

St Mary's Church, Warwick

Carol Service 2015

The Angel and The Weeper

– *by Vaughan S Roberts* –

By the light of a Christmas moon a small figure in a tattered dress is crying by the sumptuous tomb of Richard Beauchamp, late Earl of Warwick. Her name is Elizabeth and her right hand clutches one of the bronze, angel statues which – along with fourteen figures in mourning – are set into the stone sepulchre under which the Earl's bones have recently been laid to rest.

At this time of year Lizzie's labours in the kitchen at Warwick Castle are busier than ever. She's thirteen and works where her mother also worked until her death earlier in the year giving birth to a twelfth child. Lizzie is the eldest of her line and finds herself looking after her many brothers and sisters. She feels bereft not least because has no keepsakes of her protector, mentor and mother ... other than a most unusual statue. When the wealthy Earl had been buried in the fabulous chapel he had built to the Virgin Mary, his tomb was adorned by weepers and angels. It was the kindly face of Lizzie's mother that was used by the artist as the model for each little angel set into the tomb. This is all Lizzie has left, since her mother has been buried in an unmarked, pauper's grave.

Suddenly the girl feels conscious of another presence. And by the altar she sees a finely dressed figure with an aura of heaven. 'Why are you crying?' asks the angel. 'I'm remembering my dead mother,' Lizzie replies.

The Angel offers a piece of fine, white cloth to dry her eyes. It is soft to her touch – softer than any material she's ever felt. 'Take heart,' says the angel. 'The child whose birth I declared at Christmas has won a great victory over death which no one can ever take away. You will see your mother again.' And it's the tone of the angel's voice, even more than the words, which raises Lizzie's heart from the depths to which it has sunk.

She wipes her eyes and looks up once more, but there's no one there. It all seems to have been a dream. In her tiredness she's momentarily fallen asleep holding onto her mother's angelic statue and just dreamt she's been visited from heaven.

Lizzie stands up and sighs, ready to return to the many tasks awaiting her in the castle kitchen at the dawn of Christmas Day. But then she starts, looking at her hand, in which she's holding the piece of fine, white cloth given by the angel and stained by her tears.

And she remembers those words of hope and the music of the angel's voice.