

ANGELS FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

Recently I was accompanied round Abbey Park by a little blue spot. Ghost story? No. As you may have already guessed, I was playing with the GPS (Global Positioning System) on a Smartphone, watching it locate my position on a Google map of Abbey Park. This technology, GPS, is very much taken for granted now, from the good old satnav that sends people down Jack's Lane looking for the entrance to Turvey Abbey—the joys of being an unnumbered house on the High Street—to highly complex systems, but isn't it still rather amazing?

More amazing still is the Christian concept of angels—I think that all religions have angels in one form or another. You can, of course, get into theological discussions about what exactly we mean by 'angels', or argue that angels don't exist, but let's have fun for the moment and assume that they do.

I was once in Ireland on my motorbike. I especially wanted to climb Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain, it is special to me. In Westport the Sisters of Mercy kindly let me stay with them. All the rooms were occupied but they let me sleep in a big ex-classroom which seemed to be used for storage. One of the stored items was a large painting of a small child crossing a stream on a narrow plank with a huge guardian angel towering over her to keep her safe. I thought to myself that if she saw that angel she would fall into the stream immediately.

Do we really have angels accompanying us through life? In chapter seven of his Rule, the chapter on humility, St Benedict tells his monks: 'The monk must recognise that he is at every hour in the sight of God in heaven, and that his actions are everywhere visible to the divine eyes of God, and are being reported to God by the angels from moment to moment.' Well, that should be enough to keep the monks out of mischief. It could sound a bit threatening, rather like: 'Big Brother is watching' in George Orwell's book 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'. But what if these angels are sympathetic friends, what if they really understand us, what if they are loving and not trying to catch us out and condemn us? Then the picture changes, we all need to feel loved and understood, and how wonderful to be loved and understood by God's angels and thus by God.

Christmas is approaching, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, who comes to show us that God does love us, despite what we get up to. Angels figure quite a lot in the Christmas story, the birth of Jesus is announced to Mary by a really

important angel, Gabriel the archangel. (The name Gabriel means 'God is my strength'). When Joseph gets into a bit of stew about his future wife being pregnant, an angel reassures him and tells him to take Mary as his wife. At Jesus' birth the local shepherds get a big fright when an angel appears to tell them of the birth of Jesus, and a huge heavenly choir joins in singing glory to God and peace on earth—let's all take a break from our daily struggles and join with the angels in praising God for the birth of Jesus.

