

# St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

Volume XXIX, Number 19

A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

May 22nd, 2018

FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

## Time to sign up for the Vacation Bible School

*St Stephen's Vacation Bible School will run on the afternoons of Monday, June 25th to Friday, June 29th from 1.00 PM to 4.00 PM. It is open to children from four to 12. The theme for this year's event will be "Jesus is our superhero." We are asking for a nominal \$20 contribution per child to help defray costs.*

FROM THE RECTOR

## Angels aren't pixies and cherubs aren't cherubim

One of the vain superstitions of modern Christianity is a disbelief in angels. Cutting edge protestants, particularly, write them off as the religious equivalent of fairies at the bottom of the garden – lumping them into the same category as gnomes, elves and pixies.

Folks who call themselves Christian but reject the existence of angels, however, have a serious problem. They might have difficulty believing in angels, but God doesn't.

The Bible makes mention of them on many occasions – including the dramatic reference to them in the passage from the Revelation of St. John the Divine (12:7-12) that serves for the Epistle on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

In fact, angels permeate the Scriptures from one end to the other – from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Indeed, the very first is to be found at the very beginning of God's revelation of himself to mankind.

You'll find it the 24th verse of the third chapter of Genesis: After God chucks Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, he places cherubim armed with flaming swords at the gates to make sure that they stay out.

That said, even devout Christians, especially Protestants, have difficulty in accepting the existence of angels, usually because they find the concept irrational somehow. One reason for this is the way we talk about them.

For example, people engaged in utterly pointless arguments are described as arguing over the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin. And the very idea that angels might be inclined to dance on the heads of pins trivializes them and makes them ridiculous.

Then there is the way angels are portrayed artistically – and not just in the fine arts but also in popular art forms: record jackets, Christmas cards, cartoons and the like.

Even such great artists as Fra Angelico, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo portray angels as simpering, effeminate and vacuous-looking creatures. They look like guys dolled up in their sisters' clothes, and it's hard to take chaps like that entirely seriously.

If, for example, a fellow tricked out in a blonde wig, a shiny white dress, fluttery wings and precisely the wrong

shade of lipstick minced into church with what he claimed was a message from God, most people would probably have an awful lot of trouble believing him.

It is possible they might well feel like the shepherds in the ninth verse of the first Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel: "Sore afraid." But they would be unlikely to fall on their faces and cover their eyes. More likely, they would a shrink.

Then there is the question of cherubim: The odds are probably at least 1000 to 1 that most people picture them as little fat babies with a shiny bottoms. That, after all, is the way they are portrayed in just about every castle, stately home and palazzo in Europe.

But actually these "cherubs" – or *putto* (singular) and *putti* (plural) to give them their real Italian names – have nothing to do with the cherubim of the scriptures. These images are actually derived from portrayals of Cupid, the son of the Roman gods Venus and Mars.

In classical mythology Cupid (or in Latin *Cupidus*) is the mischievous god of erotic love, hence his Greek name *Eros*. Originally *Putti* symbolized non-religious passion,

## 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: Priscilla, Michael✘, Peter, Charlotte, Bryan, Dorothy, Rodney, June, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Robert✘, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Cour Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian, Tom, Michell, Aida, Mai, Al, Kathy, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, Isobel, Judy, Elizabeth, Wade & Sifa

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: 3 Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Erin, Aubery & Kathy

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

but in the realm of Baroque art, *putti* came to represent the omnipresence of God. Dubbing them "cherubs" is, thus, entirely misleading. While it might be hard to take messengers from God who look like drag queens or advertisements for baby formula seriously, the angels encountered in The Bible look nothing like that.

The Hebrew word for angel is "messenger." This, of course, accords with their job description: messengers of God. The Bible makes it clear they are, in fact, very grim-looking creatures indeed. And this is probably why their first utterance to humans they encounter is usually: "Fear not!"

One can understand why from the Prophet Ezekiel's description of cherubim: "I looked, and behold a

whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire."

Actually, this wasn't the cherubim themselves – merely the vehicle in which they travelled. Here is how he describes cherubim: "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 rightside, 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 . . ."

And how about Isaiah's description of seraphim? "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."

These eyewitness accounts make it hard to understand how artists developed the idea that angels look either like

hermaphrodites or pudgy infants.

But they make it much easier to understand onlookers' description of St. Stephen when he spoke at his trial. They said he had the face of an angel, which is hardly surprising when one reads his tough and uncompromising defense speech in the Book of Acts.

The difficulty in believing that angels exist arises, I think, from the modern tendency to assume God is constrained by the same limits he has imposed on the human beings he created. But surely people who accept the fact that God created the heaven and the earth "and all that therein is" should have no trouble whatsoever in accepting the fact that he is also perfectly capable of creating angels.

It cannot intrinsically be any more difficult to create an angel than to create a man. Actually, for some one as infinitely powerful as God, it would be absolute child's play.

Virgin births and resurrections might be well beyond our capabilities. But it is illogical to assume such acts are beyond God's capabilities. They are, in fact, exactly the sort of activity reasonable people might expect God to get up to.

When Jesus told us "Render unto Caesar those things which be Caesars and unto God the things which be God's" he wasn't just talking about money. He was also telling us we shouldn't confuse our own puny abilities with the limitless abilities and capabilities of our maker. GPH✠

## St Stephen's Anglican Church

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Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

[www.ststeve.com](http://www.ststeve.com)

The Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*  
 The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*  
 The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki  
 and 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: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

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

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –  
[evensong.ststeve.com](http://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

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

### MONTHLY & SPECIAL

## The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, June 20th, 7.00 pm

## The Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, June 20th 12.00 pm

For information: Call Sara Douglas  
 at 410-560-9026

## The Vacation Bible School

June 25th to June 29th, 1.00 PM - 4.00 PM

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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