



# THE NEW SHOFAR

***We are a part of a great multitude of believers,  
those in heaven and those on earth.***

***August 28<sup>th</sup>***

## ***Welcome to the Church of the First Born***

Here in Kingston SE, we are (next year) celebrating our 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first services celebrated in our little church. At a minimum that would work out to around 7,280 gatherings of believers to offer praise and worship to Almighty God. Many more if we were to include weekday celebrations as well. That is encouraging because we are still worshipping in that same church today. There is something powerful about one faith community building on the faith and commitment of men and women in the past. It is their vision, their willingness to make sacrifices; it is their perseverance in holiness that should be our inspiration today. This is what the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews is saying in our first reading. Our congregations are a part of the one Church, the Church on earth and the Church of the saints in Heaven. We are a part of *a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands* (Revelation 7:9) who have followed Christ Jesus the first born from the dead. That is what he promised and that is what we believe... *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died* (1 Corinthians 15:20).

## **This is the faith of our Church, faith emerging from our creeds**

The ***Church Triumphant*** is the way our traditions have spoken about these *saints* in heaven. The title describes the Church in heaven gathered around the throne of God. In the kingdom of God — the realm in which the holy Trinity, the angels and saints, and the abode of all those who have reached the fullness of salvation in Christ — the Church already exists. But it will have its fullest being at the end of time, when all of creation and (we hope) all human beings will be conformed to Christ and all reality will be one of divine praise and glory.

The term ***Church triumphant*** underlines the truth that in the glory of heaven all human sin will have been transformed, death and suffering will be no more, and the glory of God will have triumphed over all the imperfections of human history.

***The church militant*** refers to the Church on earth. This is us, all believers as they strive to be faithful disciples of Christ. The term “militant” can suggest an antagonistic relationship between the Church and the world but it is far from that – or should be. The Church Militant does battle *against sin, the devil and the demonic rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12)*. This is an authentic reality: the Church on earth works to overcome the imperfect and sinful dimensions of human existence. The Church’s mission is not to oppose the world and society, but to work for their transformation by the convincing preaching of the Gospel and by the edifying power of the good works and example of those who are baptized into Christ. The Church’s best asset is the saintly activity and example of those who have chosen the Christian way of life.

This was the faith that animated the Church. It encouraged them and empowered them to know that beyond death there is a whole new life ahead of us, a life in which Christ is already living; a life shared by all those who have gone to their rest after a life lived in search of the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. As Hebrews reaffirms for us today, in coming to Christ, *we have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival...Our God lives!*

### ***It is not all about the Church triumphant***

By reminding us of the reality of the Church Triumphant, the author of Hebrews is offering us a vision of what is available to us as we strive to be faithful disciples in a world that is growing more and more intolerant of men and women of faith. He reminds believers that in the end, this world will cease to exist. There will be God and those gathered around His Heavenly throne. We can prioritise the demands of this world and build our lives here. But if it all ends “tomorrow” where that will leave us? What God wants of us is to live in both the material and the spiritual worlds, with the things of the Spirit enriching and enlightening our activities in the material. Our author reminds us of the temptations trying to pull us first one way and then the next. It is the prayers and intercessions of the saints in heaven that reach the ear of God, pleading in our name for the grace and power we need to hear, trust and obey.

We live our faith in the midst of all the competing voices in our world—voices of fear and anger, voices of hatred and violence; voices that promote division and alienation; voices that refuse to forgive or show mercy. Amid this cacophony, God calls us to a different way of life with the voice of joy, and love, justice, and peace; a voice that is a balm to the human heart.