



Sunday, 29 September 2019 – St Michael & All Angels
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: The Revelation of St John the Divine 12:7-12, Gospel St John 1:47-end
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Angels: what do we know about them?

As Jeremy Paxman says on University Challenge here's your starter for 10. Buzz in – or rather butt in - as soon as you have an answer. How often do you regularly think about angels? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Annually? Exactly! What would Christmas be without "Hark, the herald angels sing"? If, however, we only consider angels as additions to the Christmas story, we'll miss the full scope of their actions throughout the rest of the year. They are far more than beautiful depictions, for instance, in the reredos of the north aisle altar. But, as mere mortals, how can we be sure that we've been touched by an angel? Drawing on Bible references and peoples' own experiences, I've thought of six short reflections I'd like to share with you.

1 Angels give praise and worship to God

Their activities are described in The Revelation of St John the Divine, a brief extract of which we heard earlier. We are told that they never cease to sing, day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come". We too will sing that Sanctus during today's Eucharistic Prayer. The knowledge that our worship is joined with the angels helps us to grasp that Christ has truly bridged heaven and earth in a single span.

2 Angels can pop up anywhere

In Hebrews it says "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels unawares." We've doubtless all seen people in a hire car with heads bent over a map. We offer automatically "Are you lost? Can I help you?" The driver speaks enigmatically, none-the-less you point the way to a significant landmark, then, you're distracted momentarily and on turning back to wish them well, the car's gone: did that really happen? If God's angels have been at work it will have touched our lives in an unobtrusive way.

3 Angels are God's Messengers

From Genesis to Revelation there are accounts of angels as God's messengers. In Luke, as depicted in the side window of our church, the angel Gabriel visits Mary to ask if she is prepared to bear the Christ child. Then, maybe, we've had our own personal encounters. We go to church and unexpectedly we're asked to cover a significant task we would not normally undertake. Next, a total stranger approaches and says "God is calling you to serve him in this way, always." With absolute

certainty we know that God's message has been delivered and it cannot be ignored, the result changes lives. Nathaniel had a comparable experience. Up until we joined him in the Gospel, he was sitting on the fence spiritually. Philip points him to Jesus then Nathaniel has his own Revelation "You are the Son of God!" His life is changed he joins the disciples. When God calls, faithful Christians respond.

4 Angels protect God's people

Scripturally, there's ample reference to angels saving the faithful from harm. Jesus, Matthew, spoke of children having guardian angels before the presence of God the Father in heaven. Then there are those accounts of the inexplicable. Perhaps someone walking down a road has a prescient moment. The person stops immediately not knowing why but sensing danger. Then suddenly ahead a wall collapses bringing down tons of stone. The person is spared. In such situation it's right for disciples to question, "What is God asking me to do with the extra life span he has granted?"

5 Angels come to bring comfort to believers

In the Book of Kings, it states angels brought practical help to beleaguered Elijah running for his life from Ahab and Jezebel. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, in anguished prayer, is strengthened by a ministering angel. And, what of the times when people sit in distress beside a loved one on the point of death? The air stirs inexplicably and calms both the departing and the grieving: in that moment, something divine has occurred.

6 Angels carry out God's judgment

This is the gritty task of angels. Throughout the Bible we read of angels rooting out evil and dealing with those who have perpetrated evil deeds on the innocent and vulnerable. In the short extract from the Revelation, we heard similar, as Satan with his evil angels are routed from heaven by Michael and his angels. Instead, Satan for a while establishes his reign here on earth tricking the faithless and hounding the faithful.

Not being Archangel Michael, we need the Christian equivalent of Kevlar to protect us from evil whether that is temptation or the actions of others. The Processional hymn 'Stand up, stand up for Jesus' urged us to "Put on the Gospel armour". St Paul defines this in Ephesians as the belt of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; and, the sword of the Spirit which, together, is the Word of God. The Revelation reminds us that God's incarnate Word has already conquered through the sacramental shed blood of the Lamb, his Son. We are stronger, therefore, the more we engage with God's Word and Sacrament, as a double defence against evil.

A final thought for us to ponder. So often, under the radar of our human eyes, God's wealth of love, mercy and grace is continually directing his angels to protect and support us. The armies of angels at God's command help us to appreciate that heaven is closer than we might think. Amen.