



# *St Michael's and All Angels*

## *Sermon by Revd Matthew Wright*



1 October 2023

### *Feast Day – St Michael and All Angels*

Good morning Friends. Today, both in our in-person service and online, we are marking a very special occasion indeed. It is not only our Patronal Festival – the Feast of St Michael's and All Angels, but even as we mark this feast, we also celebrate 70 years of ministry in the parish of St Michael's, Bryanston.

A whole team of people has been involved, over the last year, in co-ordinating and planning various events to commemorate this great occasion, from the ladies high tea, held last month, to the commemorative candles sold by the parish, to the various commemorative videos published throughout the course of this last year, the parish has been working very hard to make sure this occasion is a fitting celebration for this momentous milestone.

What then to say from a theological point of view, in the context of this online service, on this very important occasion? Perhaps we could begin by reflecting on the significance of the patronal festival and then move to reflect on the occasion of the 70th anniversary itself and perhaps then forward as to where God might be taking us.

Our Gospel reading for the feast day may give the initial impression of not being entirely relevant as it speaks primarily of the significance of children. Of course, in a stereotypical manner, historically angels such as cherubs have often been depicted as children, and perhaps there is a closeness or parallel between the innocence of children and that of angels.

A more realistic appraisal however would see angels as being amoral or morally neutral – they are simply very powerful, and therefore even potentially dangerous if you get on their wrong side. The fundamental or defining hallmark angles is that they work at God's behest. Satan, who was an angel, and who in Job was part of the heavenly council, was sent by God to test Job. We see also in the famous story about the fiery serpents in Numbers 21 that these, who are literally seraphim, are sent to punish the Israelites for their disobedience.

Apart from the dramatic and apocalyptic scenes set in the Book of Revelation, which detail Michael's final war against Satan, relatively little else is said about angels in the New Testament. One aspect which we might do well to consider though is that there appears to be some basis for understanding the appear-

ance of angels not in terms of flashes of bright radiance, but sometimes as seemingly ordinary looking people.

On the day of the resurrection, Mark's Gospel records a tradition that inside the tomb "a man dressed in white robe was seated". This tradition is then further developed in Luke where we have two men dressed in clothes of dazzling white, and in Matthew, where it is now a fully-fledged angel of the Lord. Then of course there is also the injunction in Hebrews 13:2 not to neglect to entertain strangers for thereby we sometimes entertain angels unawares.

As with so many aspects of our faith as Christians, we understand Jesus as initiating a new period or epoch, where the ministry, life, death and resurrection of Christ is the watershed moment which is the defining feature of our faith. When Jesus calls Nathaniel from underneath the fig tree, he suggests that there will come a point where the angels of God ascend and descend on the Son of Man. This means that Jesus, as the Son of Man, became through his death and resurrection, a gateway if you like to heaven, but it also suggests that just as had been the case previously under God, so too are the angels now in subservience to Christ and ministering at Christ's behest and in his interests.

They say that the Patron Saint of any parish is meant to somehow inform, shape, or colour the character and life of that parish. I would suggest that in addition to the St Michael and All Angels shaping the character of the parish of St Michael's, that we too, in a special way, enjoy their care and protection.

Certainly, as we look back over the last seventy years in the life of the parish of St Michael's this must be clearly evident. In other words the parish has enjoyed not just the faithfulness, guidance, and provision of God, but so too the protection and guidance of St Michael and All Angels.

The notion of praying to Saints is a concept that sits uneasily with some Anglicans. As Anglicans we represent a strange mix of Catholicism and Protestantism. So while the notion of praying to Saints for help and guidance might not sit well with some on this the Feast Day of St Michael and All Angels, let us be encouraged, both collectively and as individuals, to invoke the protection of St Michael and his angels. At least us be assured that, as we look forward to another 70 years of vibrant ministry, God "will command his angels concerning us to guard us in all our ways. That on their hands they will bear us up, lest we dash our feet against stones." (Psalm 91:11-12)

Amen