

## JONATHAN AND THE ANGEL

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**J**ONATHAN wasn't exactly frightened—but then, he wasn't exactly *not* frightened, either. He had been sound asleep when suddenly it seemed as though he heard music, and he sat up just in time to see his brother and the other shepherds hurrying down the hill toward the little town of Bethlehem. Why were they going to Bethlehem at this time of night? — and if he was expected to stay here and watch all the sheep all by himself, why hadn't they at least told him so before they left?

Then Jonathan realized that there was a lot of light in the sky and that the music he thought he heard in his sleep was still going on. Music such as he had never heard before — it seemed to be accompanied by hundreds of voices, yet was so soft and sweet it almost made him want to cry. But what foolishness! He was seven years old and certainly never cried any more.

Yet something was going on that he didn't understand at all. He *knew* it was night, but what was all that light shimmering everywhere — especially right over Bethlehem? And where was the music coming from?

At least the sheep weren't restless — but they too were awake. They were lying down with their eyes open, and seemed to be listening to the music. But they weren't going to be still long, not with all these

strange things going on. And when they started wandering around, what on earth was he going to do? Why, oh why, had he teased so hard to get his brother to take him along with the other shepherds up into



the hills? He was too young to be a shepherd. His mother had said so, and his father had said so, and they were right. Now his brother and the others had probably gone off to teach him a lesson.

Suddenly Jonathan felt his heart almost stop beat-

ing. Right in front of him, appearing out of nowhere, was — was an Angel! He had never seen an Angel before, but he knew that this was an Angel. The Angel was tall, dressed all in white, with beautiful soft peach-colored light shining all about him. His face was serious, but so kind that Jonathan at once wanted to tell him his troubles.

Then the Angel smiled and spoke, with a voice that was deep and gentle and sounded more like singing than talking.

“Your brother and his friends have gone to Bethlehem to see something very beautiful. Would you like to go too, Jonathan?”

“Yes,” whispered Jonathan. “But the sheep —” he began.

“The sheep will be safe. Come, my child.”

And the Angel started walking down the rocky path that led into the village. Jonathan hurried after and was soon walking next to the Angel, looking up into his face. The Angel said nothing but smiled at Jonathan, and that smile was so tender and so loving and so beautiful that Jonathan felt almost as though he could fly because he was suddenly so happy.

Together they walked down the hill and through the narrow crooked streets of the village, past the weavers' shop, past the place where the sweet-smelling herbs and spices were sold, past the place where the camel drivers kept their animals, past the tent-maker's shop, and past the tree under which old Malachai the scribe sat every day and read and wrote letters for the people of the village.

Then they came to the other side of the village,

and the shimmering light seemed to be brighter than anywhere else. Here was a cave where the strangers who stayed at the inn sometimes kept their animals. The cave was lit up as though the sun were shining in it. There seemed to be quite a few people, but it was very still, and nothing could be heard except for the music which had never stopped.

Jonathan saw his brother and the other shepherds kneeling and silent. He saw some other people whom he did not know, also kneeling, and he saw that there were some cattle and sheep and the big mongrel dog that belonged to the innkeeper. All the animals were lying down and they, too, were quiet.

Then Jonathan saw a man standing in the middle of the cave. He was tall and dignified, with dark hair and a long beard. He was not a large man, but looked strong. In his hand he held a staff such as one which people who must walk for many miles often use, but he did not seem to be leaning on it.

Next to him sat a lady more beautiful than anyone Jonathan had ever seen. Her face was young and radiant, her eyes shining and tender, and the light seemed to be shimmering very strongly around her.

In front of them on the ground was a manger in which food for the cattle was usually put. In that manger, on a bed of straw, lay a baby. And suddenly Jonathan knew that it was because of this baby that the light was shining, the music was sounding, and the Angel had brought him here.

The baby was awake and lay quietly with his eyes open. He smiled at his mother — for surely that beautiful lady was his mother — and held out his

little hand to her, and she gave him her finger to hold.

Without knowing quite why, Jonathan knelt down on the ground before the manger. The Angel came to stand beside him, and said in a low, soft voice:

“This is the baby Jesus, and Mary and Joseph are his mother and father. One day, when little Jesus has grown up to be a man, the great Christ Spirit from the Sun will come down and enter into him, and He will become the Savior of the World.”

The Angel stepped back, but Jonathan remained kneeling. He wasn't sure he understood exactly all that the Angel had said. But he did understand that God had sent this baby as a present to him and his brother and the people of the village — and, really, to all the people in the world. And that because of this baby, the world was going to be a much better and happier place for everyone to live in.

Then the baby turned his head and looked at Jonathan. He smiled. Jonathan smiled back, and suddenly put out his hand and gently touched the wooden side of the manger. Then, a little startled at what he had done, he drew his hand back quickly and stood up, looking at the baby's mother.

“I am glad you came,” she said, and looked at him lovingly the way his own mother often did.

“And I am glad that I could be a shepherd tonight and see the baby,” said Jonathan. Then he turned and slowly walked out of the cave.

As he started back through the village, the Angel suddenly appeared beside him.

“I will go back with you to the hill,” he said. “You can sleep in peace when you get there. Noth-

ing will happen to the sheep on this night.”

They walked silently through the streets of Bethlehem, and Jonathan began to realize that as he passed the homes of people he knew, he thought of them with love. He loved, in fact, all the people of the village, and it didn't matter any more that young Levi had thrown a stone at him the other day, or that his brother sometimes pulled his hair or called him names. Those things weren't important. What was important, was that everybody should learn to love everybody else, and then there wouldn't be any



more trouble in the world. And that was what the baby had come to tell everyone.

When they reached the top of the hill, Jonathan felt very sleepy indeed. He knew he should say something polite to the Angel and thank him for taking him to see the baby, but before he even had a chance, the Angel said, “Now lie down and sleep, Jonathan. In the morning there will be a glorious sunrise.”

Jonathan lay down and covered himself with his blanket. He fell asleep at once, but all night long he heard the heavenly music and saw the blessed light shining around Bethlehem. He and the sheep were safe in the company of the Angels.