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Tobias and the Angel Raphael

Tobit 5:1–12:22 · Bloom · Ages 13–19

Tobit is a story about faithful people in a hard place: Israelite exiles in Assyria, far from the Temple, trying to keep God's law while the culture around them doesn't. It has a blind father, a grieving young woman, a demon, an angel in disguise, a fish and a love story, and it is in your Bible because the Church received it as inspired Scripture (CCC 120).

The plot: Tobit, generous to the poor and faithful in burying the dead, goes blind (Tob 2:9–10). In Ecbatana, Sarah has lost seven husbands on their wedding nights to the demon Asmodeus. Both pray on the same day, and God sends Raphael to answer both (3:16–17). Tobit sends his son Tobias to Media to recover money left with a relative. Raphael, calling himself Azariah, goes as his guide, and the dog goes too. At the Tigris a fish leaps at Tobias; at the angel's word he lands it and keeps its heart, liver and gall. In Ecbatana Tobias marries Sarah, his relative, with her father Raguel's blessing. On the wedding night he burns the heart and liver, the demon flees, and the couple pray together before anything else. Raphael fetches the money. Back home, the gall heals Tobit's eyes. Then Raphael reveals who he is, tells them to give thanks to God, and disappears (12:11–21).

What the Church sees here: angels are real, God's servants and messengers (CCC 328–332), and every human life is surrounded by their care (CCC 336). The Church's liturgy honors Raphael by name, with Michael and Gabriel (CCC 335). Scripture itself calls only Michael an archangel (Jude 9); calling Raphael an archangel comes from the Church's liturgy, which keeps the feast of the three archangels on September 29. The Catechism says Tobit bears moving witness to a high view of marriage and to the faithfulness and tenderness of spouses (CCC 1611), and it quotes Tobias and Sarah's wedding-night prayer in its teaching on married love (CCC 2361). Tobit's almsgiving and burying of the dead are works of mercy (CCC 2447; 2300).

Honest questions:

Isn't the fish thing just magic? The Church rejects magic, the attempt to tame hidden powers for our own use (CCC 2117). In Tobit nobody controls anything: an angel sent by God gives the instructions, the couple pray, and Raphael says plainly that God sent him to heal (Tob 12:14).

Did the angel lie about his name? He calls himself Azariah, which means "the Lord helps," a fair description of his mission. The narrator tells the reader who he is from the start (5:4), and he reveals himself at the end.

Is it history? The Church has not defined the book's literary form. Many Catholic scholars read it as an inspired teaching story set in the exile, partly because some of its historical details are hard to fit with other ancient sources. Either way, the whole book is inspired Scripture, part of the canon the Council of Trent solemnly defined (CCC 120, 138), and the Church reads it with attention to its literary form (CCC 110).

Why isn't Tobit in my friend's Bible? Tobit belongs to the Old Testament in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles; most Protestant Bibles leave it out or print it in a separate section. The Church's canon, received through apostolic Tradition, includes it (CCC 120).

Song of praise · Tobit 13:1–18

After his blindness, Tobit's song looks back at exile and loss and still finds reasons to bless God. He sees that God disciplines and shows mercy, and he looks ahead to a renewed Jerusalem full of joy. Praise here is not denial of suffering; it is trust that God is at work in it. (Tob 13:1–18; CCC 2638)

Church teaching note

Church teaching: angels (CCC 328–332, 336); the Church's liturgy honors St. Raphael by name with Michael and Gabriel (CCC 335, which mentions the Byzantine liturgy); Tobit's witness to marriage (CCC 1611) and Tobias and Sarah's prayer (quoted in CCC 2361); burying the dead and almsgiving as works of mercy (CCC 2300, 2447); magic rejected (CCC 2117); the canon of Scripture, defined at the Council of Trent (CCC 120, 138); literary forms (CCC 110; Dei Verbum 12). Calling Raphael an archangel comes from the liturgy (feast of Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, September 29); Scripture names only Michael as archangel (Jude 9). The book's literary form is a scholarly question, not defined by the Church.

Talk about it

1. Tobit and Sarah were both at their lowest when they prayed. What does their story say about prayer in hard times?
2. How would you explain to a friend the difference between the fish in Tobit and magic?
3. Tobias and Sarah began their marriage by praying together. Why might that matter for a relationship?
4. Catholic connection: read CCC 336. What does the Church teach about the angels who watch over us?

Key verse: Tob 12:14. Look it up in your Bible.