

Ancient civilizations visualized the world as being populated by an array of powerful yet unseen beings-beings working for good and equally for evil. The

Israelites of OT times also shared this belief, but recognized these unseen beings as messengers of God, The Eternal One. Angels are not mentioned as part of creation but appear in scripture soon after humans first appear on earth. Remember when Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise and an angel is positioned at the gates, flaming sword in hand, banning their return.

By the time we arrive at the last pages of scripture, we have had many encounters with angels- in the OT and in the New, so much so that Scripture would not have been the same without them. In the Book of Revelation, St John and his escort, stroll through by the river of life and take in the beauty and grandeur of the holy city, and the angel is quite alarmed when John falls down and tries to worship him. The angel reminds him that they are both fellow servants of God.

We see them named according to their individual functions; Michael, “the one who is like God”. Michael the warrior.

Gabriel “the bringer of news and the announcer of the end of time.”

Raphael “the healer”. But these because of their important work are given the title of Archangel.

So it is that Gabriel comes to announce God’s will as with Mary: angels sing anthems as for the shepherds; they warn of impending trouble for Mary and Joseph, so they flee to Egypt. They are there to reprimand, guide, to rescue, to announce the good news of the hope of the resurrection. They are there to open the prison doors for Peter.

In heaven we see battle and struggle as the archangels gather their forces and war breaks out. Michael and Satan ride into battle and Michael triumphs, banishing Satan, “that old serpent”, hurtling him down as a falling star from the depths of heaven to the depths of hell, but ever since, Satan has won battle after battle among human beings who are foolish enough to think he has been defeated and is not therefore present in our lives. He still has power because he is still an archangel albeit a fallen one.

One of the sculptures which has stayed with me ever since I saw many years ago is the great bronze on the wall of the new Coventry Cathedral, depicting Michael standing above a defeated Satan- or that is how most people see it.

But by looking more closely it can be seen that Michael’s spear has not yet entered Satan’s body- that Satan is not lying dead, but resting on one elbow still with the strength enough to make him rise. Epstein’s statue reminds us if we look closely enough that the struggle between good and evil still goes on and will go on and on until the end of time.

In a similar way many wall paintings and icons, as indeed ours does here, depict Michael dressed in armour. This important image is in stark contrast with the Victorian pictorial image of pretty little girls with wings holding hands with a small child and leading them safely across the road or watching and smiling over them as they kneel and say their prayers. As guardian angels they are totally useless against “the evil one seeking whom he may devour.” That picture trivializes the work of our Patrons they do: bringers of Good news, the warriors against evil and the messengers of

God. For us in this parish, for us in our homes, they are the unseen but ever present power from God in our lives, experienced but not always recognized, by us mere mortals. That is why today we thank God “with heart and hand and voices” ( and what mighty voices they are!) to wish each other a blessed St Michael’s Day for another year of prayer, protection and guidance, so that with that confidence we can go forward worshipping “The Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Amen