



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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## The Commemoration of Feast of St. Michael & All Angels, *Being the Seventeenth Sunday in Trinity, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is something of an embarrassment for many modern-minded Christians. There's something intrinsically unbelievable about a host of girly-looking guys flapping around the universe on huge feathery wings. Truth is they just aren't compatible with cutting edge scientific skepticism.

Trouble is references to angels permeate Scripture from one end to the other: from Genesis to the Apocalypse. The angels of the Bible, however, don't look much like the angels on Christmas cards. Angels, in fact, are often described as men dressed in sensible white outfits – no wings, trumpets, fiery swords or any other forms of impractical haberdashery.

The clash between art and reality might explain why some find it hard to accept that existence of angels. But while angels occupy a space far, far beyond human understanding, so do an awful lot of things in the Bible – miracles, prophecies, and not least, God, himself. Yet if God is all we say he is, there is no logical reason for disbelieving that he created other orders of intelligent beings to do his bidding.

The word "angel" means "messenger" which means they often do similar work to prophets – running messages between God and human beings. And while I can't summon up an angel to give you his job description, I can certainly introduce you to a prophet or two. Take, for example, Isaiah: There was nothing wild-eyed about him. He was a well-bred, highly cultured

man, whose father, Amoz, was brother of King Amaziah of Judah. Isaiah wasn't a full-time prophet, wandering here and there spouting weird and incomprehensible predictions at the drop of a hat. He served for more than half a century in the King of Judah's cabinet.

One might imagine that kings of Judah would have found it rather useful to have a prophet in the cabinet or heading their secret service. After all, a prophet who gets his information straight from God, so to speak, would be a very useful asset – a far more accurate source of intelligence than the CIA or KGB.

But not so. Despite the fact that Isaiah was proved right time and again. Rarely did monarchs take his advice – even when their lives were on the line. Isaiah was right on the money when in 735 BC Israelites from Samaria joined forces with Syria to invade Judah in order to depose King Ahaz and replace him with a puppet.

Ahaz – out gunned on every side – sounded out Assyria, the regional superpower, about the possibility of making himself a client. Assyria offered him a terrible deal. Not only did they take all the gold and silver from the temple treasury, they also demanded Judah reject the God and, instead, worship the Assyrian deities.

Isaiah warned the terrified Ahaz not to cut the deal. God, he said, had ordained that the Assyrian army would defeat the Syrian-Israelite alliance. Ahaz ignored Isaiah's advice and

became Assyria's vassal. But everything turned out as Isaiah foretold: Assyria crushed Syria in 732 BC and 10 years later conquered Samaria..

The price of ignoring Isaiah's advice was immense. The impact of Assyrian taxes on Judah was so severe that King Hezekiah -- who succeeded the throne on Ahaz's death in 720 B.C. -- immediately set about forging an alliance with Egypt to free the kingdom from the burden of its foreign debt.

Isaiah warned against this alliance. The Assyrians, he said, would defeat Assyria and ravage Judah. Hezekiah ignored him, but events turned out exactly as Isaiah predicted. The Assyrian army destroyed every major city in Judah and, ultimately, besieged the capital Jerusalem.

Panic-stricken, Hezekiah debated surrendering to Sennacherib, the Assyrian king. Isaiah flatly opposed the move, telling Hezekiah that God would save Jerusalem. The king hesitated, and Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. During a single night the entire 185,000 strong Assyrian siege force died of the plague. Jerusalem was saved, and the Assyrian threat dissipated, never to re-emerge.

Isaiah foretold many other events: Assyria's deportation of the entire population of Samaria, and the Babylonian captivity the people of Judah were destined to suffer some two centuries later. And with this record of success, one might imagine the kings of Judah would at last put their trust in Isaiah's prophecies. Not so. In the end, the evil King Manasseh murdered him -- tying him between two planks and "sawing him asunder" -- to shut him up for good.

The problem was the advice God gave through Isaiah was terribly inconvenient. It didn't accord with what the people of Judah and their kings thought would be good for them. No doubt they were able to rationalize away their refusal to listen to Isaiah, who even in his own time was regarded as a holy man, touched by God. It wasn't that the Kings of Judah didn't believe in prophecy: Far from it. The whole history of the Jewish people was replete with highly accurate

prophecy. But they didn't want to believe Isaiah's prophecies because they didn't want to believe God calls the shots, not the human beings he's created.

This explains the trouble all human beings have with angels. When angels turn up on the scene with a message for humanity, it is another demonstration that God is in charge and not we, his creatures. Not being in control of things makes us feel insecure, thus we go into denial.

When St. Peter was arrested by Herod Agrippa -- grandson of Herod the Great -- he was freed from jail by an angel. But it wasn't until he was in the street outside the slammer that he realized what had happened. Amazed, he exclaimed: "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all expectation of the people of the Jews!"

Not only was Peter astonished, but all the folks who were praying without ceasing for his release were astonished, too. It wasn't that they didn't believe God could effect Peter's release. What shocked them was the means by which he did it. They expected a smart lawyer to get him off on a point of law, or that Herod might have a change of heart. The idea God would use an angel was simply too outlandish!

People are just the same today. We expect God to do things the way we would do them, When he doesn't do so -- when he acts in a way that's entirely beyond our understanding -- we dismiss it as a dream, or as a figment of a fevered imagination. Our problem is that we have difficulty accepting God can do things we can't.

But why should we be surprised when God act like God? Surely it is the height of arrogance to imagine that because we can't do something, that God -- the creator of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible -- is bound by the same rules we are. In all logic, we should have no difficulty in accepting that as far as God is concerned creating angels is no more complicated than creating human beings. But then logic has never been our strong point, has it? *AMEN.*