



## **SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2020 – ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS**

### **Psalm 103.19-end**

19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven, ♦  
and his kingdom has dominion over all.

20 Bless the Lord, you angels of his, ♦  
you mighty ones who do his bidding  
and hearken to the voice of his word.

21 Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, ♦  
you ministers of his who do his will.

22 Bless the Lord, all you works of his,  
in all places of his dominion; ♦  
bless the Lord, O my soul.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is included here, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2000 and published by Church House Publishing.

### **Hebrews 1.5-end**

5 For 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"? 6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7 Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." 8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." 10 And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; 12 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." 13 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"? 14 Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

## **John 1.47-end**

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51 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."

## **Reflection – this week from Mary-Lou**

This weekend we're celebrating the great festival of St Michael & All Angels. And you know, I sometimes wonder whether I'd actually recognise an angel! Would an angel actually be like the ones we see on Christmas cards, with their glorious wings and white robes? Just think of all those little angels we've watched in nativity plays over the years or perhaps it'd be more like the very unusual angel Clarence Odbody, in one of my all-time favourite films, *It's a Wonderful Life*?

But as the writer Ann Lewin puts it, the Bible opens our eyes to an angelic presence with a harder edge, and in more guises than we could guess. In her poem, 'Angels', she describes them as:

*'Flames of fire, shafts of illumination,  
disconcerting messengers of God'.*

We often sing hymns about 'the heavenly host'. But who are they? – the various orders of heavenly beings, who are just as much a part of God's created order as the universe we see. Among them are the angels, beings who move between heaven and earth, to engage with mortals. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are the three Archangels from the Bible: they're the beloved messengers of God. The very word 'angel' actually means 'messenger', and angels are right there in the Biblical story, coming to surprise people into new understanding of God's ways. Like the angels in Genesis who went to the very old Abraham and Sarah and promised they would still have a baby. Or Gabriel's message to Mary. And think of the angels at the empty tomb, telling Jesus's friends not to look for the living among the dead on that first Easter morning.

All wonderful, but very disconcerting news!

Angels seem to move between heaven and earth, not always recognised, bringing challenge as well as comfort, healing, or protection for the faithful. They are glorious, and deeply mysterious. Their purpose, as with all the heavenly beings, is to worship the Holy One, to worship our God – and in the Book of Revelation we have wonderful pictures of that worship that is offered continuously in heaven. Caught up in their

worship, focused on God, as God's messengers, angels listen for God's word and act on it.

They come to us, to fulfil God's purposes for creation. They invite us to be caught up in their worship, as we also listen for God's call and respond. And our part is to help those around us hear God's word too. Such mysteries, beyond our understanding!

Thank God afresh for the wonder of Michael and all the angels. And never be surprised if you catch a glimpse of one, just on the edge of your vision! What message might the angels be bringing for you? May it be one of peace, of comfort or healing – but it could also be a nudge that's a bit more disconcerting! If it is, you're in good company. The company of the faithful people of God – with Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Nathaniel, Mary and Joseph, to name just a few. God bless you.

You might like to read the whole of that poem I mentioned earlier:

### *Angels*

Flames of fire, shafts of illumination;  
Disconcerting messengers of God;  
Assuring a woman that she can give birth;  
Telling a man that what she bears is  
Gift from God; challenging us to  
Look, and now seek life where only death  
Is found; opening doors, surrounding us with  
Care, surprising us into fresh understanding.

*Published in 'Watching for the Kingfisher', Ann Lewin, p 31.*