



One Inch off the Ground

A child meets her guardian angel at a live nativity

Maureen Swinger

“MUM, WHY DOES NOBODY ELSE IN MY CLASS know the name of their guardian angel?” She’s at it again – the five-year-old with the unanswerable questions. She’s never been puzzled for a moment as to the identity of her angel. He’s her “Uncle D” – whom she has never met, unless you count two years of hangout time (supposing you measure time at all, up there) before her birth and after his death.

I did not give her the idea. But I have told the kids countless stories about my brother Donal, who never spoke or walked, but lived thirty-one years and lived them well. Our family’s hearts were shaped around him, and we were so -accustomed to one-way conversations that I often find myself talking to him in my head still, with a sense that he’s quite close, tilting his chin and quietly listening. That’s not just because of the photo on the living room wall.

I’m aware that we small humans can never understand the world of angels – great, inscrutable beings created before our time. Still, not only the child beside me, but the child within clings to the idea that God takes care of guardian angel duties in the here and now. And he might just delegate an uncle to watch out for a small niece with a penchant for accidents.

Donal was no stranger to accidents. He had severe seizures all his life, and no level of precaution spared him his share of tumbles, bumps, and chipped teeth. Who better to keep an eye on a child who in her first two years managed to rack up a concussion, a choking episode, and a tooth chipped into a triangle reminiscent of a baby vampire? Her equally adventurous brother and sister have managed to reach tween-hood without any natural disasters. This one – she needs eyes on her. And she knows they’re there.

When I tuck her into bed, she says good night to me and then to any angels who might be in the room, starting with Uncle D. On the way to kindergarten, she talks about how the sky ends one inch off the ground, so our angels can fly along next to us. A golden winter sunset means D and crew are baking Christmas cakes. (Maybe he’s baking them – not sure if he’s eating them. He wouldn’t let anything sweet pass his lips back when I knew him.) It never bothered her that she couldn’t see him, and she never expected to – until last Christmas Eve, when she did.

The live nativity was out under the stars that night, with a steady wind flickering the candle flames. Our entire community stood in silence before a shabby stable, listening to the Christmas story. My little girl’s head kept turning from the well-swaddled baby, snoozing in Mary’s arms, to a tall, dark-haired angel standing just outside the stable, with a big torch that flared in the wind. As we began filing past the tableau, singing carols and sheltering our candles, she suddenly tugged me out of the line. “I think that’s Uncle D,” she said, her eyes outshining the candles. “Please, Mum, can we go and ask him?”

I felt my heart thud. On the holiest night of the year, adults know that we stand before a beautiful symbol. What a time for a child to find out too. I tried to formulate a reason why we should not approach the angel. If she saw Donal, I saw a high-school student who had recently moved to our community. But I could not say no to those eyes.

He was a very tall angel; we both had to look up. She tugged at my skirt. “Ask him, Mum!” she whispered, not taking her eyes off his face. I didn’t see that I had a choice. With an apologetic smile, I muttered: “My daughter wants to know if you are her Uncle D.” Between the wind and the singing, how could he understand such an obscure question? But I guess angels can hear into a child’s heart. He smiled down at her and said, “Yes.”

The child glowed. She stood and beamed at him until the singing crowd jostled us onward. Away from the torches, our candles snuffed out, it was pitch dark and bitterly cold. She didn’t notice. I didn’t care.

She didn’t say anything till bedtime. As I tucked the quilt up around her chin, she gave me a

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sleepy smile and said, "Isn't it nice that it was his turn to guard baby Jesus this year?"

She didn't need to see him to know that angels are real. And I'm not worried about what will happen when she's old enough to realize that the nativity figures on Christmas Eve are people she knows and loves here on earth. That moment comes for all of us, along with the deeper knowledge that God is still with us, all around us, one inch off the ground.

Before I went to sleep, my thoughts went out to thank the young man who said yes to a child on Christmas night. But I ended up thanking my brother.

Source: The Plough <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/holidays/christmas-readings/one-inch-off-the-ground>

Extracts from Pope Francis' *Urbi et Orbi* Christmas Address

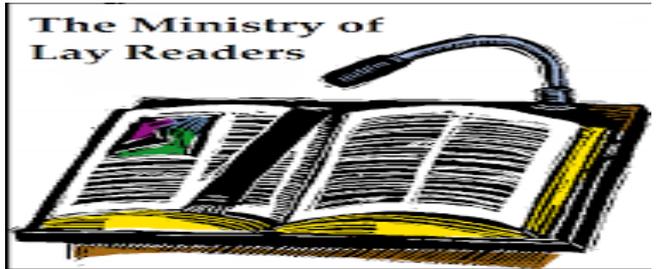
Dear Brothers and Sisters, Merry Christmas!

From the womb of Mother Church, the incarnate Son of God is born anew this night. His name is Jesus, which means: "God saves". The Father, eternal and infinite Love, has sent him into the world not to condemn the world but to save it (cf. *Jn* 3:17). The Father has given him to us with great mercy. He has given him to everyone. He has given him forever. The Son is born, like a small light flickering in the cold and darkness of the night.

That Child, born of the Virgin Mary, is the Word of God made flesh. The Word who guided Abraham's heart and steps towards the promised land, and who continues to draw to himself all those who trust in God's promises. The Word who led the Hebrews on the journey from slavery to freedom and who continues to call the enslaved in every age, including our own, to come forth from their prisons. He is the Word brighter than the sun, made incarnate in a tiny son of man: Jesus the light of the world.

This is why the prophet cries out: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (*Is* 9:1). There is darkness in human hearts, yet the light of Christ is greater still. There is darkness in personal, family and social relationships, but the light of Christ is greater. There is darkness in economic, geopolitical and ecological conflicts, yet greater still is the light of Christ...

May Emmanuel bring light to all the suffering members of our human family. May he soften our often stony and self-centred hearts, and make them channels of his love. May he bring his smile, through our poor faces, to all the children of the world: to those who are abandoned and those who suffer violence. Through our frail hands, may he clothe those who have nothing to wear, give bread to the hungry and heal the sick. Through our friendship, such as it is, may he draw close to the elderly and the lonely, to migrants and the marginalized. On this joyful Christmas Day, may he bring his tenderness to all and brighten the darkness of this world.



SPECIAL APPEAL

Despite the fact that the number of people attending our liturgy has increased slightly in recent times, we still struggle to find both Readers and Ministers of the Eucharist. This is especially the case for the 6pm Vigil mass on Saturdays and again for the 5pm mass on Sunday evening, which is very well attended.

Proclaiming the Word and serving the Eucharist are at the heart of the life of our faith community. While neither of these tasks is very onerous, they are a real service to the community and a responsibility that should normally be assumed by lay people. They require a small amount of formation and training if they are to be done with the dignity and respect they merit.

If you would like to offer this service to our community, please contact one of the serving ministers or priests after mass or email us at info@stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie for further details.

Masses and Confession

Sundays: Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm

Messe en français 12.30 (2^e et 4^e dimanche du mois)

Daily masses 10am and 12.40pm, Saturday 10am only

-Rosary daily after 10am mass

Adoration Blessed Sacrament, Weds 10.30-12.40

CHRISTMAS COLLECTIONS

1st Collection: €3,945

Share: €3,270

Weekend of 28/29 December

1st Collection: €942

Share: €540

THANK YOU