

Raphael is often represented in art as a traveler and/or with a fish, which stems from the Book of Tobit, as well. When Tobias went to wash himself in a river, a fish attacks him. Raphael instructs him to catch the fish and remove the heart, liver, and gall. He then used them to deliver Sarah from a demon and to heal Tobit of his blindness.

It was God who healed, as Raphael's name tells us, but through Raphael's human disguise, God accomplished these miracles.

Why are these archangels called saints?

“Saint” comes from the root “sanctus” meaning holy, and this term is used in many ways. Even in St. Paul's letters, his use of “saints” could be interpreted as describing the living followers of Christ.

Most commonly, the Church speaks of canonized saints; individuals who lived an earthly life with heroic virtue and whose presence with God in heaven has been confirmed to the Church through proofs of their prayerful intercession in one or more examined miracles, such as miraculous healings.

These three archangels are specifically named as holy individuals who, like human saints, can pray and intercede for us. Their roles and examples as described in Scripture can also encourage us to follow our vocations with heroic virtue.

Pope Francis summed up the roles of the Archangels: *Michael defends us, Gabriel gives us the good news, and Raphael takes us by the hand and walks with us; he helps us with the many things that occur along the journey. We must ask Raphael to help us not to be tempted to take the wrong step, to take the wrong path. Guide us along the right path; you are our traveling companion as you were [once] the traveling companion of Tobias.*

Sources Include: Catholic News Agency; EWTN; Catholic.org; Aleteia; Vatican.va

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Archangels

*St. Michael, St. Raphael,
St. Gabriel*

Feast Day: September 29

Patronage: St. Michael – soldiers, police, first responders, the dying, radiologists, grocers.

St. Raphael – travelers, happy meetings, love, young people, blind people, the sick, nurses, pharmacists, physicians.

St. Gabriel -- communication workers, postal workers, diplomats, and messengers.

The three Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are the only angels named in Sacred Scripture.

We begin meeting them by understanding; what is an angel?

St. Augustine says: “‘Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’; if you seek the name of their office, it is ‘angel’: from what they are, ‘spirit’, from what they do, ‘angel.’ ” With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they “always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” they are the “mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word”. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 329)

As purely spiritual creatures, angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness (CCC no. 330). As purely spiritual creatures, angels have no body and therefore are neither male nor female. Since the names of these three archangels have traditionally been male names, so we will use the pronoun “he” to refer to them.

The prefix “arch” means “chief” or “principal.” An “arch-angel” then is a “chief messenger” of God.

Saint Michael is the archangel who is most mentioned in Scripture. Michael is a Hebrew name meaning, “Who is like God?” His name is a rhetorical question; it is thought to be the battle cry of the angels who chose to serve God, as they battled against the angels who chose to rebel against God (which we now call demons).

Michael is mentioned four times in the Bible. In the Book of Daniel, he is described by another angel as “one of the chief princes” (chapter 10) and later described as a guardian who “at the end time” will arise (chapter 12). In the New Testament epistle of Jude, Michael is said to have “argued with the devil in a dispute over the body of Moses” (1:9). Finally, in the Revelation to John, it is said that “war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it” (12:7-9).

Therefore, tradition holds that Michael is the prince of the heavenly host, who champions God’s people, rescues souls especially at the end of their mortal life, and calls souls to their judgement. St. Alphonsus Liguori reflected, “The powers of hell will assail the dying Christian; but his angel guardian will come to console him. His patrons, and St. Michael, who has been appointed by God to defend his faithful servants in their last combat with the devils, will come to his aid.”

The Revelation to John is also where the term “fallen angels” comes from, since the rebellious angels including Satan ‘fell’ from heaven.

St. Michael is invoked for protection against Satan and all evil. The origin of the famous prayer to St. Michael began with Pope Leo XIII, who in 1899, had a vision of the evil that the Church and the world would suffer. Because of this, he instituted a prayer asking for St. Michael's protection. Some Catholics have continued the practice of praying this prayer after Mass.

Michael is often represented in art as a soldier battling a dragon.

Saint Gabriel, whose name can be translated as “God’s strength,” “God is mighty” or “hero of God” is mentioned four times in the Bible. In the Book of Daniel, he appears to Daniel to explain his visions related to the Messiah (chapters 8 and 9). Most significant are Gabriel’s appearances in the New Testament: to announce the birth of John the Baptist to his father Zachariah, and to announce to Mary God’s favor in the Incarnation of Christ (Luke 1).

In both cases, the Gospel records Gabriel assuring his listener, “Be not afraid,” and encouraging them – “your prayer has been heard” and “you have found favor with God.”

Christian tradition suggests that it is he who appeared to St. Joseph and to the shepherds, and that he strengthened Jesus during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. There is also a tradition in many faiths that Gabriel is a trumpeter of the Lord. As he is one who delivers God’s Word and God’s message to the people, it’s easy to see how this association could have come about.

St. Gabriel is often shown with lilies, symbolizing purity, or a trumpet.

Saint Raphael is the archangel mentioned by name only in the Book of Tobit. Raphael is a Hebrew name meaning, “God has healed” or “it is God who heals.” In the Book of Tobit, he appears as a young man who accompanies Tobit’s son, Tobiah, on a long journey. Raphael helps Tobiah and his new wife Sarah – whom Tobiah meets on the journey -- be healed at the start of their marriage, and Raphael intercedes to heal Tobit of blindness. Therefore, tradition holds that Raphael is patron of travelers, love, healing, and works of mercy.

Raphael’s words are often, like Gabriel’s, “Be not afraid” and encouraging phrases, such as when he tells Tobit, “Take courage! God’s healing is near; so take courage!” When he reveals his identity, he says he is “one of the seven angels who stand and serve before the Glory of the Lord.” He concludes with, “Do not fear; peace be with you! Bless God now and forever.” There are many more quotes of Raphael throughout the Book of Tobit.