

Years before the current upsurge of interest
in angels, author Jamie Buckingham
set out to explore the subject

LOOKING FOR AN ANGEL

by Jamie Buckingham

It was hot that July afternoon in 1970 and the air-conditioning in the bookstore felt good as I slipped in the back door. The store was operated by people from our church in Melbourne, Fla., and my 15-year-old son, Bruce, had a summer job there. He was just opening a shipment of books as I stood watching, enjoying the cool air.

"What are people writing about today?" I asked Bruce.

"Satan," he said, grimacing. "Satan and demons. Look at these titles."

He was right. Nearly half the books in the large shipment seemed to be about Satanism or witchcraft.

"Say, Dad," Bruce said, straightening up and wiping his sweaty hands across the front of his shirt, "why don't you write something about angels, instead? Who knows, you might even meet one while you're working!"

Bruce's idea stayed with me. That night after dinner I stepped into the den, where my wife, Jackie, was reading. "I'd like to do an article about angels."

Jackie looked at me over the top of the newspaper. "Have you ever seen one?"

"No," I said.

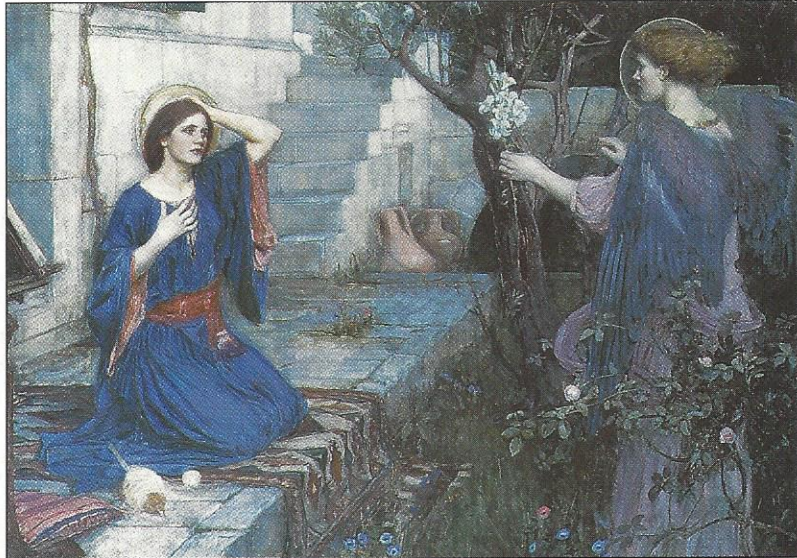
"Then where would you get your information?"

"I'm sure there are lots of people who've seen angels," I said. "I'll just ask around."

Jackie gave me a long, skeptical look. "Maybe you'd better stick to what you can be sure of," she said.

Determined to learn what I could, I set out to do some research. In the Bible I found that references to angels far outnumber all references to demons, evil spirits and Satan combined. If angels were so important to the writers of the Bible, why weren't we hearing more about them today? I wondered.

I dug deeper into the Word of God and found out more. The word *angel* comes from a Greek



word meaning "messenger". God often used angels to carry news of important events, such as the conception, and later the birth, of Jesus. An angel brought Joseph word of Herod's intent to kill the Child.

In the Book of Hebrews angels are referred to as "ministering spirits" sent from heaven to serve the people of God. In Matthew and in Acts it's indicated that every child has at least one angel with him all the time—a guardian angel.

I learned that angels are of a different nature than human beings, although they sometimes reveal themselves in human form. The writer of Hebrews cautions us to be kind to strangers, as we may be entertaining angels unawares. I also discovered that there are various orders of angels, including seraphim, cherubim and archangels.

I was becoming better informed about these marvelous creatures, but still I yearned to see one—or at least talk to someone who had. As I started asking around, however, I was reminded of Jackie's warning; some of the sightings *were* questionable, to say the least.

"I see angels all the time," one woman told me. "In fact, I can see ten thousand sitting on your right shoulder right now, and nine thousand sitting on your left."

Could she really, I wondered, count that fast?

Another woman wrote me a long, involved letter in which she said she had a guardian angel who lived in the medicine chest in her bathroom.

I began to think seeking a real angel was futile.

But then I heard from a minister, Dale E. Rummel, who wrote to say that one morning he had been driving east on Route 30 in Pennsylvania between East McKeesport and Irwin when he saw a woman back out into traffic . . . right in front of a fast-moving pickup truck. Dale Rummel prayed, "Lord, help her!" and instantly he saw an angel.

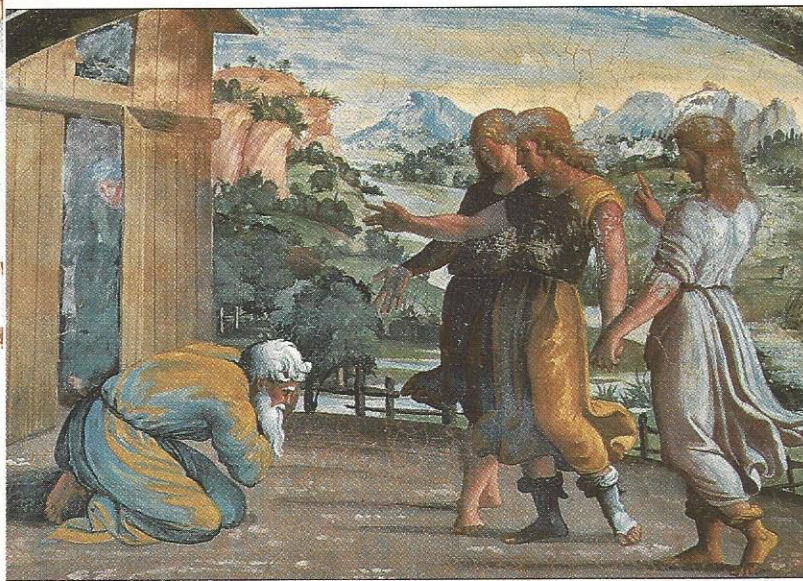
The angel was larger than the pickup and clothed in a flowing robe. He appeared on the highway, directly in front of the speeding truck, and with his right hand reached down and grabbed the front bumper. Leaning forward, he put his hand on top of the cab and pushed down and back. The momentum of the truck pushed the angel backward along the highway, but he was able to bring the truck to a stop before it hit the car. Then the angel disappeared.

"All this happened in an instant," the minister continued, "and I had sped past before I could stop. I don't know whether the truck driver saw the angel or not. Perhaps he thought his

brakes just happened to lock at that particular moment. Whatever it was, the experience has been a great source of strength to me, for God knew how much I needed a visible demonstration of answered prayer right then."

Three weeks later I was invited to speak at The Church of the Good Shepherd in Maitland, Fla., a suburb of Orlando. Before the service I talked with the rector, Father David Suellau. I had known Father Dave, the dedicated pastor of one of

Painting by John William Waterhouse, "The Annunciation" (left); "Abraham and the Three Angels," by Raphael (below)





"A Guardian Angel," artist unknown

SOME THINGS HAVE TO BE BELIEVED TO BE SEEN.

—Ralph Hodgson

Florida's fastest-growing Episcopal churches, for some time. I respected him. He was not the kind of man given to hallucinations. Yet in those few moments prior to the service, he told a story that gave me goose bumps. He had seen an angel. In fact, he had seen several of them.

Just two weeks earlier he had been sitting in his study when one of his vestrymen, a local businessman, came in terribly disturbed. The man had come from the doctor, who had told him he was going blind. He was on his way to the hospital at the University of Florida in Gainesville to see if anything could be done.

Father Dave suggested they go into the chapel. It was late afternoon and the sun's rays were filtering through the side windows, falling across the empty pews. The two men knelt at the altar rail. Father Dave couldn't recall how long he remained there praying for his friend, but at one point he opened his eyes and saw the other man surrounded by angels.

"Their faces shone dazzlingly," he said, half musing as he tried to think back. "They were short beings, suspended off the floor several feet, and were doing something with their hands as they bent over my friend. I believe they were wearing some sort of robes, but frankly I didn't pay much attention to details. It seemed perfectly natural they should be there."

After a while, Father Dave closed his eyes and continued praying. When he opened them again,

the angels were gone. It was only then that the priest felt he could share with his friend what he had seen. But when he opened his mouth to speak, he began to weep. He wept so hard and so long that the vestryman grew concerned and began to pray for *him*. It was almost 15 minutes before Father Dave could regain his composure and describe what had taken place.

The man went on to the hospital, but was sent home by the doctors. They found nothing wrong with him.

I was impressed with the matter-of-fact way in which this quiet Episcopal priest told his story. I asked him, "Has your life been changed as a result?"

"Yes," he said, "but not in the way I might have expected. You'd think," he went on, "that such an experience would make a person eager to see angels again. Instead, I found myself aware as never before of Jesus. Loving him. Wanting to be like him."

Surely, I thought, reflecting later on our conversation, this is the proper perspective. All of us would love to see angels, and if it happens that we do, we thank God for the experience. But far more important is knowing Jesus. In fact, when angels appeared in the New Testament, it was most often precisely to point people to him.

My search has convinced me that angels exist and have specific assignments from God—assignments that are being carried out whether we see these heavenly agents or not. But my motives in looking into the subject have changed. Before, I was hoping I

would see an angel myself (and perhaps be able to brag about it). Now I want to go far beyond the dimension of angels into the presence of the One who created them.

Jamie Buckingham
1932–1992

