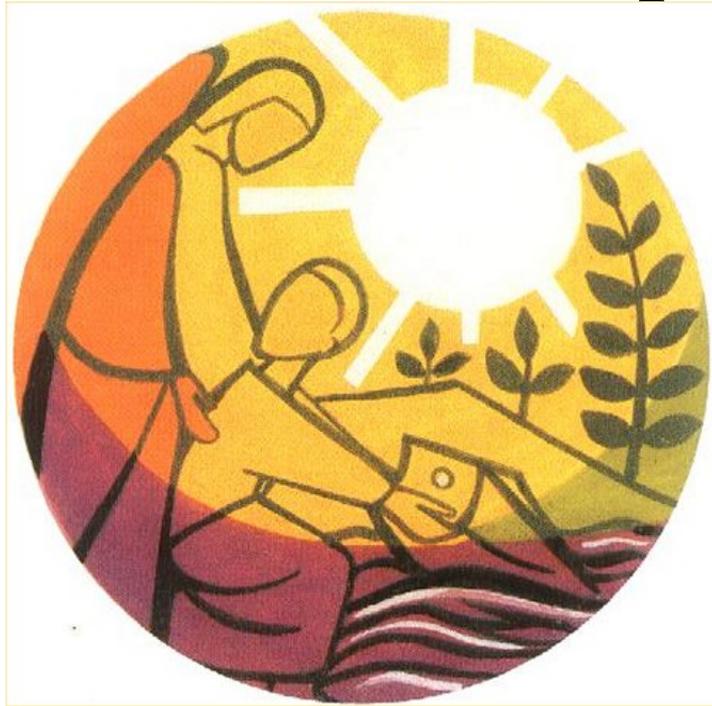


The Guild of St Raphael



Christ's Ministry of Healing

Introductory Notes
on
St Raphael and the Guild
by
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Who is St Raphael?



St Raphael appears as the Archangel Raphael in the book of Tobit (in the Apocrypha section of most Bibles); a book that narrates a story that happened in the eighth century BC - the time that the Israelites were in exile in Babylon.

Tobit was a model of Jewish piety and had been deported to Nineveh with his wife Hannah and their son, Tobias. There he suffered because he maintained his religious practices, and he became blind. In his old age he prayed that he might die, but during his prayer he recalled depositing a large sum of money with a relative, Gabael, who lived in Rages in Media, and decided to send Tobias to collect it. At the same time, in Ecbatana (also in Media), a young relative, Sarah, was also praying to die because seven different men, to whom she had been given in marriage, all died (supposedly being slain by the evil demon Asmodeus) as they approached her on their wedding nights; and she was subject to ridicule and worse from her maidservants.

God answered the prayers of both by sending Raphael in human form (known as Azariah), to accompany Tobias on his journey. *En route*, Tobias bathed in the River Tigris and a large fish tried to swallow his foot. Azariah (Raphael) told Tobias to catch it and he managed to do so. Under instruction, he then cut out the fish's heart, liver and gall bladder to be saved and used for medicinal purposes; and they used the fish flesh for food on the journey. When they reached Ecbatana, Raphael insisted that they should stay the night with Sarah's family and that Tobias should seek to marry Sarah. Tobias, knowing

Sarah's reputation, was unhappy about this but Raphael insisted that there would be no problem. He instructed Tobias to burn the fish heart and liver on incense in the bridal bedroom and then to stand with Sarah and pray to God for mercy and safety before getting into bed.

After surviving the wedding night and while the wedding feasting was still continuing, Tobias (concerned about the length of time they were away, and aware that his parents would worry) asked Azariah (Raphael) to travel on to Rages and collect the money from Gabael, taking the documentary evidence of ownership and an invitation to join the wedding feast. Raphael soon returned with Gabael and the money, causing a joyful family reunion at the wedding feast; and soon afterwards Azariah (Raphael) accompanied Tobias, with Sarah and their wedding gifts, on the return to Nineveh. Here the fish gall was smeared on Tobit's eyes and his sight was restored. A further joyous wedding celebration ensued.

At the end of the wedding celebrations, Tobias wanted to pay Azariah (Raphael) handsomely for his service. At this time, Azariah spoke privately with Tobit and Tobias, and instructed them to continue to live prayerful and honourable lives. He declined payment and revealed himself as: 'Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready to enter before the glory of the Lord', explaining that it had been he who had taken the prayers of Tobit and Sarah and read them before the glory of the Lord and that, in reply, he had been sent by God to heal both Tobit and Sarah.

Based on the Book of Tobit, Raphael became known as the angel of healing, as one who presents prayers for healing in the presence of God's glory. Hence the Guild was named after the archangel.

What is the Guild and what are its basic beliefs?

The Guild was formed nearly 100 years ago with the specific intention of promoting the Christian ministry of healing that had become increasingly neglected since the formation of the Church of England, until it was all but invisible in the Victorian era. It was recognised by the Guild's founders that, of Jesus' commission to his followers to preach and to heal, preaching had taken overwhelming precedence over healing in the reformed churches.

The Guild was founded within the Anglo-catholic tradition in the Church of England and, consistent with this tradition and in contrast with more charismatic movements, took a profoundly sacramental approach to the ministry of healing. Holy Communion, prayer (typically focussed through the laying-on-of-hands), and anointing with oil of *Chrism* were (and still are) the liturgical acts that are advocated as the means by which Christ's ministry of healing is offered within the Guild. Hence, its annual Festival consists of a Healing Eucharist, followed by an AGM; and an informal lunch at which members can meet together and get to know the Guild's Council Members.



St Raphael as depicted in the window of Muncaster Parish Church in West Cumbria.

Photograph by author

How does the Guild function?

The Guild functions mainly through its branches and its publications. Its core business is conducted by a Council, headed by a Warden (who is typically a bishop; currently the Right Reverend. Nicholas Reade, Bishop of Blackburn) and a Sub-warden (a priest with expertise in the ministry of healing who leads the administration of the Guild). The Honorary Secretary & Treasurer, Editor and up to ten council members complete the central leadership team.

Branches are largely based in Church of England parishes, although some are ecumenical. Each branch has a Chaplain, who is a priest and is most commonly the vicar of the parish, and a Secretary who organises the business of the branch and keeps in touch with the Guild's Honorary Secretary. Branch secretaries collect annual subscriptions from branch members and pay them to the Guild and generally organise their branch's prayer list. In return they receive a copy of *Guild News* for each member and as many copies of *Chrism* as the branch subscribes to. They are also sent details of and booking forms for the annual Festival. People who wish to be involved with the Guild but do not have a convenient branch are very welcome as **individual members**. They automatically receive *Guild News* and are encouraged to subscribe to *Chrism*.

Publications: The Guild publishes *Guild News* and *Chrism* twice each year, and has a website (www.guildofstraphael.org.uk) that is available to anyone.

Guild News is a newsletter that keeps members up to date with the membership and work of the Guild Council. It also includes some current insights into the ministry of

healing – typically from the Festival sermon or from *Chrism*.

Chrism, named after the oil used in anointing for healing, is a small theological journal consisting mainly of expert articles on a wide range of perspectives on health and healing. Each issue is dedicated to a particular theme. *Chrism* also contains a seasonal meditation and a section provided by the Centre for the Study of Theology & Health, based at Holy Rood House in Thirsk, as a collaboration between two organisations. Free copies of *Chrism* are donated by the Guild to all diocesan healing advisors, to theological colleges and to church-foundation universities. Individuals or organisations may subscribe to *Chrism* without being members of the Guild.

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