

INSPECTOR ANGEL

from a report by the A I A [Advent Inspector Angel]

God's plan from the beginning of time, was to send his Son into his world to be its Saviour. Centuries passed before the moment, of which prophets had spoken, was almost come. But heaven wondered - were the characters in the eternal drama ready for God's moment. God knew they were. But there was a little bit of doubt in heaven. To satisfy the Policy Committee the archangel agreed to send a deputy who would make a final check of the arrangements. I was appointed by the Committee as the Advent Inspector. What follows is a part of my report to the Policy Committee.

I found some of the principal characters and engaged them in conversation. I had carefully planned my conversations in order to ask the vital question - "What are you waiting for?"

I found the Carpenter's workshop quite easily. It was the day before the Sabbath. I waited till almost sunset before the last of Joseph's customers left. The streets were quiet then and I was not noticed. Joseph was sweeping the floor when I entered. A cloud of dust choked the air.

"I'm just finishing for today," he said half apologetically. "If it's anything more than advice you need it will have to wait till after the Sabbath." I told him I had all the time in the world.

"I'm a bit pushed for time at the moment," the Carpenter said. "I'm expecting to have to go to Bethlehem soon for the census. It's a nuisance. The authorities don't consider us of course, but I don't want to leave a lot of unfinished work - or unsatisfied customers. I don't like to keep people waiting."

"I think you're a man who doesn't find it easy to wait," I ventured.

"True," he replied. "But there are times when you have to wait, and times when the waiting isn't easy." That was my cue. "What are YOU waiting for then?"

Joseph looked hard at me. He was searching his mind as if he recognised me, but couldn't put a name to my face. "God!" he said. "I'm waiting for God - and for a baby !"

I really had what I needed to know, but I was interested to hear more. He did not continue to explain. Instead, he stared hard at me.

"You know, don't you!" he said. "You're one of them! You're another messenger from heaven ! There's something about your face that's

just like the angel in my dream." I felt a sort of deflated pride. "Yes, you're right," I told him. "But how has it all been going?"

"Awful ..." he said ... and wonderful! There's a lot happened in the last months I'd prefer to forget but there are some moments I'll treasure all my life! I expect you know all about it. The town had a field day when Mary came back from her cousin Elizabeth's. No more hiding the fact that she was pregnant then! There's not a lot of loose language at times in my workshop, but I've come in for more jibes in the last months than you can imagine - though I suppose YOU know! I think my tongue must be an inch shorter. I've bit it that many times. It's easier now though. The gossip loses its novelty if you wait long enough. I can't blame them - and I certainly won't try to explain it to them! I find it hard enough to

understand it myself. I would still if it hadn't been for one of your lot coming along to explain. I still can't get over it though. I look up at the sky some nights - full of stars just like it is now - and I think ... God's Son !... My Mary! The Christ! You asked me what I'm waiting for and I said, "a baby! But what a baby ! I'm waiting for the Messiah. I'm waiting for the Son of God! I'm waiting for the Saviour who's to bring God's people back to him, and set up a kingdom of peace ! I always prided myself on being a of David's lin, but to be a father to a King! I'm waiting to help him grow up - in my home - with me and Mary.

Mary's been incredible. At times I look at her and feel so ashamed that I doubted her ... I nearly gave her up and shamed her. She understands of course - well, as much as any of us understand. She is so good - kind and loving. I fear she's going to have to suffer much with that son of hers, but she knows that, and she wouldn't have it any other way. I love her so much ... I know exactly why God chose her."

Joseph paused a moment before he said, "Thanks for coming. I needed to talk to someone - someone who understands. Yes, I'm waiting. Waiting for God! Waiting for a baby! I had heard all I needed to hear. I gave Joseph heaven's blessing and encouragement.

I had one more call to make but it was late now. That must wait till morning. First light found me at the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. The rising sun cast beautiful shadows of hope across Solomon's porch. I knew I would find him there. Simeon was always one of the first to be at prayer. Prayer never ceased for him though. It was his life, either in the Temple or in his own tiny room above the store close by the Sheepgate. Simeon was so obviously in touch with heaven that he recognised me immediately and bowed his head. He would have knelt too if his old knees had let him. I told him to look up, for I am no more worthy than he is before God.

"You are still here?" I asked. "Still waiting?"

Simeon nodded, lifting his face to meet my question, and with a smile more beautiful than I have seen on angel faces.

"But not much longer!" he said. "I feel it. I know it. He's coming - soon! I have seen it in my dreams and visions. They will bring him into the Temple here, and I will hold him in my arms! The Christ in MY arms! It has all been so real in my dreams and prayers. O the peace that I shall feel when I take him...! Yet I shall feel pain too. Not for myself, so much as for those who will not receive him. You will know what the prophet said - he will be despised and people will reject him. Oh how the thought of that cuts at my heart - for him - and for his mother - for God - for the people. But it must be so. He will bring a day of judgement on all unfaithfulness and godlessness."

He turned his face to the rising sun. "See how the morning light glows on the gold of the doors - but see too how it uncovers yesterday's unswept courts. That's how it will be when the Saviour comes. But the light will flood out. Nothing will stop it. It will shine just as it does across the Court of the Gentiles. It will stream out to the whole world. Gentile AND Jew will both be caught in his radiance. Everyone will know his truth and his love. All people will come under his gracious judgement. The whole world will learn the way of peace...."

Simeon's gaze seemed fixed. His face was radiant, not just with the glow of the morning, but with the light of God's Spirit. I slipped away into the growing crowd of pilgrims. I had my answer. Simeon was ready. They were all ready. Surely, the people of the world would be ready!