

# ST. RAPHAEL

*“And may a blessing come upon thy wife and upon your parents. And may you see your children and your children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation: and may your seed be blessed by the God of Israel, who reigneth for ever and ever.”*

—Gabelus to Tobias  
(*Tobias* 9:10-11)



*Tobias draws the fish from the water  
under St. Raphael's direction.*

# ST. RAPHAEL

ANGEL OF MARRIAGE, OF HEALING, OF  
HAPPY MEETINGS, OF JOY AND OF TRAVEL

*By*  
Angela Carol

*“For I am the angel Raphael,  
one of the seven, who stand  
before the Lord.”*

—Tobias 12:15

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“Joy be to thee always. . . . Be of good courage, thy cure from God is at hand.”

—St. Raphael  
(*Tobias* 5:11-13)



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## Introduction to St. Raphael

Of the seven angelic spirits who chant an unending hymn of praise before the throne of the Most High God, the canonical Scriptures mention three by name: these are the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.

The Archangel Michael, whose name means literally "Who is like God?", is the leader of the heavenly hosts in the war against the spirits of darkness.

Gabriel, the "man of God" foretold to the prophet Daniel the coming of the Messiah; he is the Angel of the Annunciation, who uttered the immortal *Ave!* to the Mother of Our Lord.

Raphael, whose name in Hebrew signifies "God has healed," may be regarded as the most "human" of these angels because of the special nature of his mission. Raphael is the auxiliary of Providence, the instructor, healer and comforter of mankind. He is frequently spoken of as St. Raphael, and that too is correct, for the word "Saint" comes

from the Latin *sanctus* which means "holy." Angels, as well as human beings of extraordinary holiness, are called Saints. In the case of human beings, it is necessary that they can be canonized by the Church. This involves a process of investigation into the life, virtues and defects of a person who has given evidence of heroic sanctity. In regard to Angels, however, Holy Scripture itself tells us about their heavenly glory.

It is to the Archangel Raphael that this little booklet will introduce you, so that he might help and comfort you, even as he has aided countless thousands of others whose prayers he has presented to the Divine Omnipotence.

### **Angels: A Truth of Faith**

Some people who otherwise have a great devotion to Saints may find it difficult to believe that Angels really do exist, because one does not ordinarily see, touch or hear an Angel, and of course, there are no relics that one can venerate, as in the case of human Saints. Perhaps it has become all too customary to think of Angels merely as ornaments of religious and sometimes profane

art, or as poetic embellishments of sentimental songs. Perhaps we get into the habit of underestimating their powers, forgetting that there is a spiritual world, just as real as the material world that is so familiar to our senses.

Angels are spiritual beings endowed with intelligence, free will and great power. They were created by God to know, love and serve Him in Heaven. Angels are messengers sent by God—who is Himself a spirit—to the world inhabited by men. They also act as guardians of mankind.

The Scriptures tell us there are nine choirs of angels: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations (which, according to some theologians, are the “assisting Angels” at God’s throne), Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Archangels and Angels (described as “administering Angels” because they minister to material creation).

God may use Angels, like other creatures, in working miracles. Good Angels can inspire men to do the will of God and practice virtue. Bad angels (the devils), those who were cast from Heaven after their rebellion, can wage spiritual warfare upon mankind by means of temptations.

Angels sometimes assume bodies in order to carry out God's commands. In this way they become perceptible to the human senses. It was thus in bodily form that the three Angels appeared to Abraham outside his tent, yet he intuitively knew they were messengers of the Lord. It was an Angel in man's form who struggled with Jacob and gave him the name "Israel." And also in many other portions of the Scriptures we find Angels appearing in the guise of men. So, according to the Biblical account, did Raphael appear to Tobias and his son.

### **Devotion to St. Raphael**

Although St. Raphael is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, many commentators, basing their conjectures on the healing significance of his name, identify him with the "Angel of the Lord" mentioned in John 5:4, who descended at certain times into the pool called *Probatika* (or in Hebrew, *Bethsaida*) to stir the healing waters therein. In fact, bearing out that tradition, this is the Gospel read at the Mass for the Feast of St. Raphael, which the traditional calendar of the Church celebrates on October 24th.

Devotion to St. Raphael has been handed down through the ages, and churches and shrines have been erected in his honor throughout the world. Many religious communities have placed themselves under his protection.

Devotion to our Archangel was no doubt brought to America by Spanish Franciscan missionaries. In the 1800's a group of German Catholic immigrants to the United States appropriately chose him as their guide and protector, banding themselves together as the St. Raphael Society. But it was probably not until the 1920's that the devotion began to flourish and spread in this country, due to the zeal of Sister Mary Jerome, I.H.M.

One day, in her convent at Monroe, Michigan, Sister Mary Jerome happened to be looking for a Latin book when she came upon an essay on the "Holy Angels" by the French writer, Ernest Hello. She was impressed by his prayer to the Archangel Raphael—a prayer which has since become popularly known as the "Angel of Happy Meetings Prayer" (see page 52)—and it inspired her to spread the devotion to St. Raphael.

Before her death in 1952, Sister Mary Jerome had received thousands of proofs of the power of his intercession. Others—among them Serena Ward, who for many years conducted the “Whisperings” column in a popular Catholic magazine—have carried on the work of making the Archangel Raphael better known and loved. That is also the aspiration of the present writer.

### **Tobias**

Some seven hundred years before the birth of our Blessed Saviour, there lived a very virtuous man named Tobias. He was a true Israelite, of the tribe and city of Nephthali, which was in Galilee. He had an only son who was also called by the same name, Tobias. They lived during the time of the Jews' captivity under the Assyrian King Salmanascar, in the city of Nineve. The full account of their meeting with the Archangel Raphael can be found in the Holy Bible (Book of *Tobias* or *Tobit*), but, briefly, it is this:

One day Tobias, the elder, due to a strange accident, became totally blind. Because of this sudden affliction, his family

became very poor, so that even his wife Anna had to go out to work as a weaver. Nevertheless, Tobias (whose name means “Yahweh is good”) remained constant in his prayers, begging God very fervently to have mercy on him and his wife and son. Although many of his fellow Israelites laughed and mocked him for this, Tobias continued steadfast in his faith and hope.

At the same time, in the city of Rages, which was in Media, there lived a man named Raguel, a kinsman of Tobias. He had an only daughter, Sara. This young woman was very unhappy because seven times she had been given in marriage, and each of her husbands in turn had been killed by an evil spirit on their wedding night. To add to this misery, a servant maliciously accused Sara of having murdered them. However, despite all she suffered in her heart, Sara continued to pray to God with tears and fasting. And in God’s inscrutable wisdom, her prayers would be answered simultaneously with the prayers of the elder Tobias. The Bible states, “. . . the holy angel of the Lord, Raphael, was sent to heal them both.” (*Tob.* 3:25).

Old Tobias did not know that this wonderful thing was about to happen. Thinking,

instead he would soon die, he called his son, counselled him wisely in the love of God and neighbor, and told him to prepare for a journey to collect a just debt that had been owed to him for many years by a man named Gabelus, in the same city where Sara lived.

Young Tobias was perplexed. He had no idea how to reach that distant city, nor how he would be able to collect the debt from a man he did not even know. However, he decided to follow his father's advice and overcome his difficulty by selecting a guide for the journey. Just as he went out to seek one, he noticed a handsome young man, attired as though for travel, standing outside their house. He did not know this was an Angel of God. Nevertheless, he spoke courteously to the young man, and they arranged to go together on this long trip. Before leaving Tobias brought the young stranger to meet his blind father. The Archangel Raphael (for that is who it was), upon entering the house, greeted old Tobias, saying, "Joy be to thee always . . . Be of good courage, thy cure from God is at hand." (*Tob. 5:11-13*).

When old Tobias wanted to know his name, St. Raphael replied evasively that he

was Azarias, son of the great Ananias. He must have been smiling when he said this, for although he could not yet disclose to them his true name, he gave them a real clue to his identity: *Azarias*, in Hebrew, signifies “help of God,” while *Ananias* means “grace of God”—and this was precisely the substance of the Angel’s mission on earth: to teach mankind that our “*help from God*” depends on our being in *God’s grace*.

Blind Tobias, when his wife Anna began to lament their son’s departure, comforted her, saying, “I believe that the good Angel of God doth accompany him and doth order all things well that are done about him, so that he shall return to us with joy.” (*Tob. 5:27*). Little did he realize then how true his words were!

## **The Journey of Tobias**

With his father’s blessing, young Tobias started out on this journey, accompanied by the Angel. The Bible account also mentions that Tobias’ faithful little dog followed them.

When they came to the river Tigris, which formed a boundary between ancient Assyria

and the land of the Medes, they were confronted by a huge, man-eating fish that would have attacked Tobias, but the Angel Raphael told him how to overcome it. After they had caught the monstrous fish, Raphael instructed Tobias to keep certain parts of it—the heart, gall and liver—to use as medicines and for driving out evil spirits. (These things, of course, had no power in themselves—it simply pleased God to show His power through them.)

When they arrived at last in the city of Rages, the Angel straightway guided Tobias to the house of Raguel because, as he explained, they were of the same tribe and distantly related to each other. Furthermore, the Angel Raphael disclosed to Tobias that Raguel's daughter, Sara, was to become his bride. This announcement frightened Tobias because he had already heard what had happened to the other seven who had married her. However, the Angel explained that all the others had been struck dead for their sins, because they had not regarded marriage as holy, but as something to serve their evil passions. Now, Tobias was to take Sara as his wife for love of God and posterity—children—and for that reason their

marriage would be blessed and happy.

Sara's father joyfully welcomed Tobias under his hospitable roof and consented to the marriage when he also was assured by the Angel that there was nothing to fear this time, because God had kept Sara safe for the very purpose that she might be married to such a God-fearing young man as Tobias.

On his wedding night, Tobias burned part of the liver of the fish (as he had been told to do), and in that same moment the Angel Raphael bound up the demon Asmodeus, who had caused the death of Sara's previous bridegrooms.

Tobias and Sara spent three days and nights in prayer before consummating their marriage. "For," as Tobias said to his bride, "we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God." (*Tob.* 8:5). Therefore, they first gave praise and blessing to God, and then asked Him for health, and for prosperity in which His name might be glorified forever, and for a long life together.

The Angel Raphael, meanwhile, went to invite Gabelus to the wedding feast which, according to ancient Jewish custom, lasted

a week or longer. Overjoyed at meeting the son of his old friend and benefactor, Gabelus gladly repaid the debt he owed, thus permitting Tobias to give to Sara's parents the customary *mohar*, or marriage present.

### **Tobias' Return**

After the nuptial festivities were over, Tobias and his bride Sara, and the servants and beasts and other goods she had received as her marriage dowry, returned to his father's house with the Angel Raphael.

In those days, a journey of this kind took many months, and during young Tobias' long absence his parents, naturally, were worried and anxious about him. However, their tears and loneliness were instantly turned to joy when they heard the barking of the faithful little dog, which, running ahead of the caravan, came wagging his tail gleefully, as though he knew he was bringing good news.

Young Tobias, entering the house, first gave thanks to God. After that, he kissed his parents and anointed his father's eyes with the gall of the fish, as the Angel had told him to do. Thereupon the elder Tobias

immediately regained his sight, and they all glorified and adored God.

They also wanted to thank the young stranger who had been Tobias' friend and guide on the journey, not knowing yet that it was an Angel sent from God who had dispensed these blessings to them. In the fullness of their joy, they called him and asked him to take half of all their possessions. To this, however, the Angel replied:

“Bless ye the God of heaven, give glory to Him in the sight of all that live, because He hath shown His mercy to you. . . .” And addressing the elder Tobias in particular, he continued, “When thou didst pray with tears . . . I offered thy prayer to the Lord. And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. And now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee and to deliver Sara, thy son's wife, from the devil. For I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord.”

Then the Bible narrative continues:

“And when they had heard these things, they were troubled, and being seized with fear they fell upon the ground on their face.

“And the Angel said to them: ‘Peace be to you; fear not. For when I was with you, I was there by the will of God: bless ye Him and sing praises to Him. I seemed indeed to eat and to drink with you: but I use an invisible meat and drink which cannot be seen by men. It is time therefore that I return to Him that sent me. But bless ye God, and publish all His wonderful works.’”

“And when he had said these things, he was taken from their sight, and they could see him no more. Then they, lying prostrate for three hours upon their face, blessed God: and rising up, they told all His wonderful works.” (*Tob.* 12:6-22).

Because of the particular miracles he obtained for Tobias and his family, St. Raphael is universally regarded as the patron of happy and holy marriage, and also as patron of travelers, the sick and those in financial distress. Because of his role as healer, he is sometimes called the “Physician of God” or the “Medicine of God.”