

These books are not necessarily written from the point of view of orthodox Christian theology (though some of them are), but they *do* show that belief in angels is by no means dead in today's world.

Even for those who do not believe in the existence of angels, the word lives on in our culture and our language. People say such things as "You have been an angel to me"; "She looks like an angel"; "He is a perfect angel"; "The music during the concert sounded angelic".

In any case, the Church's annual celebration of the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels is very important. It gives us an opportunity to emphasize several very important truths. There are those within the church who would secularize the message and water down the Gospel, especially emphasizing the imminent, and playing down the concept of a transcendent God, or of any distinction between this material world and a spiritual order of being.

Our celebration of Michaelmas serves as a corrective to this. It stands as a reminder that Christians are called to believe in a transcendent God, the Maker of all that is; it reminds us that we believe that there are realities beyond the five senses, orders of being in the depths and fullness of God's creation, which pass human knowing, and cannot be seen or touched or measured or observed by us.

We note in the Scriptures that when someone is granted a vision of heaven (such as the prophet Isaiah, or St. John in the Book of Revelation), what they see is the angels worshipping God without ceasing. There is a lesson here for us. Amid the ordinary events of our daily life we are to lift up our hearts to heaven in worship, especially when we join in the church's liturgy. There we blend our voices "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" "evermore praising [God] and saying, '**Holy, Holy, Holy**'".

Or as the words of a familiar **Michaelmas hymn** express it:

**Father Almighty, Son, and Holy Spirit,
God ever blessed, be thou our preserver;
Thine is the glory which the Angels worship
Veiling their faces.**



The Rev'd Canon Peter Harris is currently Rector of St. Peter's Cathedral in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. He has served there since 1989, first as Curate, and was appointed the Rector in 1991. He has also served as Rector of the Parish of Tangier, Nova Scotia, and is a former Tutor of Divinity at Trinity College in Toronto. With his great love and knowledge of Anglican liturgy, Fr. Harris has been a solid supporter of the Prayer Book Society for many years. In May 2004 Fr. Harris was made a canon of St. Peter's Cathedral by Bishop Frederick Hiltz.



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MICHAELMAS 2004



From the Rev'd Canon Peter Harris

Reflections for the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels

"I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne...and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

Revelation 5:11

With these words, St. John describes his vision of heaven, especially his vision of the angelic beings worshipping and serving God day and night. Passages of Scripture such as this make us turn our minds and hearts toward heaven. Not only that, but such verses of Scripture also might cause the questioning mind to ask, "What about angels?" "What are they?" "What does the Church teach about angels?" "Do I really believe in their existence?"

For hundreds of years, the 29th of September has been observed as the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels—a wonderful festival which puts before us the Christian belief in angels as it comes to us in the Holy Scriptures and in the teaching of the Church through the ages.

Upcoming Retreat Dates

*Bethany Centre,
Mother House of the Sisters of St.
Martha, Antigonish, NS*
*We have successfully reserved two
weekends in 2005*
February 25 – 27
and
June 10 – 12

Through a series of daily addresses, opportunities for private and corporate prayer and study, and a chance for fellowship, these retreats provide a just enough structure weekend that most find thoroughly refreshing.

*For details and Registration contact
Lynn Edmonds at 827-3830; or email
lynnedmonds@accesscable.net*

Cost: \$100. (includes 2 nights' accommodation & meals Saturday & Sunday)

Upcoming Institute

**"The Rationale of the Trinity
Season Lectionary in the Book
of Common Prayer"**

**Saturday, October 23, 2004 at
St. George's (Round) Church,
Halifax**

*led by The Rev'd David Phillips
Rector, Petite Riviere & New Dublin*

10:30 a.m. Holy Communion
11:00 a.m. First Address
12:00 p.m. Lunch (tea or coffee
provided, please bring a bag lunch)
1:00 p.m. Second Address
2:00 p.m. Concludes

In the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, belief in angels is amply attested. They are portrayed as an innumerable multitude of spiritual beings intermediate between God and man. In the Old Testament they appear again and again, in a variety of circumstances. The New Testament authors represent Christ as surrounded by angels at the most important periods of his life. They announce his Incarnation and his Birth; they minister to him in the desert; they strengthen him in his agony, and are the first witnesses of his Resurrection; they will accompany him at his second coming.

What does traditional Christian belief and teaching tell us about angels? Angels are pure spirits—spiritual beings that exist in the presence of God in heaven, and worship him without ceasing. But they also have a role in relation to us on earth—a role as God's 'messengers'. We note that the word "angel" literally means "messenger" and consistently in Scripture they are depicted as messengers of God.

Someone may ask the question—"If angels are pure spirits, why are they depicted in a physical way with wings and face and hands?" And indeed it is true that angels are depicted in this way, not only in Christian art but also in some of the Biblical descriptions of angels. We have to recognize that symbolism is being used here—an attempt to describe in earthly terms that our minds can grasp, spiritual realities that are beyond description. So angels are represented in a human form to show that they are persons (that is, thinking rational beings) like us. They are often depicted with wings, to represent their swiftness as messengers of God.

And how are we to understand the appearance of angels to human beings, as in dreams and visions and mystic experiences? Traditionally the theological explanation of this has been to say that such things occur by a special act of Divine power and grace, which makes it possible for a human being, at least for a brief moment, to be aware of the unseen spiritual realities that are all around us.

Let us for the moment leave behind what the Bible and Christian tradition say about angels, and let us ask the question "What do contemporary people in the 21st century make of angels?" Clearly we find a wide diversity of reaction and opinion on this subject. On the one hand, we find many people in today's world who are secular humanists, and who have abandoned all belief in God or the supernatural. Of course such persons dismiss belief in angels as mere nonsense and superstition. Also we find some Christians today who would say that they are "agnostic" about the subject of angels, or that it is not central to their faith. But on the other hand, it is interesting to note that in our allegedly 'secular' modern world, if one goes to any book store and checks out the section called "New Age and Religion" (unfortunately the two are usually linked together) one usually finds a number of books on the subject of angels.

The NS/PEI Branch of the Prayer Book Society needs your continuing support

All our projects....the printing and postage for the Newsletter, the Prayer Book Institutes, our support for the Atlantic Theological Conference, the Retreats, and our encouragement of both clergy and students committed to Prayer Book worship.... All this requires us to have a certain financial freedom..... Our coffers are low..... Please help. And remember, receipts for income tax returns will be issued as soon as possible.

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**It is important that we keep in touch** Please send us your new postal or e-mail address, or phone number. Know someone we should add to our list? Let us know. See front panel for specifics on how to contact us.

**THANK YOU!**

