

A St E Dedicaton Vocation – St Michael & All Angels  
St Michael's was very nearly called St George's!

Many Anglo-Catholic churches dedicated to St Michael & All Angels.  
Standing for Catholic truth of the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it.  
Worshipping with beauty, reverence and wonder.

### **St Michael**

Slayer of the dragon in Revelation.

The dragon is Satan, the father of lies.

The Church stands for truth, God's truth.

All churches proclaim the Gospel, but a church dedicated to St Michael may have a particular awareness of proclaiming that truth.

Quis ut Deus – 'Who is like God?'. A question, a challenge, evil cannot overcome in the end.

Daniel's vision.

Angels as messengers. – 'I have now been sent to you'.

Frightening – insight into another world.

Daniel and Revelation are linked texts, they are both interested in the majesty of God and the worship of heaven.

Michael is Israel's patron saint – in Daniel it is Michael who fights with them against the Persians.

Angels, and especially Michael, symbolise our struggle against evil in the world. Not just the epic and obvious evils, but our daily struggle to do the right thing in difficult circumstances and in a world full of compromises.

The artists Albrecht Durer, in one of his most famous images, depicts St Michael defeating the dragon. But what stands out in this otherwise traditional image, is that the battle takes place over the tranquil fields and villages of his native Germany. The battle against evil happens all around us, it is part of the fabric of our lives. In polite Barnes we like to keep it hidden and not talk about it. But the evils are still there. Of broken relationships, of alcohol and drug addiction, the neglect of the elderly, lying and gossiping, child abuse, neglect of the poor, casual racism and daily sexism – it's all there if you open your eyes to it. You do not need to be a priest very long, to know that in every community there is a real and terrible struggle against the evils of the world.

Whenever anyone is baptised we say: 'Fight valiantly against sin the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life'.

Michael personifies that fight, and that God with us at all times to help us through it.

## **All Angels**

A vocation to worship.

We all think we understand what worship is, but it is difficult to define.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglican mystic, Evelyn Underhill reminds us of its essence when she describes worship as 'the response of the creature to the eternal.

It is not limited to humans, but the whole of creation, seen and unseen, worships God by virtue of its sheer existence. Even those who deny God, worship God by their mere being. Why then actively worship? Because it is the acknowledgement of how things are and who we most deeply are. It is a recognition of the transcendent reality and mystery which is beyond and outside ourselves. We exist to praise, and in worship we find both our beginning and our ends, our origin and our goal – we achieve our destiny in the here and now.

We worship because we are, and the more we worship, the more we become what we most truly are.

Awe and wonder are the beginning of all worship.

A sense of nearness but also transcendence

Of otherness but also intimacy.

We are never alone in worship.

Before I was ordained I remember saying to my parish priest, 'Just us tonight for evening prayer then'. And he said quietly, 'Just us ... and all the angels and saints ... don't forget the angels and saints.'

The angels on the altar and the saints in the windows are here to remind us that whenever we worship, we are joining with the eternal and unceasing praise of heaven. When we come to a service, we are just dipping our toe into that unending river of praise that ever flows.

We want the highest standards, but excellence consists not in standards but in devotion.

The warmth of hearts.

We God not by knowing but by loving.

Church Times 1890 contained a description of Easter Day services:

'The Altar stood out bright and beautiful in its festal array of flowers and numerous lights'

It also described it as having 'a pronounced type of churchmanship!'

Christ as the Lamb is the doctrinal centre of Revelation, and provides a recurring motif in Christian thought, imagery and spirituality down the ages.

John is told look up and see a Lion, but instead he sees a Lamb.

The people of Israel were expecting a lion, a mighty warrior – instead they got Jesus, the Lamb of God – but his power was something far stronger.

God's victory is the power of love not the love of power.

And the lamb stands as if it had been slaughtered – for he won that victory not by force but by offering himself.

Our church is designed to look exactly as heaven is described in Revelation. Revelation describes music from harps, the singing of angels, the music of harps and the smoke of incense.

I am always reminded of the story of Father Tooth who received a complaint from one of his parishioners about the use of incense. He replied: 'Madam, in the afterlife there are two smells – brimstone and incense – you'd better get used to one of them!'

The angels and saints gathered around the Lamb on the throne  
Tonight in Benediction, we kneel before Christ in his Sacramental presence. He is on his throne of the Altar. This service is an evocation, as far as we can, of the glory of heaven. Our worship is a foretaste of the heavenly worship.  
A vision of the world that is to come.  
We look for that day when we shall no longer see God under sacramental signs of bread and wine, but see him face to face as the Lamb upon the Throne.

Edward Aisling who wrote a history of the early years of St Michael's records that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved for the first time in 1921.

'All who love St Michael's may humbly and sincerely give praise and thanks to the Lord of the Sacrament that he has put into the hearts of his servants to provide for him a resting place where those who desire to meet him will always be sure of finding him'.

A church in one form or another has existed here to serve the people of this part of Barnes for 150 years. That's not long compared to St Mary's 700 years or more! But we have so much to thank God for in the past, the present, and I have no doubt, in the future too.

To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever. Amen!