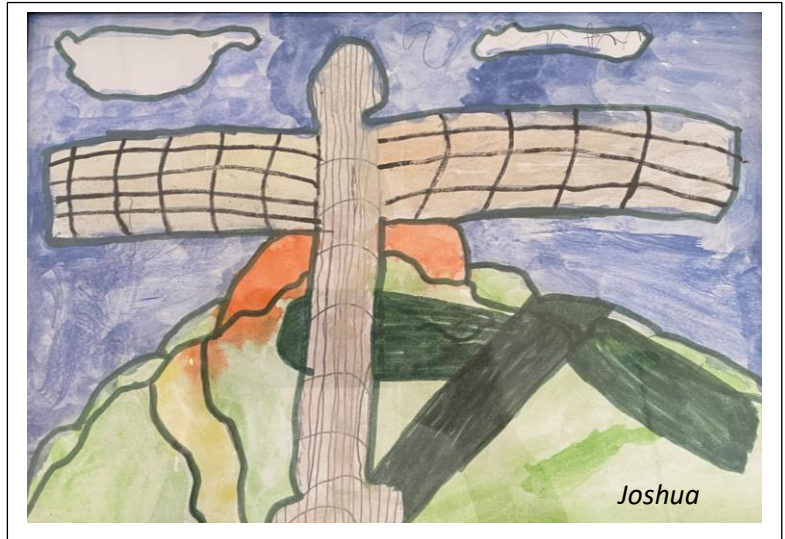


# The 'Angel of the North'

## ...25 years old !

Love it or loath it, Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North invites us to wonder!

This painting of it was by 8-year-old Joshua following his visit to see it. Gormley was this age when he experienced '*a strong feeling of the presence of a guardian angel*', which inspired him to create the sculpture.



The Angel is a cruciform figure, legs bound together, with enormous, outstretched arms made of rusted aeroplane wings, casting a moving shadow across the hillside like a blessing.

The Angel faces south, welcoming travellers from the South. It is so big as to be all-seeing, yet it cannot be seen in the dark, and is often missed even by day-time travellers. Have you ever felt the 'absence' of God in the darkness, or failed to notice Christ in your life?

The Angel is impossibly oversized, inviting us to notice the 'out of proportion' love of Christ on the cross. It is earthbound, on a hill above a redundant mine, where coal miners worked in the dark for 200 years. At one time mines were often equated with hell. Jesus' cross was on a hill on a rubbish tip, Golgotha, the 'place of the skull'. The Angel is humble. No kiosk sells souvenirs. It is abused, covered with graffiti! ... Have you discovered the love of Christ amidst the abandoned mines and refuse tips of life?

Gormley says the sculpture is '*burdened as much as blessed*'. Christ chose to bear a burden for us, which became our blessing. To touch the feet of the sculpture in the rain is to remember how Jesus has touched and washed our feet. The Angel is '*earth-bound and so big and heavy that despite its wings, it could never fly*'. We worship a God who can do the impossible and who is bigger than the created universe yet chooses a bond with earth.

Gormley says '*flight is a divine attribute*'. The wings are not beautiful as angels' wings are in medieval paintings but designed like aeroplane wings. They reflect the manufacturing industry of the north and the human endeavour to fly. The wings are rusted. So much of our industry is now redundant, its machinery rusted. Even when our sin spoils our beauty, God can renew us in ways we never imagined. ... Are we willing to be vulnerable as Christ was – to allow our rusty wings to carry hope to forgotten places?

Gormley asks, '*How does our assimilation of divine attributes change us?*' As we commit ourselves to discipleship, asking the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we face the same question, '*How then shall we live?*' What does it mean for us to be Christ's servants, Christ's agents in the world?