

Dear friends,

It was good to be at St. Michael's church for their patronal festival on Sunday. Four angels are mentioned by name in the Bible. All of them end with the suffix "el" which means "God" and they all have a definite meaning.

Gabriel means the strength of God and is probably the most famous one to us as he delivered the message to Mary that she was to bear a son.

Raphael means the healing of God and is talked about in the apocryphal book of Tobit where he restored Tobit's sight.

Uriel, the least well known is the light of God and appears to Ezra in a vision in 2 Esdras.

Saint Michael, who along with the others is the name of the church in Otterton means "one who is like God" is described as a protector of Israel and leader of the armies of heaven and is best known for his defeat of the dragon in Revelation that we heard on Sunday.

This coming Sunday is Harvest festival and is the first time Louise and I will be at different churches in six years. I preside at St. Peter's but Louise is singing in the Benefice choir at St. Michael's Otterton. Each church has something extra of course. St. Peter's has its harvest lunch, all Saints is having Bacon Baps after the service and St. Michael's has its Harvest supper on Tuesday night!

### **Sunday 6th October – Harvest festival**

As I say, I will preside at St. Peter's and Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's at 11am.

**Joel 2: 21-27.** This prophesy says that Israel will be rewarded with silos full of grain, early rains, and vats full of wine and oil. This in the aftermath of years of drought and swarms of locusts. The Israelites very much believed in the "carrot and stick" approach of God when it came to things that befell them, including exile and return and of course crucially the weather.

**1 Timothy 6: 6-10.** Paul maintains that we should be content with enough food and clothing. This is not of course how people have ever behaved (except for a handful of extraordinary people). The reading goes on to say that famous saying "The love of money is the root of all evil". It is all a question of degree and where your heart truly is. Note that it is not money itself (which is neutral) but the love of money which is the

root of all evil. A misdirected love which leads us away from God and towards selfish and avaricious behaviour.

**Matthew 6: 25-33.** A famous reading that instructs us to get our lives in perspective. Developing character (righteousness) is far more important than amassing wealth. The spiritual part of our lives (which lasts) is more important than material things which decay and we can't take with us into eternity. Although important, food is seen here as a basic material need.

### Thought for the day

Harvest has become a much more holistic celebration in modern times. Originally it "did what it said on the tin" and was a people, whether Egyptian, Jewish, Sumerian or whoever giving thanks for the Harvest that kept them alive year after year. It was a universal urge and harvest festivals are the basic root of many religious observances. This has diminished in the West because people generally live quite separately from the land with farming in this country employing only a tiny fraction of the population. Hence, we get to the point where inner city kids don't know that milk comes from an animal and fish comes in a tin or packet. But also, with the growth of an ecological consciousness, you will notice that schools for example generally have shifted to Harvest being as much about environmental issues or bio-diversity or climate change nowadays. This isn't a move away from tradition but is seeing the bigger picture that farming inhabits. The basic Christian principles are all there – caring for the environment and being stewards of creation, not just exploiters. It is not that people care any less about farmers or farming, just that they are taught to see everything from a much wider perspective than before. Although the roots of harvest celebrations go back to the time when hunter/gatherers started to settle and start to grow crops the modern church service we call Harvest festival is a Victorian innovation by a Cornish vicar and is an idea and practice that just snowballed. It feels as if we have been doing this forever, and in a funny kind of way, we have. It is a very old idea indeed, resurrected for the modern church which is continually being adapted because we live in a different context.

**The Prayer for Today** is by Frank Topping

**Lord, your harvest is the harvest of Love.**

**Love sown in the hearts of people.**

**Love that spreads out**

**Like the branches of a great tree**

**Covering all who seek its shelter.  
Love that inspires and recreates.  
Love that is planted in the weak and weary,  
The sick and the dying.  
The Harvest of your Love is the life that reaches  
Through the weeds of sin and death  
To the sunlight of resurrection.  
Lord, nurture my days with your Love,  
Water my soul with the dew of your forgiveness  
That the harvest of my life may be joy.**

Love and peace,  
Martin