

**Readers' Notes for The Four Archangel Mosaics by James Powell and Sons, 1888.**  
**St John's Church, Boreham, Wiltshire.**

These mosaics at St John's Church, Boreham in Wiltshire were made by James Powell and Sons of the Whitefriars Foundry, London between 1888 and 1915. Whitefriars produced hand-made glass which was exported throughout Europe.

Based upon what we know from Scripture from the books of: Tobit 12:15; Isaiah 63:9; and Revelation chapters 1:4, 20; 3:1; and 8:2,6 - the Church has determined that there are seven Archangels.

The Archangels have played an important role in the Bible and in other Jewish and Christian literature for centuries. Some of the archangels are very well known, while others have been forgotten to history. At the Council of Rome in 745 C.E. under Pope Saint Zachary, the Catholic Church only acknowledges the names of three of the seven Archangels: St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael.

Although the Church accepts that there are seven Archangels, these three Archangels are the only angels named in Scripture, and who are officially recognized by name in Catholic doctrine. The names of the other four Archangels appear in Jewish and Christian sources outside of the canon of Sacred Scripture (such as in the Book of Enoch chapter 20) and their names are: Uriel, Raguel, Zerachiel, and Remiel.

For artists, finding a visual symbol to depict celestial beings was a challenge, but by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, winged figures are universally accepted as the main way to portray angels.

**ST MICHAEL**

Michael is found in the books of: Daniel chapter 10:13 and 10:21, and chapter 12:1; Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7-9.

Michael's name means, "Who is like God?" He is the ultimate symbol of the pious warrior and the Patron of soldiers, police officers, and firefighters. Various traditions say that he was the first of the angels to be created. Traditionally, Michael has been referred to as the Prince or Guardian Angel of the people of Israel and he is now revered as the Guardian Angel of the Church. He is the famous angel who led the forces of Heaven in casting out Lucifer (also known as Satan) when he rebelled against God.

For centuries the exact rank of Michael over the other angels has been debated. Some Christian traditions, including The Prayer to Saint Michael by Pope Leo XIII, refer to Michael as the Prince of the Heavenly Hosts (i.e. the leader of all of the angels in Heaven). Michael is the only angel in the Bible explicitly addressed as an Archangel in Jude 9. Michael plays a role in human history in his interactions with other saints, like these events.

***St Michael and The Plague of Rome*** – During the 590s, there was a great plague in the city of Rome that took many lives. Pope St. Gregory the Great led a procession of prayer through the city streets pleading with God to end the plague. When they reached the tomb of Emperor Hadrian, Pope Gregory saw a vision in which Michael stood on the tomb sheathing his sword. This was taken as a sign that what the Pope, and those who joined him in prayer had done, was pleasing to God.

***St. Joan of Arc*** (c. 1412–1431) was a young woman who led the French forces in numerous military battles against the English during the Hundred Years War. She was seen as a gift from God used by Him to encourage the French that God favoured them in the war. She received numerous visions from many Saints, among whom was St. Michael.

**Our Lady of Fatima** – In 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three children in Fatima, Portugal. Michael appeared to them as well and brought them Holy Communion, giving the Sacred Host to Lucia and the Precious Blood to Jacinta and Francisco.

**POPE LEO XIII** – who reigned during the second half of the 19th Century, had a vision of Satan and composed the now well-known *Prayer to St. Michael* as a result.

While consulting with a number of Cardinals in the private Vatican chapel on October 13, 1884, the Pope passed before the altar, where he stopped suddenly and seemed to lose all awareness of his surroundings. His face grew pale, his eyes stared in horror, and he stood motionless for several minutes until those around him thought he was going to die. His physician rushed to his side, but in a moment or two the Pope recovered and almost painfully exclaimed, “Oh! What terrifying words I have heard.”

It is said that after the Pope recovered, he retired to his office, where he composed the famous prayer to the Archangel Michael:

*St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.  
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,  
and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts,  
by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits,  
who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.*

So in this Mosaic we see Michael slaying the dragon, taken from the book of Revelation:

<sup>7</sup> And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup> but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

He is dressed in his traditional armour, holding a spear and wearing a blue cloak with extraordinarily large wings. He knows exactly how to defend himself and those in his care. In other art he is often seen weighing souls at the Last Judgement.

St Michael fears nothing but seeks only to serve God.

## **ST GABRIEL**

Gabriel's name has many meanings:

“Strength of God,” “Hero of God,” and “God has shown Himself Mightily”.

These variations can be summed up in one definition, “God is My Strength”.

Gabriel is God's Holy Messenger, and traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Wisdom, of Revelation, Prophecy, and Visions.

Gabriel has an important role in Scripture:

He appeared to the Prophet Daniel to explain a vision from God in Daniel chapter 8.

He appeared to the priest Zechariah to announce that he would have a son, John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus in Luke chapter 1.

He appeared to the Virgin Mary, at the Annunciation, also found in Luke chapter 1.

Tradition shows that Gabriel was also the angel who appeared to St. Joseph in his dreams in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and that he was the Guardian Angel of Jesus and the Holy Family.

In addition, some sources say that right before the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven (what we call The Assumption of Our Lady), that Jesus sent Gabriel to

His Mother to inform her of what was to happen, just as He sent Gabriel to her at the Annunciation. Gabriel also appears in many apocryphal Jewish and Christian sources.

Here we see Gabriel holding a lily which is a sign of purity in Christian art. And highlights Mary's purity before she becomes the mother of Jesus as well as the purity she retains throughout her life. Only one flower is in bloom, the rest won't flower until Jesus is born. And we see a banner with 'Ave Maria' on it – that is Latin for – 'Hail Mary'. This represents the first words Gabriel uttered at the Annunciation to Mary when he told her that she would give birth to Jesus.

Below his feet are some buildings and landscape to illustrate ancient Israel: to remind us of the significance of Nazareth and Bethlehem.

Gabriel is also wearing the same blue cloak and wings as Michael. The blue is a symbol of protection power, faith, courage, and strength. Yet Michael is the only archangel to have a short tunic.

Both Gabriel and Michael have a red and gold halo as do the other two archangels.

### **ST RAPHAEL**

Raphael plays a pivotal role in the hugely exciting Book of Tobit. He guided Tobias, the son of Tobit, on his long journey to restore financial stability to their family, to heal his father from blindness, and his kinswoman Sarah from a possessive demon, resulting in the blessing of a happy marriage and long life.

Unlike other archangels in the Bible, Raphael appears first in disguise as a human being and with a different name. It is only right at the end of the book of Tobit, in chapter 12:14-20, that Raphael reveals who he really is and explains his purpose all along.

<sup>14</sup> I was sent to you to test you. And at the same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. <sup>15</sup> I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord."

<sup>16</sup> The two of them were shaken; they fell face down, for they were afraid. <sup>17</sup> But he said to them, "Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God forevermore. <sup>18</sup> As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises. <sup>19</sup> Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything—but what you saw was a vision. <sup>20</sup> So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you." And he ascended.

Raphael mentions that he's one of seven angel here, highlighting the emergence of this belief within the text itself, rather than only as doctrinal development. While the Book of Tobit is only found in Catholic Bibles and is not part of the Protestant Canon, Raphael also appears in many apocryphal Jewish and Christian sources, such as the Book of Enoch where he is "the angel of the spirits of men," and it is his business to "heal the earth which the fallen angels have defiled."

Raphael's name means, "Healing Power of God". Traditionally, due to the meaning of his name, he is revered as the Archangel of Healing and in this mode is very popular today.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, all of us have Guardian Angels. From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life."

Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God. (Paragraph 336)

Raphael is the perfect example of this type of early biblical guardian angel. His role throughout the book of Tobit is to guard, guide, pray with, and protect two families which also represent the salvation of Israel.

There is other Scriptural basis for this thinking in Psalm 91: verses 9-12:

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

And in the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew 18:10

<sup>10</sup> "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.

These Guardian Angels, along with the Archangels and the other Angels, intercede for us in prayer as we read in Tobit 12:12 when Raphael explains to Tobias:

<sup>12</sup> So now when you and Sarah prayed, it was I who brought and read the record of your prayer before the glory of the Lord, and likewise whenever you would bury the dead.

While Raphael is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, later Christian tradition has identified his healing powers with the angel who stirred the waters in the Pool of Bethesda in John chapter 5: 2-4.

Raphael, along with many other prominent angels, appears in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which God orders him to re-warn Adam of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge and to war in heaven against the devil.

There are many paintings in European and modern art of Raphael, both on his own, and with Tobias, where he is seen with a boy, a dog and a fish. Raphael is said to guard pilgrims on their journeys, and therefore, can often be depicted holding a staff. Early mosaics show him and the other archangels in the clothing of a Byzantine courtier. But here we see Raphael with a sword for the journey and holding the hand of a child. He like all archangels, has a specific mission in the service of God. And he ascribes all his actions to God, dispelling the fear of who he is and where he has come from.

Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael share a feast day on 29<sup>th</sup> September in the Catholic calendar.

## **ST URIEL**

Uriel's name means, 'God is my light' or "Fire of God."

Traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Repentance standing at the gates of Eden with a fiery sword. He is also the angel supervising the Damned, some apocryphal sources claim that he is God's regent over Sheol or Hades – what we now call Hell. He is always associated with wisdom and knowledge.

Although Uriel isn't mentioned in the Bible, his name has long been part of tradition because he has an important role in many apocryphal texts. These include the Book of Enoch in which he is Enoch's guide and mentor in astronomical knowledge and the leader of the luminaries who has command over all the celestial lights which relates to his name. In 2 Esdras he instructs Ezra concerning evil, commands him to fast and interprets his visions. Esdras is a prophet who asks God a series of questions and so God sends Uriel to answer them. Esdras predicts that Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel will be the four archangels who rule at the end of the world. He is identified as one of the angels who helped bury Adam

and Abel in Eden and some scholars believe Uriel warned Noah of the impending flood in Enoch 10: 1-4. He is mentioned in the Apocalypse of Peter and in 2 Baruch.

In Christian apocryphal gospels Uriel helps to rescue John the Baptist from the Massacre of the Innocents ordered by King Herod. He carries John and his mother Elizabeth safely to join the Holy Family after their own flight from Egypt, and escape from Herod's murderous plot. Their reunion is famously depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in his paintings of the *Virgin of the Rocks* where we see Uriel to the right of Mary helping to watch over Jesus and John.

Since various Jewish scholars and Christian theologians during the early Church believed that these texts had credibility, Uriel was venerated as an Archangel by the Church until the Council of Rome in 745. At that Council however, Uriel and the names of other angels and three of the Archangels were removed from the official Canon of angels to be venerated, to deter the growing trend of heretical angel worship.

Nevertheless, Uriel survived the cull. He has always been revered as an Archangel along with Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael and by the Protestant English poet John Milton in his famous work - *Paradise Lost*, published in 1667. Milton incorporated all four of these Archangels we see here in the telling of his story about the fall of Lucifer.

The Eastern and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Ethiopian church, the Celtic Church of Brittany and the Anglican Church continue to venerate Uriel as the fourth Archangel to this day. In the Anglican Church, he is recognized as the patron saint of confirmation. In some Episcopal churches, Uriel is regarded as the keeper of beauty and light, and regent of the sun and constellations which is what we see here. Uriel holding a book to denote wisdom and knowledge, wears a halo with extended sun rays to symbolise his command of the astronomical world.

The use of red for both him and Raphael represents their role in the service of others.

In Thomas Heywood's book - *Hierarchy of Blessed Angels* written in 1635, he describes the angels of the four winds: Uriel (south), Michael (east), Raphael (west) and Gabriel (north).

These mosaics are made in a style known as Opus Sectile, meaning 'one piece'. Although some of the backgrounds are made with small, regular pieces of glass, the figures are made of larger, irregular pieces. So an angel's wing or a fold in a robe might be one piece of mosaic.

The development of mosaics on biblical themes coincided with the Victorian passion for the religious arts, and the colourful and detailed pictures had great appeal. Wealthy Victorians liked to donate a mosaic either as a memorial or simply as a gift to their local church.