

Last week, we had our annual celebration of 'Michaelmas' – the Feast of St Michael and All Angels. This year, as usual, I found myself pondering the general tosh that is spoken of angels and what in God's name I might say about our church's namesake. The world loves an angel: many who can't bring themselves to acknowledge God still claim guardian angels and who doesn't love a good nativity? (For your amusement, here's a 'spot-the-minister in her earliest angelic role' competition.)



Following the late Queen's death, the pearly gates gained a new angelic guardian in the shape of St Paddington of Bear, guiding Her Majesty to her eternal throne where, apparently, she gets to swap her crown for a halo and munch her marmalade sandwiches in peace: A sharp contrast with her own wish that the Lord would return in her lifetime so that she could cast her crown down before him.

The Bible throws up a rather more alarming set of images when it comes to angels. Check out Ezekiel 1 with angels that seem part-human, part-animal, part-eye-covered-wheelchair or deep dive into Revelation 12 where Michael himself gets to defeat the evil dragon. Despite the penchant for cutesie angels on social media, the real money is found in the ultimate battle of good versus evil. The Lord of the Rings was voted Britain's most popular book, grossing nearly \$3 billion at the box office and Harry Potter's final epic battle made over \$1341 million. These stories resonate deeply. We don't see many dragons on our streets, but we know they're there. We've seen the creeping serpent escalate anxiety and ill health. We've seen it goad people into drugs and violence and we don't call it the demon drink for nothing. It snakes into our computers and kids us it can keep a secret and that what we watch in our own time doesn't affect our soul or our relationships. It coils around us in any number of ways until, one day, we realise the gentle squeeze is a suffocating grip, which awakens us to our plight or kills us off completely. No, we may not see dragons, but we know they are real.

Our church is dedicated to Archangel Michael, sword in hand; the battling protector of God's people; leader of the heavenly army. He's ready for the fight between God and evil and he knows whose side he's on. So as once again I ponder spiritual realities, I have no hope of understanding (yet at least) I wonder if we're ready for whatever might come at us next and what kind of armour might we need as we journey into the unknown? Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 to put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. As all the best stories tell us, heroes and heroines rarely have much when they set out on their adventures, but they find companions along the way and, together, the resources they need come to them at the right time.

May it be so. Go slay dragons!

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