

**Readings for Today:** Revelation 12: 7 – 12; Psalm 137 (138): 1 – 5; John 1: 47 – 51.

The Church of England's translation of the Nicene Creed asks us to acknowledge the existence of things *seen and unseen*, but the original text speaks, not merely of things we don't see, but of things we cannot see – *things visible and invisible*. And in saying this the Creed is simply acknowledging a truth of which Scripture repeatedly speaks – namely that God's creation is not limited to the material universe. The books of the Bible are full of spiritual presences: of beings which worship God continually, like the seraphim in Isaiah's vision; of agents which carry out his will, like the horses and chariots of fire protecting Elisha, and the destroyer of Sennacherib's army; and of messengers who bring God's commands, like the one who prevented the sacrifice of Isaac. We give the title 'angel' to all these beings although it should strictly be limited to one who is a messenger – which is the meaning of the word.

In the canonical scriptures three of these beings are named – *Michael*, *Gabriel*, and *Raphael*. Their names signify 'Who is like God', 'Strength of God', and 'Healing of God'. In Christian tradition they are called archangels.

*Raphael* appears only in the Book of Tobit, where he protects Tobias and his wife from a demon and brings about the restoration of Tobit's sight.

*Gabriel* appears as the messenger of God to Daniel, interpreting his visions, and in the Gospel of Luke, bringing Mary the invitation to become the mother of Jesus.

*Michael* appears in the Book of Daniel as the prince and defender of God's people, and in the Book of Revelation as the leader of the army of heaven, defeating Satan.

These archangels are sometimes joined by four others, among them *Uriel*, who figures in the apocryphal book of Esdras as the teacher of Ezra, and so is regarded as the angel of wisdom.

Of these archangels *Michael* has attracted the greatest popular devotion, being regarded as the protector of the Church against diabolical evil, and the standard-bearer who leads the departed Christian into the heavenly light.

But our most frequent celebration of the angels occurs in the celebration of the Eucharist, when we join them in the never-ending worship of God, the thrice-holy Trinity.