

**“Angels Among Us: Raphael”**  
**Tobit 5:4-10**  
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I'm going to guess that many of you have not read the book of Tobit. I'm going to guess that many of us are not all that familiar with the books of the Apocrypha. As Protestants we have not typically included these books in our Bibles. The word “Apocrypha” means “hidden writings” but it more properly refers to books that were written by Jewish authors during the time in between the Old and New Testaments. You may remember that the Jewish people were in captivity in Babylon during the sixth century BC, but then when the Persians conquer the Babylonians, they allow the Jews to return and restore the Temple and rebuild Jerusalem. This is recounted in several of our books of the Old Testament: Daniel and Ezra and Nehemiah. Those events conclude around the year 500 BC and soon after. But then there are several hundred years of Jewish writing and history between that time and the coming of Jesus and the New Testament. The writings of that time were eventually collected into the Apocrypha and some churches eventually accepted them as part of their Bibles. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox and the Slavonic Orthodox Churches all accept some of the Apocryphal books as authoritative. Tobit is one of those books, but it was never accepted as a fully authoritative book by Hebrew scholars and so it is not part of the Jewish scriptures, so the Protestant reformers did not accept these books either. Still they are interesting and informative for us to learn about that period in history and see how faith continued to grow among God's people.

The book of Tobit was written in the third century BC, but it tells a story about a family that was taken away to Assyria in the seventh century BC. The story is of a man named Tobit, his wife Anna, and their son, Tobias. I would commend this story to all of you, it's not a long one to read and it is a good story of a man who falls into bad luck through no fault of his own, and then is struck blind. When this happens to Tobit, he remembers that he has saved some money and left it with his relative in the city of Rages, near Ecbatana the capital of Media, to the east of Nineveh where he lives. He calls his son

Tobias to him and urges him to go to Rages and retrieve his fortune. But it is a long way and the young man does not know the way to Media. That is where we come into the text that is in your bulletin for today: (read Tobit 5:4-10)

## *Tobit 5:4-10*

*So Tobias went out to look for a man to go with him to Media, someone who was acquainted with the way. He went out and found the angel Raphael standing in front of him; but he did not perceive that he was an angel of God. Tobias said to him, 'Where do you come from, young man?' 'From your kindred, the Israelites,' he replied, 'and I have come here to work.' Then Tobias said to him, 'Do you know the way to go to Media?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'I have been there many times; I am acquainted with it and know all the roads. I have often travelled to Media, and stayed with our kinsman Gabael who lives in Rages of Media. It is a journey of two days from Ecbatana to Rages; for it lies in a mountainous area, while Ecbatana is in the middle of the plain.' Then Tobias said to him, 'Wait for me, young man, until I go in and tell my father; for I do need you to travel with me, and I will pay you your wages.' He replied, 'All right, I will wait; but do not take too long.'*

*So Tobias went in to tell his father Tobit and said to him, 'I have just found a man who is one of our own Israelite kindred!' He replied, 'Call the man in, my son, so that I may learn about his family and to what tribe he belongs, and whether he is trustworthy enough to go with you.'*

*Then Tobias went out and called him, and said, 'Young man, my father is calling for you.' So he went in to him, and Tobit greeted him first. He replied, 'Joyous greetings to you!' But Tobit retorted, 'What joy is left for me any more? I am a man without eyesight; I cannot see the light of heaven, but I lie in darkness like the dead who no longer see the light. Although still alive, I am among the dead. I hear people but I cannot see them.' But the young man said, 'Take courage; the time is near for God to heal you; take courage.' Then Tobit said to him, 'My son Tobias wishes to go to Media. Can you accompany him and guide him? I will pay your wages, brother.' He answered, 'I can go with him and I know all the roads, for I have often gone to Media and have crossed all its plains, and I am familiar with its mountains and all of its roads.'*

So Tobias' guide becomes the archangel Raphael, one of the traditional four archangels of the heavenly host. The name "Raphael" means "God heals," which is appropriate, because on their way they discover a way to heal the blindness of his father Tobit. But as usual, neither Tobias nor Tobit know that Raphael is an angel, let alone one of the great holy ones who stand and enter before the glory of the Lord. But Tobias hires him at a drachma a day to be his traveling companion. They soon meet a dog who also accompanies them along the way through their series of adventures. As they are traveling near the Tigris river, Tobias stops to wash and a great fish leaps out of the water and tries to swallow

the young man's foot. At the urging of the angel, Tobias catches the fish and cuts out its heart, and gall bladder and liver and holds on to those parts. When they finally reach the town of Rages and are welcomed by Tobit's relative, they discover that he has a beautiful daughter named Sarah who is unmarried. Well to be fair, she had actually been married seven times but every time she married as soon as she came to her wedding night, there was a demon who also loved her and would kill each of the husbands. But with Raphael's help, and by burning an obnoxious concoction of the fish innards which causes the demon to flee to the remotest part of Egypt where Raphael binds him hand and foot. Thus, they are able to break the curse, Tobias and Sarah marry, take the fortune home to Tobit and Anna, cure him of his blindness, and then at the end, discover that his traveling companion all along has been none other than an archangel.

Last week we talked about Michael, the guardian angel of the nation of Israel, and said that one of the primary functions of an angel is to protect. Well, I think that another of the functions of an angel is as a traveling companion. Raphael is sent to travel with Tobias, to show him the way, to give him advice along his journey, and to be a friend as he goes. Do you have an angel like that? One who has been with you on a journey, sitting next to you on a plane, or a train or that you traveled with in a car or someone who showed up when you were broken down? Did God ever send you an angel? Or maybe it's a different kind of journey, maybe it is our journey through life. Has God sent you an angel to walk with you through your life or part of it? Someone who supports you, gives you advice, shows you the way, and is just a friend as you travel on your way. Maybe you're lucky enough to have a spouse like that. It might be that the real angel companions in this story is that Tobias and Sarah are angel companions for each other. Perhaps the best part of this story is the short no-nonsense prayer that Tobias says when he and his bride are at last alone together. He simply says, "And now I take this my kinswoman not with lust, but with truth. Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together." That prayer lasts them until Tobias finally dies at 117. Accompanied all along by his angel. But God gives us other angels as well. In Celtic Christianity there is the idea of the *anam cara*, which



in Gaelic means “soul friend.” This is friend of your soul, not necessarily you spouse or a lover, but it is a friend that God gives you who can know your deepest secrets without judgment and in their presence you feel accepted and loved. As one of the Celtic saints, Aelred has said:

“But what happiness, what security, what joy to have someone to whom you dare to speak on terms of equality as to another self; one to whom you can unblushingly make known what progress you have made in the spiritual life; one to whom you can entrust all the secrets of your heart . . .”

That's an anam cara, a soul friend, an angel who walks with us along the way. Do you have one?

Or are you one? Is there someone to whom you can say anything and you know that you will not only be accepted but loved? Is there a friend who can say anything to you, who can share their weaknesses and failures and you not only won't be judgmental, but you won't be disappointed in them either.

Because you know them so well, you know that God has brought them into your life that you might be their guide as God guides both of you. And this is not because you have it all together. Rather, soul friendships often develop precisely because we perceive the other to be human like ourselves, struggling as we are to make sense out of life, and to find some degree of inner peace and harmony. No human soul friend is perfect and we should not expect each other to be. We don't all get Raphael as our guide, but maybe that's just as well. We get each other and in traveling together on this journey, learning to love and accept each other as imperfect human beings, maybe we'll learn to love and accept ourselves as well