

Angels

I guess that each of us has their own idea of what makes a good holiday. For nearly twenty years now, my idea of a good holiday has been exploring Russia: where the culture, the cities, the countryside, the alphabet and the language; are so different from ours. Going abroad to meet English people, eat English food and drink English beer; is not for me. But that's just my taste; yours may be different.

After I'd been going to Russia for over fifteen years, I started to get too cocky. Language? No problem: I could do everything from asking directions, to ordering a meal. Travel? No problem: I'd travelled on trams, trolleybuses and inter-city trains. Then came a lesson for my pride. I'd planned to travel three hours East of Moscow on a train, and then do 40 kilometres by bus to a beautiful but remote town. Forget about travel agencies or package tours, I said to myself, I was going to do it my way.

Unfortunately, the departure railway station in Moscow turned out to be a complicated mix of departure points. When we emerged from the Metro, we stood looking lost. Then a young man approached us aged Western-looking tourists, and warned us not to stand about, as this was a favourite location for thieves. I hardly had time to thank him before he'd gone.

Then I found that my knowledge of Russian wasn't good enough to find the departure platform for our train journey into the unknown. Then I heard a voice saying: 'Can I help you?' It was a Russian lady who spoke excellent English and who directed us to our train. I turned to thank her, but she had disappeared.

Angels are messengers from God sent to help us. Their representation in the icons of the Orthodox Church are not portraits, but a visual expression of their invisible nature. Their wings represent their ability to swiftly connect and communicate. Their warrior headbands represent their authority and power. While sceptics may wonder how wings out of your back can make you fly, I see that young man and that lady as living icons of angels: like the one sent to the journeying Tobias in the Old Testament 'Apocryphal' Book of Tobit.

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