

An Angel Just Like Me

Celebrating the Diocesan Christmas Project, 2021



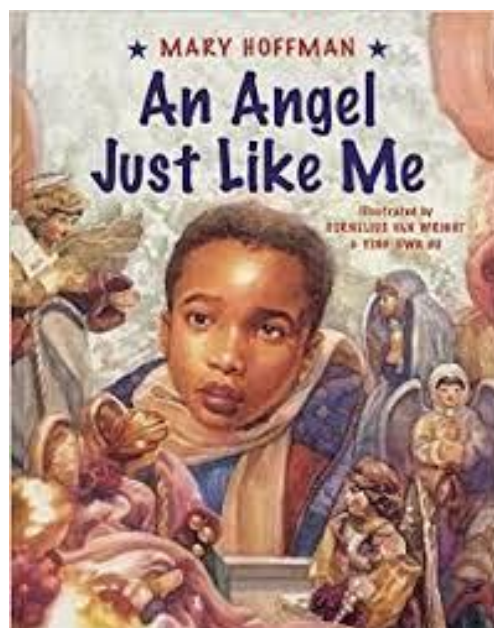
Our Vision : Deeply Christian, Serving The Common Good

Introduction

The Christmas 2021 Diocesan schools' project has inspired young people in schools and parishes across Winchester and Portsmouth Dioceses to discuss racism and stereotypes against a background of Christian values.

The project, based on Mary Hoffman's book 'An Angel Just Like Me', was launched to help support the Church of England's commitment to diversity and anti-racism outlined in the recent From Lament to Action report.

The project saw children in parishes across both dioceses investigating different views on racism and developing their own opinions on discrimination and inclusivity.



Written nearly twenty-five years ago but equally current in 2021, An Angel Just Like Me is the story of African American boy Tyler's search for an angel that looks like him to put on the family Christmas tree. The story made an effective prompt for encouraging children to think about the stereotypes and assumptions they make about the Christmas story and about the wider world they live in.

This brochure celebrates the work of the children and school staff in addressing these powerful issues.

Any schools, church groups or community groups wishing to take part in the project can find all the resources on the diocesan websites: <https://www.winchester.anglican.org/>
<https://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/>

Lament to Action - Further reading and links

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf>

[Anglican Minority Ethnic Network \(AMEN\)](#) to the report

[Archbishops' response to the Taskforce report.](#)

A 'meaningful understanding' at Alverstoke

The text of 'An Angel Just Like Me' and associated diocesan resources opened up an insightful conversation at Alverstoke Church of England Junior School.

RE leader Halen Garside said: 'Teachers fed back that initially children were concerned about saying 'black' and seeing difference as they did not want to offend, however once reassured, it allowed them to explore the subject and reach a more meaningful understanding.'

Children to consider what angels look like. They discovered that angels were mostly portrayed with white skin, white clothing and blonde hair. Pupils discussed the importance of challenging assumptions and celebrating differences. During class collective worship, children were shown two artist impressions of The Annunciation, one by Henry Ossawa Tanner and the other by Jesus Mafa. Each class reflected on the artwork and discussed the following questions-



The artist chose to show the angel as a beam of light, rather than giving him an obvious human form. Why do the class think that he did this? What do the class think of painting Mary and the Angel as Black Africans? What if they were Chinese? Or South American? Would it matter? Why / Why not?

Classes enjoyed making their own 'angels just like me' to decorate the school Christmas tree. Below is the school's 'Pupil Mission of the Week' which was shared with pupils and the wider community.



‘This week is about celebrating uniqueness and diversity. It is about loving ourselves and others for who we are. Enjoy some window moments. Look out into our school and community and celebrate the differences you can see. Can you spot different people’s talents, different personalities and how we are all beautiful in our own, unique way. Don’t forget to think about and celebrate what makes you unique too! ‘



Angelic card competition

Staff at Christ the King College on the Isle of Wight had already planned to have a Christmas Card competition for students when they heard about the 'Angel Just Like Me' project. Natalie Evans, the college’s Assistant Head of RE, said: ‘I thought it would make a superb theme for our students, especially as we are doing serious work around themes of diversity and inclusion across the school. I have just done this with a year 7 class and they were entranced.’

The winning design was made into tradition packs of printed designs and an e-version. The proceeds from sales will be split between the Isle of Wight Radio Toy Appeal, the Isle of Wight Food Bank and the Children’s Society

Global Christmas Traditions

Children at Cornerstone Church of England Primary School in Whiteley used the angel project to explore global traditions, studying how Christmas is celebrated across the world.

Below is a Powerpoint presentation and a QR code to a Wakelet that the children used to inspire their discussions.

[Global Christmas Wakelet](#)



Celebrating difference in Swanmore

The children of Swanmore Church of England Primary celebrated how important angels are to Christians, and how it is possible to find angels of all ethnicities and cultures just like the diversity of children all around the UK.

The school began the project by reading the book *An Angel Just Like Me* and moved on to using *The Children of God Storybook Bible*, a multicultural version of the Bible by Desmond Tutu.

Teachers used dance, music and drama to help the children engage with the diversity theme in a creative way. Children used Jesus Mafa's painting *The Annunciation* to introduce children to the idea that the characters in the Nativity story could be Black, or brown, or from different parts of the world. The painting was created in Cameroon in the 1970s, when a group of missionaries realised that all their resources were unsuitable, presenting images of Jesus and Christians as white Europeans.



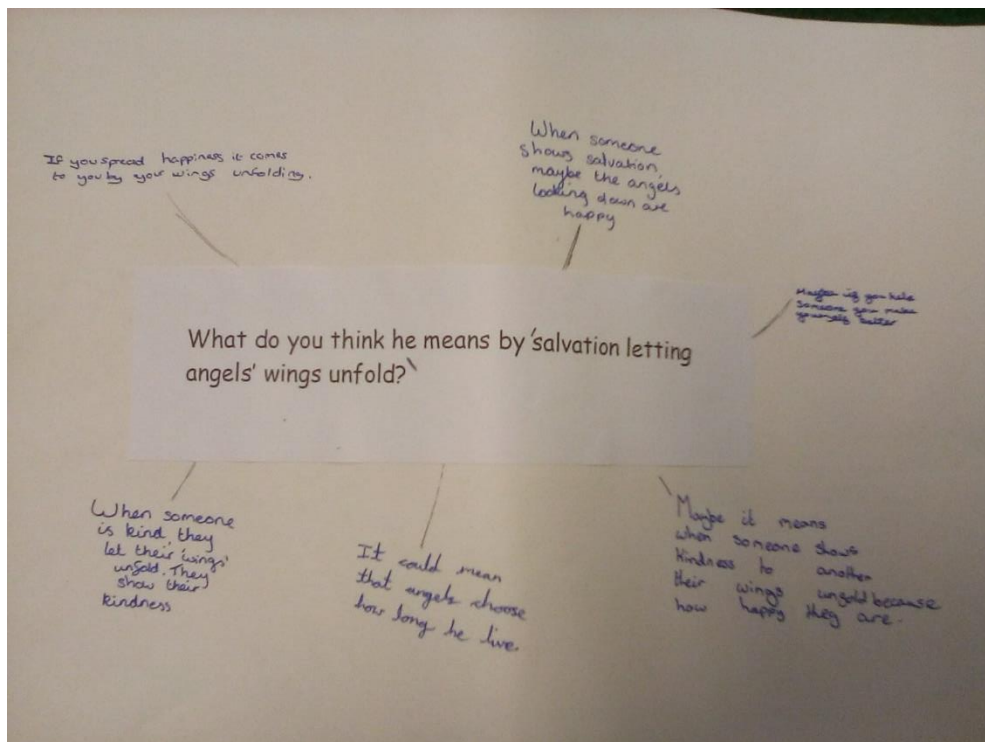
The children were asked to debate the following questions:

What do you think of painting Mary and the Angel as Black Africans? What if they were Chinese? Or South American? Would it matter? Why / Why not?

Children in Year Six particularly enjoyed a karaoke comprehension activity taken from the diocesan resource booklet prepared for schools. This was based on the lyrics to Robbie Williams' song Angels and encouraged children to think about the following questions:

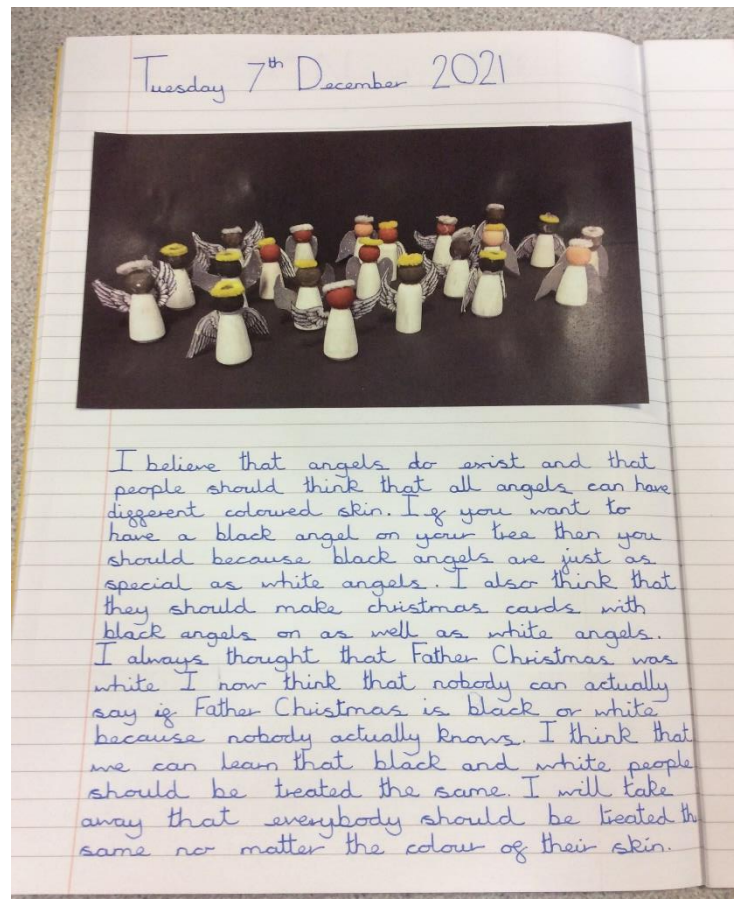
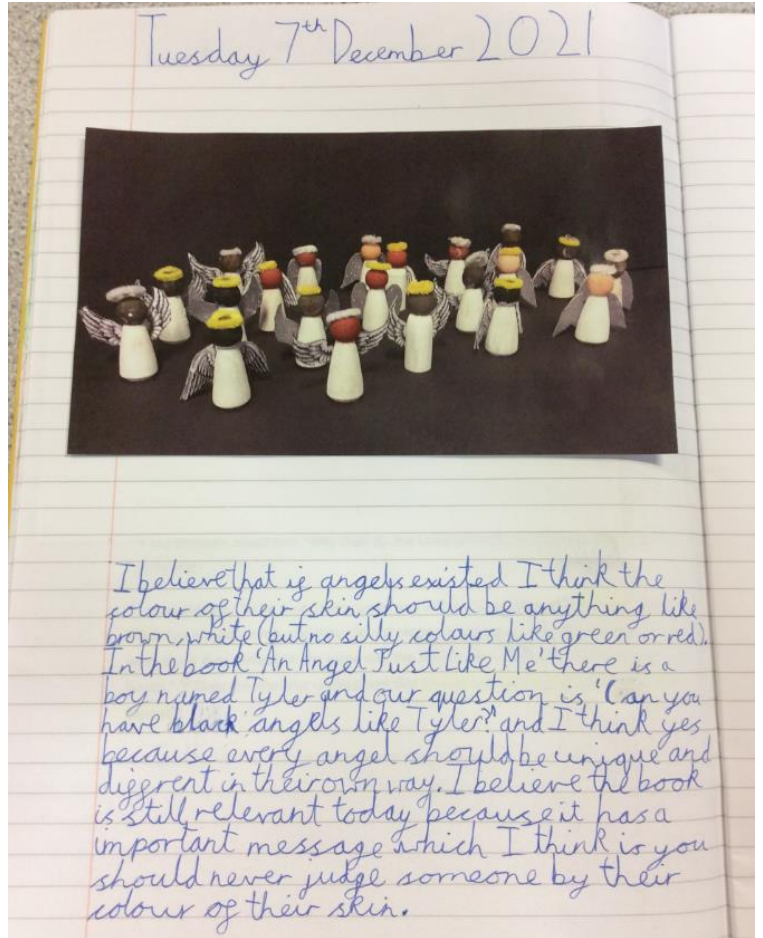
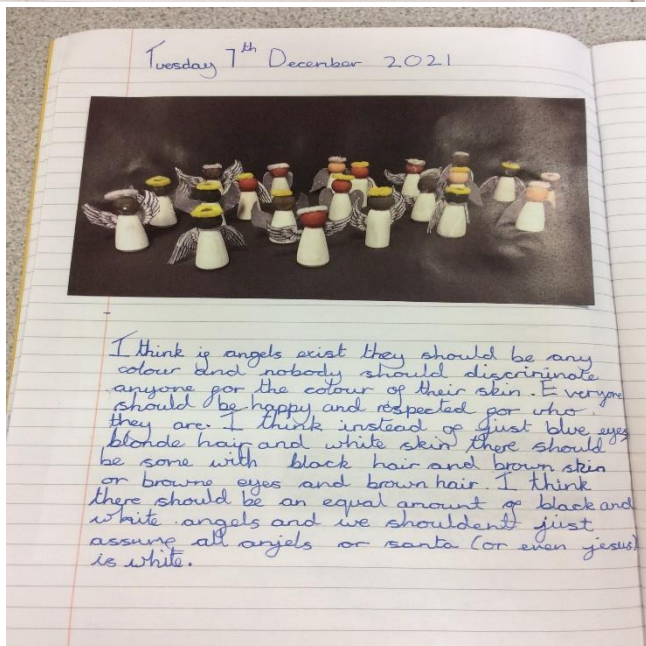
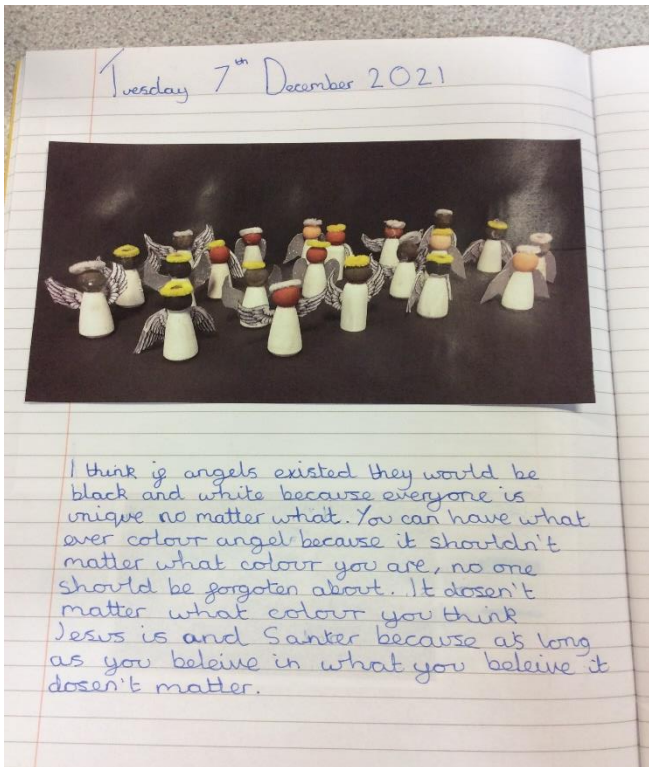


Where do you imagine the singer might be when he is sitting and what might he be waiting for?
 Could the angels he sings about symbolise different things for different people?
 What does the question 'Does an angel contemplate my fate?' mean?
 What does salvation mean in the Bible? Why might the singer need protection?
 What do you think he means by salvation letting angels' wings unfold? Why does he look above? Are angels always 'above' or could they be anywhere?



Reflections from Alton

Staff at St Lawrence Church of England Primary School were delighted with the insightful and deep discussions with Year Six pupils who took part in the project. Some of their reflections are captured below. Deputy Headteacher Fiona Micklefield said: 'I think it's a fantastic book and has made me think a lot too!'



Church supports school with Angel project

Sarah McClelland, lead minister at St Francis' Church in Eastleigh invited children from St Francis Church of England Primary School into church to listen to the video of Mary Hoffman reading the story of 'An Angel Just Like Me.' The children made angel wings with different craft activities for each year group. Children enjoyed a talk, a prayer and a blessing before every child had their photograph taken to make angels just like them! Finally, the children sang carols round the church Christmas tree outside in the garden.





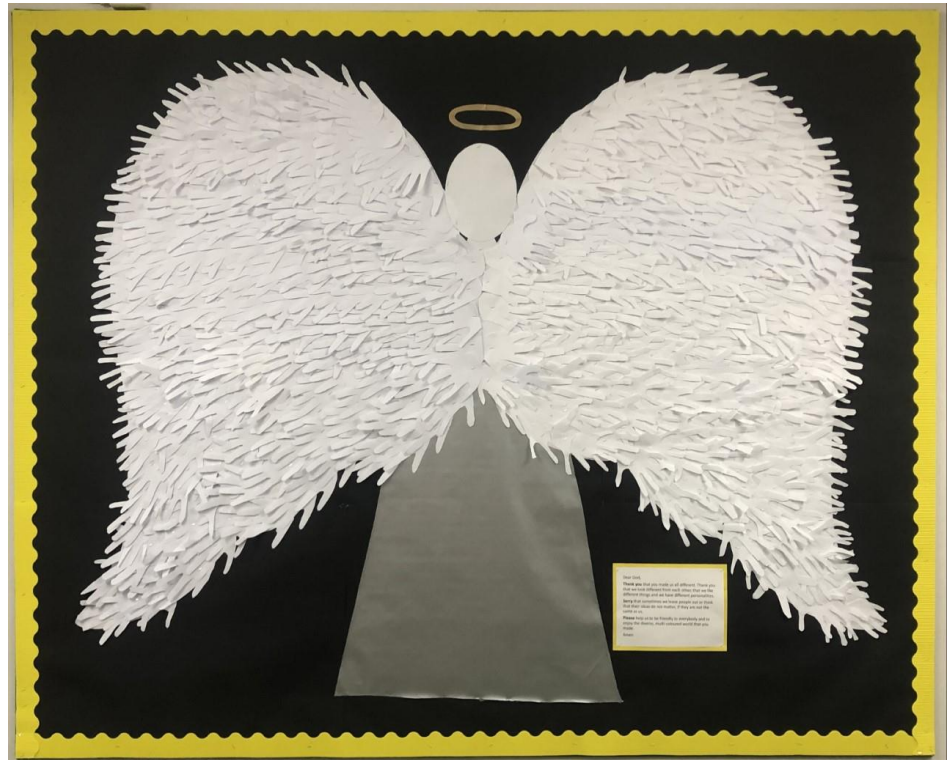
The interactive toddler group nativity scene at St Mark's church, Southampton

Individuality at St Matthew's

The children at St Matthew's Church of England primary School, Blackmoor watched the video of the 'Angel Just Like me' story in Collective Worship. They discussed why it was important to Tyler to have an Angel that looked like him before talking about how each person was different and special. On Christmas Arts Day the children were taught one way to make an Angel, but staff emphasised that pupils might want to do it a different way to create an angel like themselves. Each child had a variety of materials to choose from and their photograph and they made their own individual angels.



At St Mary's Church of England Primary School in Old Basing every child drew around their hands to represent the feathers on the angel's wings. The angel has their back to the viewer so that the children could think about what the angel face may look like. The children also made their own angels with different faces and these were displayed on a Christmas tree in the hall.



Christmas card designs inspired by an Angel just like me from children at Milford-on-Sea Church of England Primary School

Children at St Bede Church of England Primary School in Winchester created 400 angels which were put on display in a corridor, each with a photo of the children of St Bede added. Pupils, staff and parents enjoyed playing 'spot the angel/child' as part of the end of term festivities.



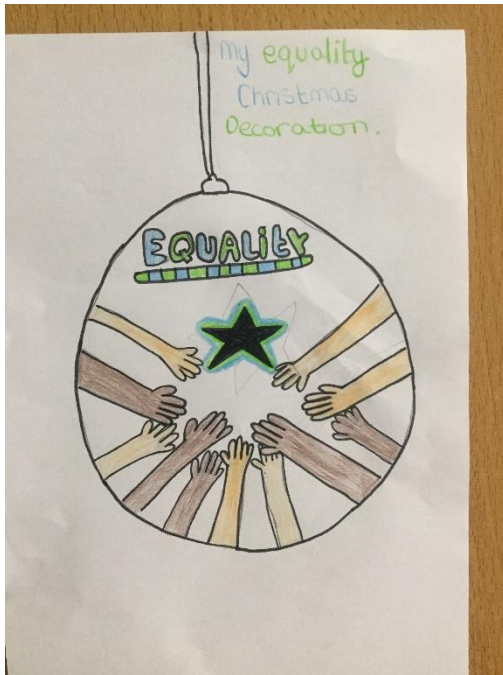
Giant angel wings from Durley Church of England Primary School where each child made a feather and space was left for a child to stand between the wings. The angel was later displayed in church for the end of term.



Angels created by children at Bentley Church of England Primary School.

Challenging stereotypes

Children at Whitchurch Church of England primary School showed their creativity during the project. Headteacher Kate Stevens said: 'We have enjoyed the "Angel Just Like Me" story and the children have responded in various ways. As a staff we have enjoyed the opportunity to challenge stereotypes.'



Below are photographs of the Year 1 angels as paper dolls, the Year 4 Christmas cards and Year 6 Christmas decoration designs.





Sophie Davies, headteacher at Twyford St Mary's Church of England Primary School said: 'I really loved the way these worships and reflections were put together. We focused on this for a week with our eldest pupils,,,,, culminating their learning in a P4C enquiry which resulted in some beautiful articulation of understanding of the key concepts behind the book. As a school, we then introduced our own diverse nativity scene.'

If you are interested in thinking through some of the issues raised by 'An Angel Just Like Me', there are some interesting articles online. This is an [article from The Independent](#) which was written in 1997, when Mary Hoffman's book was first published, which talks about the fact that Christmas images are almost all white and Western and whether this makes some children feel excluded. This is a [blog from 2013](#) which deals with the problems of finding racially diverse dolls and the claims by Megyn Kelly on Fox News that Father Christmas and Jesus were both white.

If you have more time, then '[God is not a White Man](#)' by Chine McDonald is challenging and very readable. She writes about her experiences of growing up as a Black Nigerian in 1980s Britain, such as when she started school and realised for the first time that she looked different from the other children!