

## Column

The Bible speaks of them. Hallmark sells them. Some people collect them. Vintage funeral home fans feature them. Of what or whom am I thinking? Angels!

I am thinking about them because Sept. 29 is the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels . . . sometimes shortened to Michaelmas (Michael's mass). Because this day falls near the equinox in the Northern Hemisphere, it is associated with the beginning of autumn and the shortening of days.

In former times in England, tenants would pay their rent in geese, resulting in roast goose appearing on many tables on this day. Some still follow this tradition.

My focus in this column, however, is not on customs associated Michaelmas, but with angels themselves. Who are they, and do they still play a role in the lives of people today?

In answering the first part of this question, it is surely to the Bible we must turn. There, the word translated 'angel' in the New Testament means 'messenger', and this seems to be one of their primary functions. The angel Gabriel, for example, brings Mary the message that she is to be the mother of the Christ. Later, presumably the same angel confirms that message to Joseph.

But, what about angels today? Do they still minister to humans on God's behalf? Well, I must admit I have never had any direct experience with one, but I have known someone who has. The story he told me goes like this:

When he was working in county government in Cherokee County, N.C., he found himself caught up in a very volatile and potentially dangerous situation. An ordinance had been passed mandating that old cars and other eyesores be removed from private property, and people, especially those in rural areas, were up in arms. Soon, my friend and his family began receiving threatening phone calls.

To address the concerns of these disgruntled citizens, a public meeting was scheduled at the county courthouse. On the day it was to be held, my friend, knowing that members of a citizens' group opposing the ordinance would be out in full force, said a prayer for safety before leaving his office and walking a block to the courthouse.

As he neared the building, he could see a crowd milling around out front. To his relief, when he arrived, people moved aside and allowed him to enter without incident. The meeting also went well and tempers calmed.

Sometime later this same friend found himself on a country road at night with his car boke down. Would you believe that the person who stopped to help him was the leader of the citizens' group opposing the ordinance?

During their conversation, the man asked, "Do you remember that meeting at the courthouse?" My friend nodded yes.

He continued, "Who was that big man you had with you? Did you think we were going to hurt you?"

At that point, my friend said that he had no one with him. He had come alone.

But the man persisted, "But, you did! We all saw him and were wondering who he was. We thought you had brought a bodyguard."

My friend had no answer. Was the man who walked beside him an angel?

*O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant that, as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so, by thy appointment, they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)*

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