

Angels On High and Nearby

The stores are finally closed. Once while I shopped this season, I noticed a large sandwich board sign on the sidewalk in front of an upscale coffee house. In the spirit of Christmas, it was offering some things *free to children*—but I guess it was a sign of warning for parents. This is how the sign read:

“Unattended children will be given an espresso and a free puppy.”

Throughout the centuries of our faith tradition, religious people have often found it to be too huge a jump to get from themselves to God in one leap. So, they visualized mediators—things between heaven and earth—to help us to sense God’s presence.

In ancient times, God, along with God’s attributes, such as Wisdom, were seen to be at the top of the universe. They called the beings that are between God and fully human beings, angels! Angels were messengers of God. Some angels were considered to bring a particular message: An angel named Gabriel comes to Mary; Joseph learns that Mary is expecting by an angel. Who said, “Do not be afraid?” An angel. An angel tells Joseph to name the infant “Jesus.” A whole bunch of angels announce the Good News of Jesus’ birth to humble shepherds.

Some angels speak in dreams; some are more like a calm presence.

In the Bible, we meet Angels who are “On High” and have wings.

Tonight is one of the few nights of the year when we actually *see* angels, at least angels with wings and halos. They tend to hover around church nativity pageants, like ours. Yet, all of us are aware of “angels” in our lives. Angels, that is, who have skin. These are nearby, and they look a lot like people who do wonderful things whenever they are needed, conveying the presence of God, just like a divine messenger.

When people are very kind, we say to friends, children, even sales clerks, “You’re an angel!” and we sort of mean, if you really think about it, “You’re a messenger of God. You’re spreading good will on earth.” I’m fond of telling our “Office Angels” who help

at noontime in the church office, “You’re halo’s shining extra brightly.” Yet I could say that about almost all of you at one time or another.

Some angels have skin. They are nearby, and they look a lot like people who do wonderful things whenever they are needed, conveying the presence of God, just like a divine messenger.

I have begun to believe that if we were ultra-sensitive to all of the influences upon us, we’d discover some angels nearby who have *no* skin. They are invisible, but are very real for those whom they touch.

There’s a classic German film, “Wings of Desire,” that show us, the viewers, angels who are invisible to the people around them. In one scene, on a subway car, the angel who is wearing a raincoat and has a pony tail—no wings, no halo, notices a man whom we know, through a voice-over, is at the end of his rope. The man has no hope, does not know where to turn. The rain coated angel squeezes in to sit beside the depressed man. The invisible angel puts his arm around the man to comfort him, and the human man suddenly thinks, “Wait, there is hope. . .” The real human’s attitude shifts, without ever knowing that he had received angelic help.

This Christmas, we again sing about Angels on High, and we give thanks for all the angels with skin who do wonderful things on earth.

One Sunday morning recently we found in our pews little candles as symbolic gifts of God’s grace in our lives. I regret that there’s no way we can put angels in our pews tonight. Oh, no, that’s not true! As I look at you, I realize that our pews are filled with skin-clad angels—Jace, Michelle, Amanda, Tyler, Kasey, Lori, Samantha... Wait,

as I look more closely, I realize there are *invisible* angels, too, squeezed between you all.

God's messengers are too numerous to count!

Angels *are* On High, *and* Nearby. That's something to ponder, and to celebrate!