

Angels

by [Barbara Crooker](#) in the [January 12, 2017](#) issue

One set of scholars believes that the Book of Kells was created to honor the 200th anniversary of the death of Colum Cille (St. Columba).

In the Book of Kells, messengers are both seen and unseen: framing the Virgin at the Nativity in all four corners; the infant Christ, dressed as a small man, fully clothed, on his mother's knee. The angel in the upper left seems to be saying *Oh, my God. What have you done? Do you really think this was a good idea?*

The one on the upper right seems resigned. *You want to send him where?* While the two on the bottom, crowded behind Mary's chair, seem dwarfed by the occasion, relegated to the corners. But they're always there. I like the angels on the arm of the chi in the great Chi Rho; you have to tilt the page to see them, unflagrant, hovering above. And some angels are almost hidden, like the one in folio 48r, hands outstretched in prayer, framed in the diamond-shaped O of *Omnia*. I wonder what it would have been like to live then, in the time of Colum Cille, when angels might have been hovering in the breathable air?