

Reflection for 29th September, St. Michael and All Angels

Christ, the fair glory of the holy Angels,
Thou who hast made us, thou who o'er us rulest,
Grant of thy mercy unto us thy servants
Steps up to heaven,

Send thy Archangel, Michael, to our succour;
Peacemaker blessèd, may he banish from us
Striving and hatred, so that for the peaceful
All things may prosper.

Send thy Archangel, Gabriel the mighty;
Herald of heaven, may he from us mortals
Spurn the old serpent, watching o'er the temples
Where thou art worshipped.

Send thy Archangel, Raphael, the restorer
Of the misguided ways of men who wander,
Who at thy bidding strengthens soul and body
With thine anointing.

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

9th century, Archbishop Rabanus Maurus

Michaelmas has always been one of my favourite seasons. It reminds us that we are not alone, but are surrounded by a whole company of angels. Some of us have had vivid experiences of the intervention of angels in our protection. Others are just comforted by the knowledge of their unseen presence. This time I would like to illustrate my reflection with three personal stories and three others from people I have never met but who have had their stories published.

I was only just over five years old when the second world war began and the whole nation was plunged into blackout. I can remember being afraid of the dark when the moon and stars were hidden by clouds, buildings or trees. My mother told me of an incident her grandfather had described when she too was a child. Great grandfather Wood was a master builder and stone mason in the 19th century. He often had a long walk to and from work. On one job his route was through a particularly dark wood and one night as he entered that wood he suddenly felt afraid. He started to say the Lord's Prayer and as he prayed he saw an angel in the path ahead of him. He was never afraid again. After being told that I was never afraid in the dark again either.

Not long after coming to Watton I was on my way to our only Bible Study Group. As I turned into Thetford Road from Monkams the rear corner of my car was clipped by a speeding motorist. The car turned over two and a half times and came to rest on the verge. As I felt the initial impact I cried aloud "Oh! My God" and instantly the car was full of light, a light I cannot describe. When the car came to rest it was on its side and I climbed out of the shattered windscreen unaided. The people who came to help when they heard the crash found my glasses unbroken on the floor of the car. When the RAC came to collect the wreck they asked my husband "How many were killed in that?" and could hardly believe their ears when he replied

“My wife was in it alone and climbed out unaided.” I only suffered shock and very minor whiplash. That was Monday night and I was taking the Family Service at St. Mary’s the following Sunday.

Many years later I was returning home from Lakenheath on a particularly cold and icy night. As I approached the bends near Bodney church I knew I had to be careful in those conditions and prayed as I drove. At the very beginning of the bends I felt nothing but could not immediately understand how I came to be at the bottom of the hill on the other side of those same bends. I had no sense or recollection of having driven round them. The next day I heard there had been a nasty accident on those same bends due to black ice. Had my guardian angel, silent and unseen, lifted my car around the bends? I can think of no other rational explanation.

During the MauMau troubles in Kenya some seventy or so years ago a Kikuyu pastor answered a knock on his door only to be confronted by a group of armed MauMau. Later the MauMau were asked why they had not attacked the Pastor who had refused to deny his faith in Christ. They said because of the white clad and heavily armed soldiers who appeared on his roof.

Returning home from Viet Nam to his home in a rural part of America on a very foggy night a young soldier approached a bridge that was a short cut to his home. Suddenly his much loved dog bounded to meet him, but barked and protested when he tried to step on the bridge. In the end he gave up and let the dog lead him home by the longer route. He told his parents, saying what a joy it was to be met by his dog. But they said the dog had pined for him when he left and died shortly after he went to Viet Nam. They hadn’t told him, thinking he was going through enough out there without that sad news added to his woes. They also said the short cut bridge had recently been damaged in a storm. If he had tried to cross it in that thick fog he would have fallen off it and drowned.

Angels often appear as human beings, but can take any form to make us aware of their presence. “He makes his angels winds; His servants flames of fire.” (Hebrews 1, v.7 [the same Greek word is used for wind and spirit])

A young woman walking home down an alleyway from her bus stop one night felt afraid as she heard two men following her and prayed for protection. She got home safely. Later another young woman was cruelly raped by those same men. The police asked why they had waited and not attacked the first young woman. They replied “Because of the two strong men walking either side of her.”

Everlasting God

You have ordained and constituted the ministries of angels and mortals in a wonderful order;
Grant that as your holy angels always serve you in heaven, so at your command,
They may help and defend us on earth;
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen.