

## **ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS**

There are all kinds of images, times or seasons which hint at the meaning of today's feast. Certainly in mediaeval times, it was undoubtedly linked to the end of harvest when all was gathered in and looking ahead to the chill and dark of winter. In other words, a change of seasons, something we will soon all experience here at Church. Rather than complain though, about a lack of heat, let's get organized and wrap up ready and be prepared - dear sisters and brothers - like the best of scouts or girl guides!

Let's be hardy Christian souls like our medieval forbears, who had never heard of central heating at the press of a button or who had never heard, for that matter, about the magic of air-source heat pumps. Neither could they know of the saving power of capturing the sun's energy from solar panels as we can today. We have all that to look forward to and the Diocese are very much wanting our plans to succeed. Please do read the Archdeacon's very encouraging words over there! We are soon to embark on our Faculty application and even ecclesiastical lawyers have been converted to a kinder, ecological future – which is, admittedly, very different from a certain world leader's views 'across the pond'. Praise be, for the Church of England then, something you don't often hear me say!

A new season is here. A new academic year is here which represents all kinds of new opportunities, shaping our every future. And today, Masses for St Michael are celebrated

across the world to remind us all that the last things, the end of time even, will be our seeing face to face: the end of all evil and darkness and instead, the glorious light of the heavenly host – the angels and archangels (not to be confused with archdeacons) surrounding us. They will literally banish the darkness of this world and, for ever.

I love all the imagery of serpents and dragons on earth being defeated, don't you? Our reading today from the Book of Revelation positively encourages the most vivid of imaginations. There's none of this folklore stuff about not eating blackberries after today's feast; you must know that common tale of St Michael's defeat of Satan who fell into a blackberry bush, hence they are no longer good to eat. No, I prefer this quote from Jane Williams in her beautifully illustrated book 'Angels'. I quote:

"Angelic activity is exciting, but definitely not for the faint-hearted."

She suggests that if this is how angels operate in the Bible, perhaps it is how angels also operate today. Angels do not appear simply to comfort and encourage and warn, but to move us on, to help us to make some imaginative leap or overcome some mental hurdle that is preventing us from seeing what the world might be like and what our own role in it may be. I like this idea of angels prompting us and putting us right. Caravaggio did that in the case of St Matthew, Tchaikovsky did that in today's anthem.

Our choir are learning Russian I am reliably informed, so watch out for that arresting phrase from the Orthodox Liturgy which translates, roughly, “let us set aside the cares of life that we may receive the King of all, who comes invisibly escorted by the Divine Hosts. Alleluia.”

Becoming disciples in the image of the saints is a huge and daring ask but the angels of God encourage and even demand this of us. To receive Christ into our hearts and homes and places of work is the very source and inspiration of all our creativity, and all our learning. This was true for Nathanael in today’s Gospel, as it was true for Jacob’s ladder betwixt heaven and earth. And for all of us, there will be an end-time when, we pray, we **will** see God face to face, in that place where (as Psalm 103 declares), “The Lord has set his throne in heaven, and his kingship has dominion over all.” There, our worship will continue to resound and echo in that dwelling of everlasting blessing, peace and light, surrounded by the whole company of angels and saints.

Hopefully, there will be no agenda of whether we feel hot or cold but instead, whether we feel rewarded and blessed to be in the closer company of the One who made us, redeemed us, and welcomed us home.

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AMEN.