

Genesis 28:10-17

Psalm 91

Hebrews 1:5-14

John 1:47-51

SS Michael & All Angels (Michaelmass) 27th September 2020 - Mumbo Jumbo? (Fr. Mike)

There is a famous old film starring James Stewart as an absent-minded professor who develops a relationship with a six-foot rabbit named "Harvey" which is clearly visible to the professor, yet totally unseen by the rest of the world. It is clearly a brilliant film, albeit in black and white, expressing the complexity of all that is, seen and unseen (or as the Book of Common Prayer says, '**all that is visible and invisible**').

Our Creed asks us to profess this belief in all the "IS" - yet are we 'one can short of a six-pack' if we take seriously the existence of angels?

How much do you know?

The universe is like a car. Our scientists have learnt much about the universe and how it works, but they have no idea where it is going or why someone even wants to go in it. There is no point in asking the machine, because machines, like universes, do not answer questions.

Perhaps God made the universe in an evolutionary way so that we might share his joy, learn the wonder of creation, and try to work out some of God's purpose for ourselves. So why do we know so little, and if God likes us to share his knowledge why does he share so little?

I feel that the theology of Angels speaks to us of God's continual sharing. The feast of St.

Michael and All Angels today highlights our true position in Creation.

Reality or rubbish?

Study the psalms. They give a view of human life (history) and they show it to be a continual struggle against very real and evil (unholy) powers.

When God created the heavens, He created them first with an order of spiritual beings (the Heavenly Host). Next came the material universe, and lastly humans with spiritual souls, capable of love, and with an intellect – a capacity for understanding. Therefore, our life is both *an education* (i.e. can you learn to believe in God?) *and a test*, (i.e. do you love God?)

Each week we dutifully recite in our Creed that we **“believe in all that is, seen and unseen.”**

During the services that use this language we stand in a building together preparing to literally eat the bread of angels, to share in Christ’s eternity. This is none other than **‘the gate of heaven’** (Genesis 28.17) joining our prayers **‘with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven,’** as our Eucharistic prayer also helpfully reminds us.

Who are the angels? Where are they? What do they do?

At the font: the angels are witnesses of every Baptism (Hebrews 12.v22). At a Christening angels are assigned to the newly baptised as guardians (Matthew 18.v10).

At Judgement: angels write down in the Book of Life names of those who are Baptised, **‘and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth...but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life’** (Revelation 21.v27).

Angels rejoice: at every child of God delivered from sin - i.e. people who are healed from a wrong relationship with God (Luke 15.v10).

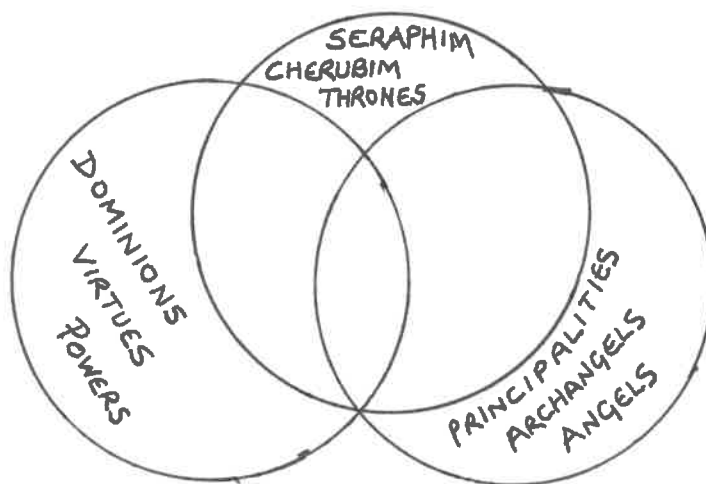
Angels were present: at the birth of Jesus - therefore they are present at the new birth of all his little ones (Luke 2.13-14); and at Holy Communion - during the Sanctus ('Holy, Holy, Holy') prayer (Rev.4. 8-11 and Isaiah 6.1-3).

Consequently, if a higher spiritual being such as an Angel bows in due reverence, so too must the priest and the people of God.

At Jesus Christ's Ascension: the Angels sang (Psalm 24.v7).

Normally, you cannot 'see' angels at all, and we are usually more conscious of evil spirits than angelic ones – but when you think about it, that's hardly surprising given that the most helpful people are very quiet about what they are doing. To ask the question 'what are angels 'like' ? is really a non-question because there is nothing 'like' them in our physical experience. So to try and answer this we can only look to Christian art. For instance, the pictures with angels with wings, looking more or less like men, may or may not be accurate, as these were merely appearances.

History has listed an order of angels in three triads.



What these orders 'do' is, as they say, anybody's guess, mainly because the business of heaven is not completely our affair, as yet.

Why are Angels carved in our church?

The significance here is that the war which occurred in heaven continues here on earth, and our guardian angels are heavenly aspects of our 'neighbourhood watch' schemes (although they are more concerned with our spiritual welfare rather than whether our homes are ransacked). We believe that God watches over all of us; and further helps us by creating doctors, teachers, priests and friends who also watch over us. Sadly, not everyone accepts help, but we all live by begging in some form. The Prime Minister and our bishops for example, are dependent upon secretaries and assistants, and know how to beg 'nicely.' If we are ambitious or self-sufficient then we try to forget these indispensable helpers...



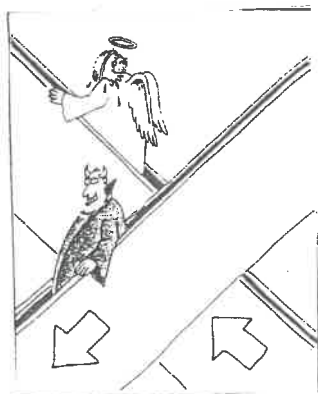
Angels '[shouted for joy](#)' as they watched Creation although God charges them with error (Job 4.v14). Consequently they get their spiritual noses broken, as we do; although God still loves them enough to let them take charge of the little things, such as you and me.

Hell's Angels v Holy Angels

The world God created is beautiful, although aspects of it are now ugly and some bits even seem a little clumsy. Apparently, this must mean that God did not want a world of pure perfection - yet some of us do! If God loves you and me, He therefore loves imperfect things in the same way that parents love and care for their offspring.

Having said all this, if we think of angels as being 'pure spirit,' in the sense of being less muddled than you and me, most of the angels loved God far too much to be jealous, or preoccupied with their own status, and concerned themselves solely with the message they were charged to communicate. **"And he will give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all his ways"** (Psalm 91). Perhaps this means that what we have tended to call our 'conscience' is not actually from us at all – it is in fact direct internal dialogue with a 'pure spiritual being?'

In other words, *it is our guardian angel*, gently keeping charge over us like an unseen pilot – sometimes making a mess of it, but generally carrying out God's vital messages.



Notice the nine arches carved in our Rood screen. These are surely not as random as they first appear. Maybe they represent the traditional nine orders of Angels, and offer in a very understated fashion, a powerful and symbolic representation to all who seek to approach the High Altar and ultimately the throne of Grace?



Conclusions

We sometimes do evil out of ignorance or stupidity, but the Angels are not stupid. When rebel Angels revolted against God they were 'successful' in the sense that Satan could famously brag to Christ that at one point all the kingdoms of the world were his...

Violence and deception are to a degree ever-present; and this cruelty and fear can never be completely removed from earthly things. Nevertheless, it is our duty as **'a flame of fire'** (Heb.v7) for the Church militant, to preach the Holy Gospel so that stupidity and pride is cast out of our religion just as they have already been cast out of heaven. Our spiritual friends, the Holy Angels, are conscientiously watching us to see how bravely and how often we can fight to build the true Kingdom of God in our crazy, mixed up, COVID19 world, and beyond. Amen!