home mom."

Adrienne had long wanted to launch a small non-profit — an idea that sprouted while at Lutheran Services Car-

olinas. The idea grew after being at home with James, and BELONG NC was born. It's one of five organizations receiving grants this year from the Mission Grants Committee at St. Michael's. Adrienne serves as lead teacher, treasurer, grant writer, marketing coordinator — at least for now.

"It's about accessible programs [refugee] moms and kids can attend, and access to early education programming," she says. "Schools struggle tremendously with this population," where English isn't spoken at home. "That adds one more layer in an already strained primary school environment."

Add that to the fact that most refugee mothers don't have extended family to help out, and the need for that support proves challenging.

So in 2020, Adrienne called on an attorney friend to help incorporate the non-profit. By July 2021, they knew what they wanted to do, though programming wasn't yet in place. They had a target neighborhood — the Smithdale Drive apartment complex — one of four in Raleigh served by Lutheran Services, and visited door-to-door, sharing about the program. They would start with summer camp, then build on that effort to create a preschool program. Lutheran Services had established a tutoring program in the neighborhood and had recently acquired an apartment for that purpose. A former coworker knew of her dreams and offered her the space during the mornings.

"One of the key factors for these children is that they have never been out of contact with parents or grandparents,"

Michael

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low rattling and crackling sound that makes you think someone is on the roof high above your head. Sometimes when I'm in there, saying my prayers, I imagine Michael has landed on the roof for a quick inspection.

In the Bible, one of the many words for angels is "watcher." Thus, in the song "Ye Watchers and holy ones," we are singing about heavenly beings who watch our goings on and perhaps join with us in our doings. In this sense Michael watches over us, and yes even joins in.

In this issue of Archangel, we're looking into all things angelic, and it's a worthy topic, especially given the name of our parish magazine. In these pages, you'll learn more about Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. You will discover things you might not know about what angels are, and some among us will share how angels have worked in their lives.

To be sure, it is not Michael but Christ who saves, and we are One Body in him. We do not serve angels. They serve God and we serve God in their company. Which means that while Michael is our patron, we belong with him to Jesus. Jesus is Lord, and it is Jesus who calls us all — angels and everybody — to a sacred life and a sacred home.

Through the Holy Spirit, God gives us a yearning to find higher ground than what the world offers, holy ground, and the Spirit shows us the way to such places.

I think St. Michael's is such a place. A house of God where we may rest in holiness and feed on the spiritual food carried to us every day, by the angels of Christ, who ascend and descend to and from there, all the time. How awesome is our spiritual home, our house of God?

But angels do not merely descend on this church of ours — they ascend from it, too. They come here bearing gifts from God — wisdom, love, healing — and the Holy Word and Food of Christ. And in a way they bring gifts back to God from us.

What do we bring? Not merely from God's house, but what do we bring to it? And to the world around it, that God so loves, he gave his only Son?

Let us be more than watchers of holy things my friends, but bearers of holy things — in our lives and in our world.



Shirley Jones +

Gabriel

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nature, have attained everlasting life.

But, there are "fallen ones" as we know, since angels, too, have a propensity to sin... and it has been said the greatest sin is "blasphemy... aspiring to the position of God". Nevertheless, the holy ones, including the "Angel Gabriel-of-Old" still abound in mysterious, Godly ways, manifesting the presence of God, and shining light on the love and grace that is forever in our gracious Lord. And this is comforting and revelatory news, as his ministry is a blessing among us!

Whether in a dream-like-state or not, wouldn't it be amazing to meet Gabriel and hear the Lord's proclamations? Perhaps you have met him.



Sing

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During the rehearsals, I became part of a soprano section where many members sang as if each alone needed to carry the soprano part. This was frustrating. Fortunately for me, the conference offered a workshop from Carolyn Myers on choral collaboration subtitled: Listen Louder than You Sing. She made several good points: sing softly enough to hear each other, maintain good breath support, and sing with pure vowels to create a good blend. After practicing her techniques, we sang a new, four-part madrigal. This produced a lovely clear sound—a choral blend that more resembled a pureed soup than a layered vegetable salad where individual voices were still recognizable.

This is the blended sound our choir works to create each week for St. Michael's, by both listening and singing into our collective songs of praise.



Cherie Vick has been singing first soprano since she joined the St. Michael's choir in 2008.

ARCHANGEL

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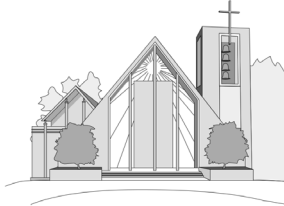


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Raleigh, NC
PERMIT NO. 696



BELONG

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she says. “To offer a preschool program in the same complex with the school that looks exactly like their apartment is comforting for them.

Today, the five children in the program are thriving. They come from Central America, Malaysia, Morocco, and Eritrea (East Africa), but the language barrier hasn’t proven to be a problem.

Through play and story, the children get along with each other. “The children don’t know any different,” she says. “They’ve been hearing different languages around them since they came to the US. Put them in a room and they start socializing with toys, with music. It’s very refreshing to watch.”

The children in BELONGNC have even started partnership with Little by Little, James’ preschool, and have become city Zoom and pen pals. The classes will exchange crafts this winter.

Some of the grant money has been used to hire their first employee, an Afghan mom who has been living in Raleigh for eight months. The model is for the non-profit to be run by the community it’s serving — a goal they hope to reach by 2026.

St. Michael’s funding will also support a full year of preschool and summer camp.

“We’re empowering the refugee population to not only engage in their new community but to lead it,” Adrienne says.

And in doing so, she’s engaging toddler James in the work.

“I had some hesitation going into a preschool and teaching,” she says. I didn’t know how my own child would feel, how a 3-year-old would see that. But he has been so engaged. He helped me clean the apartment, he’s donated toys. “He asks, ‘How was the refugee school day Momo?’ Watching the work filter down to the younger generation has been the greatest surprise for me.”

— Susan Rountree

Learn more about BELONGNC at belong-nc.org.

