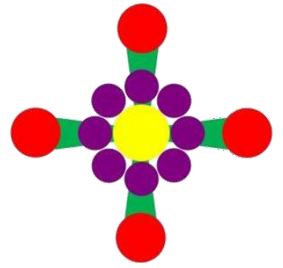


**The Benefice of Harden, Wilsden,
Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 29 September 2024
The Feast of St Michael & All Angels**



Richard has prepared our worship for today

Call to worship

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

**Let us rejoice and shout for joy,
giving God the glory.**

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
**as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever.**

Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Call to Confession

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love
with all the saints in earth and heaven.
Knowing our unworthiness and sin,
let us ask from him both mercy and forgiveness.

God of mercy,
we acknowledge that we are all sinners.
We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said
and done,
and are mindful of all that we have failed to do.
For the sake of Jesus, who died for us,
forgive us for all that is past,
and help us to live each day
in the light of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

May God our Father forgive us our sins
and bring us to the eternal joy of his kingdom,
where dust and ashes have no dominion. **Amen.**

Collect

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;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word

First reading: Hebrews 1:5-14

To which of the angels did God ever say,
'You are my Son;
today I have begotten you'?

Or again,
'I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son'?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
'Let all God's angels worship him.'

Of the angels he says,
'He makes his angels winds,
and his servants flames of fire.'
But of the Son he says,
'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.'

And,
'In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.

But you are the same,
and your years will never end.'
But to which of the angels has he ever said,
'Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?

Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Thanks be to God for the gift of His word.

Second reading: John 1:47-51

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Holy Word.

This reading, taken from the first chapter of John, right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, is John's account of the calling of the disciples. Immediately before he has called them, he has been baptised and John has recognised that he is the Messiah. John clearly preaches that he is not the one who has been sent – it is Jesus who is, and people hear, and are drawn to Jesus. There aren't quite the stories of fishermen putting down their nets, a common detail we often learn as children when we learn about the calling of the disciples, but beginning with Andrew, then Peter, then Philip and Nathanael, they hear Jesus, they spend time with him and then with a clarity of realisation, they know they can do nothing else but follow him.

On the next day, Jesus goes to Galilee with his new disciples (the lectionary misses out Nathanael's joke about 'Can anything good come from Galilee?') and it is here we encounter Philip and Nathanael who both, on encountering Jesus, recognise him and begin to follow him. Nathanael's name means 'God gives' in Hebrew but he is a figure who almost immediately understands exactly who Jesus is and what he has come to do – he represents the Jewish people who recognise Jesus as Messiah. The reference to the fig tree is an important symbol in telling us more about Nathanael: in the Old Testament, the fig tree is where people study the Torah.



Fig trees are tall and broad and shady, making a good practical place to study, but it is also a tree redolent of fertility and growth – again showing us that by reading and studying scripture, we will learn more about God and that will nourish our lives. Things – and we – will grow if we feed ourselves. It is a real encouragement for us to commit to reading our Bibles. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus curses a fig tree that bears no fruit – a metaphor for those who reject him – so the fig tree then is a symbol to encourage us to commit to regular study of the Word.

His words to Nathanael at the end are also full of hope and promise. Even though Nathanael is a good man who knows his Torah, Jesus will reveal things to him that are far beyond his understanding and that his study will not have prepared him for – the heavens to open and the angels of God will be visible alongside Jesus, revealing his divinity. In the book of Genesis, Jacob, son of Abraham, sees a ladder in his dreams where angels are climbing up and down, revealing heaven but here they are to reveal to humankind that Jesus is the son of God. And Jesus promised that there will be ‘greater things than that’. Greater things than those written in the Old Testament; greater than the miracles of the past: greater even than the promises of the prophets. And that is what Jesus came to reveal to us. Emmanuel – God with us; God among us. A love stronger than death.

I hope you will find this passage a great encouragement to enjoy reading our Bibles and spending time with Jesus – just as his disciples did. It is such a beautiful image of the fig tree – rooting us back with Old Testament prophets and Gospel disciples – to find pleasure in learning and studying more about God. But it is the promise of the fruit of that study and knowledge that is exciting – Jesus will speak to us through those words and call us, deepening our love for him and guiding us through our lives. I hope we find our own fig trees, truly recognise Jesus and follow his call for our lives.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

**Though he was divine,
he did not cling to equality with God,
but made himself nothing.
Taking the form of a slave,
he was born in human likeness.
He humbled himself
and was obedient to death,
even the death of the cross.
Therefore God has raised him on high,
and given him the name above every name:
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
and every voice proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession with Helen Ludkin

Gracious God we bring to you the people, places and issues of the Middle East in all its pain and confusion. We pray for the leaders of Lebanon, Israel and all the nations and factions that they may have compassion for each other and wisdom to find a peaceful way forward. Be especially close to those who have lost loved ones, those who have been injured, those who have lost their homes and those who live in fear.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Gracious God our prayers continue for Gaza and for all the trouble spots of the world. We commend to you the United Nations and all world leaders as they seek to promote harmony between the nations. We pray for the coming of your kingdom when women, men, boys and girls will no longer have to live in fear and for the peace which the world cannot give.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Gracious God we remember those in our own country and throughout Europe who have been afflicted by floods and extreme weather. We commend to you those who are engaged in the clean-up process; those who are seeking to return to their homes; those offering comfort and support.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Gracious God we commend to you our government, parliament and all political parties as they seek to discern the best way forward for our nation. May they be guided by your values of righteousness, justice and mercy.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, you gave your Son to be our saviour and to show us how to live by his words and actions. You gave us an example of love and compassion. We pray for our churches that we may have the vision and imagination to serve you creatively and to offer comfort and support to those in need.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, so many people in your world are suffering in so many ways. There are those who live in fuel poverty; those who are dependent on food banks; those whose lives are crippled by debt. We commend them to you. We remember all who are sick, those awaiting treatment, those anxiously waiting for the results of tests for themselves or for those whom they love, that you will bring them your peace.

**Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers,
for the sake of your son,
our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Closing prayer

Lord of heaven,
you have brought us near to an innumerable company of angels
and to the spirits of the saints made perfect:
as in the sacred food of our earthly pilgrimage
we share their fellowship, so may we come to share their joy in heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

God's Blessing for us

To him who is able to keep us from falling
and to present us without blemish
before the presence of his glory with rejoicing,
to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion and authority,
before all time and now and for ever.

Amen.

May God give you
his comfort and his peace,
his light and his joy,
in this world and the next;
and the blessing of God Almighty
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you now and remain with you always.

Amen.

Sending Out

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
In the Name of Christ! Amen!