

**Article for Ripon Gazette etc. by the Very Reverend John Dobson, the Dean of Ripon**

**The Dean's Reflection**

**February 2020**

**Celebrating the Angels**

There has been much interest in the fallen angel of Ripon Cathedral. Well, you could imagine that there would be. To be nearer to the truth, there has been much interest in our Fallen Angels project. This is the conservation of our outstanding choir pews following the unfortunate fall of one angel from his elevated a couple of years ago.

This newspaper and the Yorkshire Post are amongst those that have celebrated the work that is going on in our scaffolding-filled quire. (We use the word quire, as opposed to choir, to describe the part of the cathedral where the choir stalls are located and where the choir sings most afternoons or evenings of the year.) The London firm of conservators, Bainbridge Conservation, are working hard to remove centuries of dust, then applying a beeswax compound in a painstaking process. In their interviews with Tristram Bainbridge, the regional papers have registered that these stalls and the finely carved wooden screens above them are of international significance. What is particularly pleasing is that they were carved by a local craftsman, William Bromflet, at the beginning of the Tudor period. A tribute to Yorkshire craftsmanship!

All of this has provided an opportunity to joke that we are always restoring fallen angels here at Ripon Cathedral. Of course, there is an important, potentially life-changing, point in that. If by talking about fallen angels we are reminded that the church communicates to the world that God in his love, as shown in Jesus Christ, offers forgiveness and a second chance in life to us all – then this is more than a joke.

The word 'angel' will prompt different thoughts in the minds of different people. In our society, we often use it for those who show their goodness in serving the needs of others. (I would include those who have helped to fund our conservation project, including the local Charles and Elsie Sykes Trust). Each day, under the 70 beautifully carved angels that look down on us in the cathedral's quire, we pray for the people living in the communities across the huge diocese of Leeds and the vast region of North Yorkshire. We pray for those for whom life is difficult; we pray for those who are a blessing to others by how they contribute in a positive way to their lives – 'angels', we might say.

Using our daily prayer diary, each month we remember a great crowd of those who are a blessing to others. A few examples include: hospital staff (11<sup>th</sup>); hospices and Macmillan Cancer Support (12<sup>th</sup>); Jennyruth Workshop and those caring for loved ones at home (6<sup>th</sup>); those working in the region's tourism industry (25<sup>th</sup>). We pray for God's blessing upon these and many more like them – all giving of themselves in the service of others. I would say, they help the world to be a bit more like heaven. Which is, of course, 'a place' we associate with angels.

The bible gives the clear impression that angels are close to God, surrounding him with prayer and praise. As one hymn puts it, 'Angel voices ever singing round thy throne of light, Angel-harps for ever ringing, rest not day nor night...' The danger is that we might worry that our prayers and praises could never be acceptable when compared with the perfection of the heavenly angels, but the sincere praise and 'good works' of anyone are surely pleasing to God.

The real job of the angel, of course, is to be the messenger of God – as Mary and Joseph discovered before Jesus's birth. It was the angels who told the shepherds not to worry and prompted them not to miss the opportunity to see the new-born Prince of Peace; the one who would reveal God's saving love to the world. In a way, that's still the job of those called to be God's messengers today.

Next Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, is the beginning of Lent when we remember how Jesus resisted the temptations of the Devil in the wilderness. It is the season when the message is not to miss the opportunity to be put right with God, with each other and with ourselves. It's not just the carved angels that can be restored to be more like their best selves. We all can – through the love of God of which the angels sing, in heaven and on earth.