

## Seasons of the Spirit

### ANGELS

Welcome to the first in this lunchtime series of music and readings on particular themes which we have called 'Seasons of the Spirit'. We have tried to give you an experience which is neither a concert nor a religious service, but a chance to feed your spirit with music and readings that will inspire, encourage and relax you in the middle of the working day.

And we begin with the theme of angels.

Why angels? Angels are very popular today and there is a lot of interest in them and a growing number of people who report seeing visions of angels. They are very much part of contemporary experience. But there is another reason for beginning this lunchtime series with angels. September includes the feast of St. Michael and All angels. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are the three named biblical angels, Michael especially at the hour of death. September therefore is the angel month.

In a scientific, sceptical world, angels offer us mystery, and a link between earth and heaven.

#### **Choir – I have a dream (Abba)**

Almost every culture has a sense of a densely populated spiritual world which acts as an intermediary between God and Humankind, but it is within Christianity, Judaism and Islam that these beings are called angels.

The Bible doesn't try to prove their existence – it just takes them for granted. Their purpose is to worship God, to act as messengers of the divine will, to guard against evil and to minister to the souls of those who have died.

It is no coincidence that both the Greek and Hebrew words for angel mean messenger: angels are intermediaries between earth and heaven. All the major events in Jesus' life were attended by angels, most memorably at his birth:-

*And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest', and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!' When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and*

*see this thing that has happened' which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.*

*Luke 2: 8-16*

### **Choir – Glory to God (Handel's Messiah)**

Angels also guard against evil – the idea that everyone has their guardian angel is shared by many cultures, and is implicit in this Psalm (91)

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge: his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. 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 over you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and serpent you will trample under foot. Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.*

*Psalm 91*

This sense of divine protection in time of need is an experience that many people have had, including Dorothy Kerin, the founder of Burswood, a Christian healing centre in Kent.

*Dorothy was eager to help others experience the healing ministry after she herself was miraculously healed in 1912. She began to be ill from the age of twelve, suffering from diphtheria, pneumonia, pleurisy and tuberculosis, which weakened her so much that she was ill for many years and bedridden for the last five. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1912 she received Holy Communion and asked her little sister, Evelyn, who was sitting with her, to sing the hymn 'Abide With Me'. Evelyn tried but did not know the words very well. Just then, both sisters heard it sung beautifully and distinctly from beginning to end by an unseen choir of angels.*

*For the next fortnight, Dorothy was blind and unconscious due to tubercular meningitis and there was no hope of her recovery. Yet on 18<sup>th</sup> February she saw a great light all around her and an angel took her hand, telling her, 'Dorothy, your sufferings are over. Get up and walk'. All the family and nurses were standing round her bed, certain that this was Dorothy's dying moment. They were all amazed to see her get out of bed unassisted and walk down the stairs. She asked for food and was offered milk in a feeding cup. She refused it, saying she wanted 'real food'. She walked to the larder and got a meal of meat and pudding. Her astonished family watched her eat it all with great relish. Dorothy said, 'How I enjoyed that meal. It was the first solid food I had been able to digest for years.' The following morning, everyone was amazed to see that normal, plump, healthy flesh had replaced her previously skeletal figure and discoloured skin, her condition for years. When the doctor arrived he asked, 'Is it possible that this is the girl I left dying yesterday?'*

*Recalling the two weeks when she was unconscious, Dorothy described a vision of heaven. She had seen many angels there, some wearing haloes or carrying lilies. Describing the angels she said, 'Their movements made lovely music and they all looked as if they were coming and going with some definite purpose. No words of mine can exaggerate the exquisite beauty of the scene.' Dorothy was twenty-three when this healing occurred. She went on to inspire many people to find healing during her long and fruitful lifetime.*

### **Choir – For he shall give his angels charge over thee – Mendelssohn**

Angels have inhabited the English imagination down the centuries. Even the beginnings of English literature were angelically inspired: Caedmon the first English poet was a herdsman at Whitby Abbey when he was visited by an angel in a dream who told him to write songs in his native tongue.

This is a country where angel footsteps have often trod. Bede, the first English historian and recorder of others angelic experiences, had his epitaph completed by an angel while the stone-carver paused searching for a suitable, adjective: it was the angel who gave Bede his title 'Venerable'.

And even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the piece of modern sculpture that has most caught the public imagination is Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North, its glinting wings embracing the motorway traffic as it looms over the A1. Angels are of and for all times and all places, and there for each of us.

### **Choir – Factum est Silencium – Dering**

*Angels operate in our lives by stimulating our minds and imaginations They whisper the good word in our ears, and sharpen our perceptions of the world. they teach us that we*

*already know the correct place to be, as well as our path toward it. The answers to our questions lie within us.*

*Angels provide us with many of our insights. We often call this inspiration or enlightenment, little realizing that we are actually taking the light of consciousness that they provide and calling it our own. We are divinely inspired, and it is the angels who carry our spirits up into the realms of higher consciousness.*

*Knowing the angels is not conditional on mystical thinking. It simply needs the acceptance that we may not have all the answers, and that there are things out of the bounds of everyday life that affect and influence us. Angels fit into the category of imponderables. They are an aspect of the mystery of how the Holy Spirit moves.*

*Ambika Wauters – “The Angelic Year”*

This month as we celebrate the feast of St. Michael and all Angels, we give thanks for the ministry of angels in human life.

**Choir – How like an angel came I down – Drayton**