#### The Parish of Brereton & Rugeley.

**St. Michael’s Church Brereton**



#### Rumours of Angels

#### An act of Worship

**Call to Worship**

The Lord commands his angels  
to keep you in all your ways.Give thanks to the Lord, all his angels, mighty in power,  
who fulfil his command and heed the voice of his word.Give thanks to the Lord, all his hosts,  
his servants that do his will.Give thanks to the Lord, all his works,  
in every place where he rules,  
my soul, give thanks to the Lord.For he commands his angels,  
to keep you in all your ways.

**Opening Prayer:**

Almighty and ever-living God, King of the universe,

in your goodness and by your grace,

you have shown favour to your people

by giving us your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,

and by sending your holy angels to minister to us

as they ministered to him in the wilderness.

For all this, we thank you.

And we ask that you would listen to our prayers,

so that we might praise your holy name in one voice

with all the host of heaven;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**All Amen**

**Confession**

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.  
Lord, have mercy.

**All Lord, have mercy.**  
  
Woe is me, for I am lost;  
I am a person of unclean lips.  
Christ, have mercy.

**All Christ, have mercy.**  
  
Our guilt is taken away,  
and our sin is forgiven.  
Lord, have mercy.

**All Lord, have mercy.**

**All We praise you, O God,  
we acclaim you as the Lord;  
all creation worships you,  
the Father everlasting.  
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,  
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hymn. Ye Holy Angels Bright**

**A Psalm of Praise for God’s Universal Glory**

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!

**All Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!**

**Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!**

Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

**All** **Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.  
He established them for ever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

**All Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!**

**Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!**

Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.

**All He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the Lord!**

**The Word of God.**

**Readings:**

**Job.38:1-7**

*At the end:*

This is the word of the Lord

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Hebrews 1:1-8, 14**

*At the end:*

This is the word of the Lord

**All: Thanks be to God.**

***Music for reflection – Panis Angelicus.***

**The Prayers**

Father in heaven,  
by his blood your Christ has ransomed us to you,  
and has made us a kingdom and priests to you our God.  
As the angels minister to you in heaven,  
strengthen your Church to serve you here on earth.

Lord, hear us,

All Lord, graciously hear us.Father in heaven,  
when the angels greeted the birth of your Son  
they sang for joy ‘Glory to God and peace on earth’.  
Bless with Christ’s peace the nations of the world.  
Lord, hear us,

All Lord, graciously hear us.Father in heaven,  
your Son has promised to your children  
the care of the guardian angels who look upon your face.  
Protect by your mercy our neighbours, families and friends.  
Lord, hear us,

All Lord, graciously hear us.Father in heaven,  
you give your angels charge over those who trust in you  
to guard them in all their ways.  
Be with those in trouble …,  
rescue them and show them your salvation.  
Lord, hear us,

All Lord, graciously hear us.Father in heaven,  
your angel declares ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.’  
‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit,  
‘for they may rest from their labours,  
for they take with them the record of their deeds.’  
Enfold in your love all who come in faith  
to your judgment seat in heaven.

Lord, hear us,

All Lord, graciously hear us.Father in heaven,  
the angels sing by day and night around your throne:  
‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.’  
With Michael, prince of the angels, who contends by our side,  
with Gabriel, your herald, who brings glad tidings,  
with Raphael, the protector, who ministers your healing,  
and with the whole company of heaven,  
we worship you, we give you glory,  
we sing your praise and exalt you forever.

All Amen.

**The Collect.**

Everlasting God,   
you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order   
the ministries of angels and mortals:  
Mercifully grant that,   
as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven,   
so by your appointment   
they may help and defend us here on earth;   
through Jesus Christ our Lord,   
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,   
one God, for ever and ever.

All Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us we say together.

**Our Father in heaven,**  
**hallowed be your name,**  
**your kingdom come,**  
**your will be done,**  
**on earth as in heaven.**  
**Give us today our daily bread.**  
**Forgive us our sins**  
**as we forgive those who sin against us.**  
**Lead us not into temptation**  
**but deliver us from evil.**  
**For the kingdom, the power,**  
**and the glory are yours**  
**now and for ever.**  
**Amen.**

**The Blessing**

Know with certainty that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah.

God has highly exalted him

and gave him the name that is above every name.

And the blessing of God Almighty

The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit

Bless, preserve, and keep you.

This day and always.

**All Amen**

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An Angel Appears to Zechariah

The Lord Visits Abraham

Rumours of Angels

A Bible Study in

preparation for Advent

thinking about Angels through the Biblical tradition.



The Parish of Brereton & Rugeley

**Thinking about Angels through the Biblical tradition. . .**

Each group has part of the familiar nativity story that refers to the presence of an angel or angels. Each group also has some other verses from either the old or New Testament that refer to angels. Look at the nativity story and then the further passage and think about the questions together. The questions are there to aid study. Please feel free to discuss other ideas too.

Keep in mind as you go through the study that both the Hebrew and Greek word for angel mean essentially ‘messenger’.

**The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold**

5In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

8Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, 9he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. 10Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 13But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’ 18Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.’ 19The angel replied, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.’

21Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. 22When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. 23When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

**1.** What role does the angelic visitor have in this story? Consider both words and actions!

**2.** How do you understand the phrase ***‘an angel of the Lord’***? What does this phrase add to our understanding of the angelic role?

**3.** Consider how the following themes give us some clues as to the timing of this angelic visitation:

* Circumstances not unlike those of Abraham who was childless
* The mention of Elijah. Vs.17
* The reference to ‘good news’ Vs.19

**4.** In this story we glimpse angelic authority and power. Vss.19-20. Is our image of angels too romantic?

**5.** In verse 19 the angel – Gabriel - has a name, uses the emphatic ‘I’ and has a form of rank ‘I stand in the presence of God’. Are these points to add colour to the story or does this tell us more about the nature of angels?

**6.** Just how would you describe an angelic visitation just using your hands and arms? Try it!

**The Lord Visits Abraham - Genesis.18:1-15.**

18 The Lord appeared to Abraham[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+18&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-426a)] by the oaks[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+18&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-426b)] of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3He said, ‘My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. 4Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.’ So they said, ‘Do as you have said.’ 6And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+18&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-431c)] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ 7Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9They said to him, ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ And he said, ‘There, in the tent.’ 10Then one said, ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. 11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’ 13The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” 14Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.’ 15But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’

**7**. This story which is part angelic visitation part theophany (an appearance of God himself) probably raises in our minds many more questions than it answers.

How did Abraham recognise these heavenly visitors?

**8.** The visitors remain for a considerable period of time but the overall fleetingness of their visit is perhaps hinted at in the haste expressed in vss. 5 – 6. How do you think Abraham felt? What was going through his mind?

**9**. The visitors appearance in this story challenges the stereotype of what angels look like and how angels behave. Spend a few moments talking about the stereotypical angel. In what ways do these heavenly visitors differ in this story? What guidelines would you give to be included in an imaginary book by Adrian Plass under the title ‘Recognising an Angel’ (slightly tongue in cheek perhaps!)

**Thinking about Angels through the Biblical tradition. . .**

An Angel Visits Mary

Angels & Humans

Rumours of Angels

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The Parish of Brereton & Rugeley

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**The Birth of Jesus Foretold – Luke’s story**

26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24914b)] 29But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ 34Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24920c)] 35The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born[[d](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24921d)] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.’ 38Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

**1**. What role does the angelic visitor have in this story? Why does he come? (note. Vss. 28,35) Does this help to explain the appearance of an angel here?

**2.** The Annunciation has been one of the most frequent subjects of Christian art. How do **you** imagine Gabriel to have appeared to Mary? (Does verse 26 and verse 38 perhaps suggest his appearance to Mary may not have been instantaneous?) What do you think it was it about the angel Gabriel that meant he needed to reassure her and tell her not to be afraid?

**3.** How long do you imagine the visitation to have lasted?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **4.** Thinking about all the words Gabriel spoke to Mary. How do you think Mary felt afterwards? Circle all that you think might apply. | | | | |
| nervous | afraid | lonely | excited | |
| honoured | reticent | blessed | elated | |
| joyful | distressed | calm | special | |

**5**. Why are we told the angels name - Gabriel? Consider the fact that when he appears to Zechariah he says *‘I stand in the presence of God’*- what might this indicate?

**6**. The only other angel named in the canonical scriptures is *Michael*. From any information you may remember about the *archangel Michael,* how do their roles of Gabriel and Michael seem to differ?

**Hebrews 1:14,**

Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

**Heb.13:2**

Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing

**7**. These verses from the Hebrew epistle seem to suggest that angels have a wider ministry to all Christian people. In so doing whose purpose are they said to be fulfilling? What could this ministry be and how can we recognise it?

An old Hebrew Midrash says:

“At the wedding of the son of Raban Gamaliel II the bridegroom’s father poured wine for the guests, some of whom thought it unfitting that they should be waited upon thus by so distinguished a scholar. They remembered however, that Abraham, a greater man than Gamaliel, had waited upon others. “Ah!” said someone, “but these were ministering angels.” “Yes”, was the reply, “but Abraham did not know that; to him they looked like Arabs.”

**8.** How might this tale help us to interpret ‘the visit of Angels’ in a way relevant to 21st century society?

**Matthew 18:10**

 ‘Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.

**9**. This is another specific reference to angels helping humans. What do you understand it to mean or signify?

Rumours of Angels

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The Parish of Brereton & Rugeley

Matthew’s Nativity Story

Peter Delivered from Prison

**Thinking about Angels through the Biblical tradition. . .**

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**The Birth of Jesus the Messiah ( as told by Matthew)**

18Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah[[i](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-23163i" \o "See footnote i)] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ 22All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
    and they shall name him Emmanuel’,

which means, ‘God is with us.’ 24When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;[[j](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-23170j" \o "See footnote j)] and he named him Jesus. . .

**The Escape to Egypt**

. . .12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they (the wise men) left for their own country by another road.13Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ 14Then Joseph[[h](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23184h)] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’ . . .

. . . When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 20 ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ 21 Then Joseph[[k](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23191k)] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. 23 There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’

**1.** What role did the angelic visitor have on each of the occasions they are mentioned in Matthew’s story?

**2.** Matthew does not specifically say how the wise men were ‘warned’ in their dream. Was this also through the medium of an angel? Is that question important?

**3**. Nothing is said about the appearance of the angel or anything the angel did in the incidents Matthew records. The focus is clearly on the message and the human response to the message. So why are angels involved in this story? Is part of the clue to be found in the names given to the infant?

***‘Jesus’*** – the equivalent of Joshua – the deliverer, the rescuer – the one who led Israel into the land of promise. You might compare Joshua 5:13-15.

***‘Emmanuel’***– God with us.

**4.** How do you understand the phrase ***‘an angel of the Lord’***? What does this phrase add to our understanding of the angelic role?

**5.** We have all experienced dreams (nightmares?) that are disturbing that might even wake us up in a cold sweat but which we often quickly forget within a few hours. What does Josephs’ response on each occasion indicate about the vividness of his dream and the authority he attached to them?

Do you think meeting an angel in a dream is less terrifying than meeting an angel face to face in full consciousness?

**Peter Delivered from Prison**

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. 3After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) 4When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. 5While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

6The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. 7Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists. 8The angel said to him, ‘Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.’ He did so. Then he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ 9Peter[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+12&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-27335a)] went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. 11Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’ 12As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. 13When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14On recognizing Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. 15They said to her, ‘You are out of your mind!’ But she insisted that it was so. They said, ‘It is his angel.’ 16Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. 17He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, ‘Tell this to James and to the believers.’[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+12&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-27343b)] Then he left and went to another place.

**6.** What parallels can you see between this story of an angelic visitation and the accounts in Matthew? Consider how the following themes might give us some clues as to the casue of this angelic visitation:

* A King called Herod
* Peter the Leader of the church in imminent danger
* The feast of unleavened bread and Passover
* The church at prayer

**7.** Here we also read of an angel doing something? What did the angel do?

**8** . *“Peter went out and followed him; he did not realise what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.”* Did the apostles and the early church have any more awareness of angelic visitations than we do?

**9.** Does the fact that this story of angelic visitation and deliverance is placed side by side with a very human and almost comical account of what happened next (verses.12-16) surprise you. What might it suggest about its historical reliability?

**10**. Should modern day followers of Jesus ever expect such angelic guidance and assistance?

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**Thinking about Angels through the Biblical tradition. . .**

The Shepherds and The Angels

Isaiah’s Vision

John’s Vision

Each group has part of the familiar nativity story that refers to the presence of an angel or angels. Each group also has some other verses from either the old or New Testament that refer to angels. Look at the nativity story and then the other passages and think about the questions together. The questions are there to aid study. Please feel free to discuss other ideas too.

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**The Shepherds and the Angels**

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%202&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-24977a" \o "See footnote a)] the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%202&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-24979b" \o "See footnote b)] praising God and saying,

14‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
    and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%202&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24980c)]

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**1.** What do you understand by the phrase, ‘**angel *of the Lord?’*** Vs.9. (compare vss.15) What does the phrase add to our understanding of the angelic role?

**2.** Notice it says of the angel that ***‘he stood before them’*** (rather than that he was suspended in mid-air). How do you imagine his appearance?

**3**. What role did the angel have here? Whose identity is he sent to reveal?

**4**. The angel brought quite detailed instructions as to how to find Jesus. Are angels always necessary to communicate such detailed instructions from God?

**5**. How might a 21st century angel herald God’s presence and point us to him?

**6**. The multitude of angels seems to have a slightly different role. How would you describe it? What does the term ‘host’ suggest?

**A Vision of God in the Temple**

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

4The pivots[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%206&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-17774a)] on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

6Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7The seraph[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%206&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-17777b)] touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’

**7**. Another passage strikingly full of ‘angelic’ worship is that described above.

Did Isaiah see the Seraphim in the same sense that the shepherds saw the angelic host?

**8**. Would you draw any distinctions between the angels in the story of the Shepherds and those Isaiah describes. If so what are they? What are the similarities? (note ‘*serpahim’* means burning ones!) What of the words of the carol *“Thus spake the seraph and forthwith appeared a shining throng!’ (i.e. is Seraph the correct designation?)*

**9.** And what of the beings described here in a Text from the Book of Revelation . . .?

**P. T.O**

**Worship around the throne**

*.* Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

‘Holy, holy, holy,  
the Lord God the Almighty,  
    who was and is and is to come.’

**10**. All these references have inspired Christian worship through the ages. How do these stories of heavenly beings inspire you?

## Give an account of an act of worship that you have devised and led.

The act of worship was one prepared for the beginning of Advent 2013. It was in fact held on the Sunday of the week before Advent because of commitments to other services such as the Christingle on Advent Sunday. It was part of an afternoon of study and reflection on the theme of Angels which I was asked to put together as part of the parish’s Advent devotions. It arose out of a proposal put to the DCC at St Augustine’s two weeks prior to Advent in 2012 by a member of the congregation who suggested that a study of angels would be appropriate given the frequency with which angels appear in the birth narratives and also a concern that often angelic ministry was completely ignored or, as in much contemporary ‘new age’ mythology, was assigned roles and a place unwarranted by scripture. It was felt at that time to be far too close to advent to put the study together and do it justice but that it could be looked at again as a whole parish event for 2013. So it was that I was assigned the task of putting such a balanced study together as a devotional activity for Advent 2013 and that it should include an appropriate act of worship – In a sense, as I’m sure it can appreciated, the whole time of reflection and study and the gathering together for worship at the end were all parts of a much larger whole that formed a complete act of worship for advent.

The ‘study’ section of the afternoon was divided into 5 parts of varying lengths:

1 .An introduction based around a 5 minute PowerPoint presentation contrasting images of angels in popular modern culture with a very quick run through of angelic visitations across the whole of scripture – this involved biblical texts and a related picture of some form set to music.

2. Four different studies prepared for separate groups of 4 or 5 people. Each of these studies included part of the nativity story that involved angelic visitations in addition to another one or two accounts of angelic visitations from the rest of scripture. In each case questions were suggested to aid the study and reflection of the group.

3. An opportunity for each participant to decorate a simple wooden angel figure in a way of their choosing and to place it on a background of paper on which they were asked to write short comments that expressed something they had learnt about angelic ministry from their study. (This task I delegated to someone else to arrange)

4. A feedback session as a plenary where participants were encouraged to tell the whole group what they had learnt or to ask questions. This proved to be a source of further interesting discussion and it ended with a clip from BBC ‘Songs of Praise’ that just happened to include a testimony of an angelic visitation from a programme broadcast the week before!

5. The act of worship in the church of St Michael and All Angel’s Brereton. (It was their hall that had been used for the study). This gave this act of worship a really appropriate setting and worship space as there are several small statues of angels as well as artistic depictions of angels on some of the plaster about the nave and chancel.

**Putting the Act of Worship Together.**

Putting the Act of Worship together was not at first easy. The context helped, but the act of worship had to strike the right balance between being a reflection on angelic ministrations while at the same time keeping God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the centre of the act of worship. Christians don’t worship angels, nor do they pray to them as such but they can certainly glorify God for their creation and ministration a precedent set in the Psalms. As well as allowing biblical accounts of angelic worship to inspire their own praise and worship as in the case of the ‘sanctus’ – a regular part of Eucharistic Sunday worship. Compare also Psalm. 103:20-21

Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
    you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
    obedient to his spoken word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
    his ministers that do his will.

However, if possible I wanted to avoid merely repeating forms regularly used in other services to give the service a feel of freshness and some originality. A useful source for some of the material was Common worship tests for the feast of St Michael and All Angels, including the use of the acclamation as a ‘call to worship’ and the intercessions and collect from that service. I included a confession that was based on Isaiah 6 and the vision of the seraphim and this is followed not by words of absolution but by the beginning of the Te Deum in contemporary language that seemed to be very appropriate words of praise in response to God’s mercy and which also features angels. I included a psalm (Psalm 148) which I divided into sections (larger than single verses) to say antiphonally to encourage further congregational involvement.

I chose two readings, one from Job which was slightly obscure – but it features angels as ancient beings and clearly witnesses to them as part of the created order. And Hebrews 1 because here the difference between the ‘Son of God’ and the angels is clearly emphasised. Unfortunately we had no musician available for the act of worship but I felt it important to include two musical pieces. One was an obvious choice – a well-known hymn - ‘Ye Holy Angels Bright’ which had to be sung unaccompanied. The other was of a gentle rendition of Panis Angelicus (on CD) as a means of aiding quiet and personal reflection on the readings and indeed on what had been studied during the afternoon. A sermon was not necessary as we had spent much of the afternoon studying the scriptures together. The final blessing was purposely chosen to refer to Jesus as our Lord and Messiah stressing that his name is ‘above very name’ ie. highlighting once again the ontological difference between the Son of God and the angels. I wanted this to be part of the subtext of the service to highlight in our worship the doctrinal difference between ‘Son of God’ and ‘sons of God’.

This act of worship lasted about 25 minutes and was an appropriate end to the afternoon of study and reflection. It certainly had a sense of purpose to it which fitted with the day and the approaching season. It gave opportunity for everybody to participate in an act of worship that meaningfully reflected what they had studied during the afternoon.

The afternoon received much positive feedback, those who attended appreciated the opportunity for reflection. One person was particularly encouraged that the afternoon was at a level which she found engaging and uplifting – she had worried that it might be too ‘intellectual and theological’. There were many expressions of thanks at the end.