

The Archangel Windows: All of the other stained-glass windows in our church were installed in the year 2000. The windows depicting the three archangels mentioned in the Bible—Raphael, Gabriel, and our patron saint, Michael—have always been part of our worship space. These windows are above the central door on the east side of our church.

What is an archangel? An angel is pure spirit, and an arch-angel is a high-ranking angel. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition . . . 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 . . . Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: they closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor [John the Baptist] and that of Jesus himself.”

The window on the left shows St. Raphael with a purse and a fish. In the Book of Tobit, Tobit sends his son Tobiah to find some money he had deposited in Media; the angel Raphael accompanies Tobiah on this journey. On the journey, a fish leaps up from the river, and Raphael tells the boy to use the fish for medicines.

In Gabriel's window (to the right), we see a dove at the top, symbolizing the Holy Spirit and Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God. The initial “M” under Gabriel's feet is Mary's initial, and the lily, a symbol of purity, also refers to Mary; the lily is one of the most commonly used symbols of Mary, especially in artistic representations of the Annunciation (Gabriel's visit to Mary).

Now for Michael, our parish patron saint, given a prominent place in the middle window. The archangel Michael, mentioned in the books of Daniel, Jude, and Revelation, is usually represented in art dressed as a Roman soldier, with a sword, fighting with or standing over a conquered dragon (see Revelation 12:7-9). These motifs suggest the triumphant battle of good over evil. Our window, as you can see, shows a winged presence dressed as a Roman soldier, with a monster at his feet. Above Michael's head we see a sword, again alluding to a battle. Another symbol in the window is a set of balances, suggesting judgment, a reference to the ancient legend that Michael conducts the soul to God at the moment of death. Keep in mind that angels are pure spirit, so their representation as physical beings is symbolic; their wings no doubt derive from their role as messengers.



RAPHAEL

GABRIEL



