

# Hosts of Angels

In the season of Advent, leading up to Christmas, angels appear in many of the carols. These heavenly beings seem to divide into two types, both seen in the story of the shepherds as told in Luke's gospel. Firstly there is the individual 'angel of the Lord', a powerful being who descends from the celestial heights, and at first terrifies but then reassures the shepherds (Luke 2: 9); followed by 'a great company of the heavenly host', singing in heavenly choirs, worshipping the Lord (Luke 2: 13 -14).

Over the centuries artists have portrayed angels in different ways. There are the delightful 'putti' so beloved of the Italian masters, and here at Edgbaston Old Church we have several windows and carvings depicting this type of angel.



These little cherubs can sometimes make us smile, but wall plaques and gravestones with *putti* can evoke quite a different response, for these may denote the death of an infant or child.



There is a sad little cherub on the marble plaque close to the vestry door; and several poignant stone angels in the churchyard.

The subtle faces of the angels in our 'Agony in the garden' window (*see page 9*) convey a darker message. These angels are the companions of Jesus through his long night of agony. The artist shows their awareness that although they are with him to offer support,

'this *must* be' - the cup shall not pass. These are companion angels, who offer solace by their very presence.

A complex window on the south wall of the church - in the 'Lady Chapel' - has angels fulfilling a mixture of roles. On the right hand side is a single angel - whose power and authority is shown by the combination of halo and celestial fire - holding and protecting a sleeping child,



while on the left is a 'choir' of worshipping angels.

*Perhaps you might like to take up the 'Angel Trail Challenge', and see how many angels you can spot inside or outside the church. You could print out the 'Angel Trail' and take it with you to the church.*