

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE RECTOR

It's foolish to confuse our capabilities with God's

The Prophet Ezekiel's description of cherubim explains why an angel's first words on encountering a human being are: "Fear not."

Here's how they appeared when Ezekiel met them face to face: "Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures . . . They had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves feet.

"They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides . . . As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle . . ."

So the description goes on and on -- none of it getting any better. Indeed, this is a description that could appeal only to the likes of Calvin; not the theologian and reformer; but the little boy much addicted to horror stories in the cartoon series "Calvin and Hobbes."

And just in case you think that Ezekiel was prone to bad dreams as a consequence of eating too much blue cheese at supper, it might be worth reading Isaiah's views on the subject. Here's his description of the type of angels called Seraphim (6:1-2):

"I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood six seraphim: each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew."

When one reads the eyewitness accounts, it's rather difficult to understand how artists developed the idea that angels look either like hermaphrodites or pudgy infants. It also becomes rather easier to understand the description of the trial of St. Stephen.

When the first martyr spoke in his own defense, we are told that those who saw him "saw his face as the face of an angel." The speech that St. Stephen delivered is remarkably tough and uncompromising.

His devastating defense of the faith in Acts 6 & 7 shredded his accusers, intellectually and theologically. Its power drove them into a fury of hatred so intense they took the law into their own hands and dragged him outside and stoned him to death.

Believe me, if Stephen's face resembled that of an angel, it was the sort of angel Ezekiel and Isaiah described rather than one of the sort depicted by Renaissance artists on the walls of churches.

Now let us consider the passage from the Book of Revelations appointed to read in place of the Epistle on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. It describes the war that took place in heaven, between St. Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels, during the time that Christ lay in the tomb.

Are we to take this passage literally or as allegory or is it simply completely irrelevant in this day and age?

Well the fact of the matter is that nothing in The Bible is irrelevant. If it appears to be so, we simply misunderstand it.

Indeed, if we have trouble believing that something that The Bible – quite clearly and unequivocally – says is so, then it is rather more likely that fault lies with us than with the Scriptures. Thus, it makes sense to try to discover the root cause of our disbelief.

And in this context, it's not entirely by accident that the lesson from the Revelation appointed for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is coupled with a Gospel reading taken from the 18th chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.

It reminds us of Jesus' warning: "Assuredly, I say unto you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The qualities that our Lord is seeking from us when he tells us to emulate little children are not pouting and petulance, but humility, tractability and readiness to learn. And in this regard, our problems in believing in angels seem to be entirely of our own making.

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Phyllis, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Cary, Courtney & Marie.

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

IN MEMORIAM: Warren

FOR THOSE WHO MOURN:

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN

If we accept the fact that God created the heaven and the earth "and all that therein is" we should have no trouble whatsoever in accepting the fact that he is also perfectly capable of creating angels.

Actually, it surely can't be intrinsically any more difficult to create an angel than to create a man. Indeed, there's a good case for thinking that, for some one as infinitely powerful as God, it would be absolute child's play.

We might be tempted to say that the really tough part of the whole business was the creation of the universe and that, in comparison with that, everything else was a piece of cake. We might be tempted to say that ... but we'd almost certainly be wrong.

Creating a universe, you see, wouldn't be in the least bit

difficult for somebody who's almighty and all-powerful – in other words, for somebody like God.

One of the problems with being human is that we tend to see everything from our own perspective. We judge every creative act by God in comparison with our own limited ability to function creatively. We look at the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection and we say to ourselves: "Gosh, isn't that awesome?"

We're right, of course. It is awesome – awe-inspiring and quite frightening. It is so far removed from anything that we ourselves can do that it boggles the mind. If a human being claimed to have created a Virgin Birth or a Resurrection, we would, quite rightly, reject the claim out of hand as a downright lie. Such acts are far beyond human capabilities.

But we should not confuse the things that we, human beings, can do with the things that God can do. Virgin births and resurrections are well beyond our capabilities. Such acts, however, are certainly not beyond God's capabilities. They are, in fact, exactly the sort of thing that any reasonable person would expect God to get up to.

When Jesus tells us to "Render unto Caesar those things which be Caesars and unto God the things which be God's"

he isn't just talking about money. He is also telling us we shouldn't confuse our own puny abilities with the limitless abilities and capabilities of our maker. GPH*

FROM THE TREASURER

Pity the poor treasurer!

"Are there no work houses? Are there no prisons?" that was Ebenezer Scrooge's to people who begged him for alms at Christmas time. But I hope it won't be your response to your church treasurer's annual summertime plea.

The trouble is that folks cast all cares aside when they go away vacation and among the cares they cast aside are all thoughts of poor church treasurers struggling to make ends meet with no pledge money coming in.

Parishioners go on vacation. Church treasurers get to go on vacation too – but only if they are up-to-date with the bills. And, sad to relate, bills never take a holiday.

Please do me a favor and bring your pledges up to date before you go away. That way I can take care of the bills and go away myself. Scrooge would say: "Bah! Humbug!" Personally, I'd much rather say: "Have a great vacation." **WHJH**

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar* · The Rev. Michael Belt,
The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –
evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, September 21st, 12.00 PM

Pappas Restaurant & Sports Bar

Afternoon Tea

Thursday, September 8th, 2.00 PM

Weekly Silly Summer Suppers

Wednesday August 31st, 6.30 PM

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
11856 Mays Chapel Road
Timonium, MD 21093

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