# Raphael, Michael and Gabriel: Feast of the Archangels

Each year as the warm days of summer turn to the coolness and bright colors of autumn, the Church celebrates the work and ministry of angels. We begin this celebration on Sept. 29, with the feast of the archangels – Raphael, Michael and Gabriel. The Scriptures speak of how angels are sent to assist in God's plan of salvation. They bring messages, accompany the faithful along the path of daily life.

In celebrating the archangels on Sept. 29, the Church reminds us of three special messengers who were sent to accomplish very specific tasks. The Book of Tobit, one of the classics of the seven apocryphal texts of the Hebrew Bible, tells the story of Raphael, who was sent by God to accompany Tobias in his quest to find medicine to cure the blindness of his father, Tobit. Raphael's task is to lead, guide and protect his young companion in his quest. Along the way Tobias experiences many adventures, finds love and marriage and, in the end, secures the medicine his father needs. Thus he achieves many goals, receives numerous blessings and completes his mission. This is made possible because of the archangel's guidance. Raphael has served his purpose well; he has carried out the mission God gave him to accompany, guide and protect Tobias from harm.e and fight the battles of God.

Michael was sent to fight God's battles. The short letter of St. Jude describes Michael in an argument with Satan over the body of Moses. While Michael does not make any pronouncement against the devil, he does say, "May the Lord rebuke you" (Jude 1:9), indicating the false nature of Satan's argument. In the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, Michael's role is much more proactive. He is described as "the great prince, guardian of your people" (12:1). In his vision, Daniel describes the classic confrontation between good and evil at the end of

time. Michael is the great champion of the people; he stands ready to greet those who rise from the dead and experience God's great victory over evil. The New Testament continues to reveal Michael's role as a champion for God.

The most prominent and best-known of the archangels is Gabriel, the one who delivers special messages to those favored by God. We first hear of Gabriel through St. Luke's depiction of the Annunciation:

"In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, 'Hail favored one! The Lord is with you'" (1:26-28). Gabriel continued: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:30-33).

We next encounter Gabriel in Matthew's Gospel when he delivers the message to Joseph that he, Mary and Jesus must flee from the wrath of Herod. "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him" (2:13). Later, after the crisis has passed, once again Gabriel comes to Joseph instructing him to return to Israel (see 2:19-20).

The messages that Gabriel delivers were obviously highly significant and, thus, the Lord entrusted them to a special carrier.