

Christmas Eve 2009- "Excerpt From An Original Story"

I. II. Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Luke recounts that the birth of the Christ child took place in Bethlehem, in the region of Judah during the reign of Augustus Caesar when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. According to Luke, it was a census year like our year of 2010. Each family instead of registering in the region where they lived had to go back to the town of their origin. It wasn't a convenient time for Joseph's family because they were expecting their first child, but Joseph went anyway, carrying with him his pregnant wife who was in her ninth month. The trip was arduous, rough and tiring and the couple had to stop for rest often. Several times, Joseph would have turned back, but Mary insisted that it would be all right. They had to press on.

Upon arriving at a kind of Comfort Inn in Bethlehem, they discovered that all of the rooms had been taken. And not only that, there were no other hotels, inns or Bread and Breakfast places left within a twenty miles radius. So, they were directed by one of the chamber maidens to a barn outside the local Inn. Shortly after bedding down in the hay loft, the time came for the baby to be born and Jesus was born on a bed of straw and cradled in a animal feeding trough. It wasn't an ideal time for rejoicing in such a place but Joseph and Mary could not have been happier. The baby was simple gorgeous and although Joseph and Mary were far from the excitement and rejoicing celebrations among family and friends in Nazareth, the animals in the barn seemed to sense the importance of the occasion and filled the air with their own special noises.

Luke records that there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their sheep by night. Once yours truly wrote a story about what happened to the little shepherd boy in Shepherd's field that night. Tonight, I will share excerpt from it.

A Star, A Star in the Night

As little Daniel pondered the words of his elders about the future and gazed at the night skies, thoughts of better times warmed his heart and caused him momentarily to close his eyes. He opened his eyes again and faced the eastern sky. Something seemed different. Jupiter and Saturn started to move together in alignment and a star, he had never seen before, burst forth from that conjunction, moving in the direction toward his village in the distance. His hazel eyes grew wide with excitement. In his jubilation, he almost awakened his father but feared that Simon would think him to be still the child of wild dreams. So, Daniel shrugged his shoulders, snuggled up next to dog Ajar, attributed the apparition to that state of mind between consciousness and deep slumber and fell fast asleep.

Sleep was short lived, however. Suddenly a bark from Ajar and the other dogs awakened Daniel and the shepherds with a start. The

night skies around them radiated with the brilliance of the Arabian Desert at midday. Daniel and the entire company of shepherds were terrified. The sheep bleated loudly and the dogs howled. As if out of no where, a figure in glistening apparel stood before them. The young men cringed and the older shepherds grabbed for their staffs in defense.

"Fear not," the messenger said, "for behold I bring you good tidings of a great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior which is Christ the Lord."

The shepherds regained their composure. Their hearts leapt for joy and their faces were alighted with anticipation.

The messenger continued, *"And this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger [in your very village]."*

Presently, the heavens were filled with music. The heavenly spheres resounded with song,

"Praise be to God in the highest heaven... Let there be peace on earth among all men of goodwill." Then as suddenly as the messenger had appeared, he vanished from their sight. The choirs ceased. The brilliance faded. And, the shepherds were left alone with their wonderment and sheep.

The shepherds, filled with joy and peace, said to one another, *"Let us go quickly to Bethlehem to see this child!"*

Simon looked at little Daniel and said, *"Daniel, my son, I have a big job for you. The other shepherds and I must go to Bethlehem, but someone must remain to tend the sheep. I know that it is a big task, but I am confident that you are man enough to take care of it."*

Daniel was disappointed because he too wanted so much to go with them. Nevertheless, his passion to become a good shepherd outweighed the desire to go to Bethlehem. So, with sure confidence, he said to his father, *"You have nothing to worry about, my father!"*

"Father," Daniel said, "I do have one request to make of you." You remember the mother sheep and the little lambs that I saved from the wild dogs last week? Since you gave them to me, I would like for you give them to the little baby for me. Perhaps, my little lamb could share some milk with the Babe of Bethlehem!"

Simon smiled approvingly and left Daniel in the hills tending the sheep while he and the other shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the Babe in the Manger.

The story of the shepherds' visit to Bethlehem has been told and retold millions of times in the last two millennia. It need not be recounted further in this account. What has not been known is what happened to the little shepherd boy who was left to tend the sheep in Shepherd's field on that holiest of nights.

Glimpse of the King

It is said, that the little shepherd boy never laid eyes upon the Christ child, but he was told that his father Simon and the other shepherds did. Simon said that it was by far the most wonderful experience he had ever encountered. Upon following the star, they came to a stable and there on a bed of hay, they saw Him for the first time—the Babe of Bethlehem. His countenance embodied the visage of all of his people from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and hundreds of generations before them. But, there was more. His face radiated with the very essence of God himself.

With gratitude and jubilation, the shepherds presented unto him several ewe lambs and returned to the hills to tend their sheep. Daniel did not witness what happened in Bethlehem, however, he noted that things had changed drastically with his father Simon and the other shepherds. Wherever Simon traveled, he always carried with him the story of the birth of the King of kings and Lord of lords. And, whenever the story was told, people felt a little more peaceful, a little more loving and a little more joyous.

Search for the King

In story, song and legend, it is recounted that for most of his life the little shepherd boy was always too late to see the King. He arrived too late at the village stable in Bethlehem, too late in Jerusalem for the presentation, too late when Jesus was talking with the lawyers and doctors at twelve years of age and too late for Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan. It is said that many, many years later, Daniel almost ran into Jesus upon the mountain where Jesus fed a multitude of over 5,000. He missed him at Jericho when Jesus visited the home of Bartimaeus. When Daniel went by the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was arrested, the soldiers had already departed with Jesus, taking him for trial to the courtyard of Caiaphas and later to Pilate's headquarters. He was too late in all of these places, although it was ordained that Daniel was to have a wonderful encounter with Jesus Christ in another place.

The King is Found

The years had passed by slowly with many missed opportunities. The hope of ever seeing Jesus had faded as disappointment and failure heightened. Daniel at the old age of forty five was commissioned to provide the sheep for the Passover in Jerusalem. It had not been a good year for most shepherds because the grazing was sparse and the sheep were lean.

Daniel and his family, however, had been especially blessed, for he had learned to be the best shepherd in the Judean hill country, adept at finding good grazing lands. On his way back from the temple precincts, he heard a commotion in the Praetorium and decided to go in to see what was happening. As the soldiers thrust him aside, he saw Jesus. There was a crown of thorns upon his head with blood trickling down his brow.

One of the soldiers came over to Daniel and snatched the scarlet robe from his shoulders and placed it on the shoulders of Jesus. Then most of the soldiers paid mocking homage to the Jesus, crying out, *"Hail, king of the Jews."*

A heavy wooden cross was placed upon Jesus' raw shoulders. Many whelps from lashes of a whip had cut deeply into the flesh of the suffering one. Old Daniel followed the soldiers and the crowd out of the city and on to Calvary where the wooden cross with Jesus nailed upon it was dumped into its hole. The sky darkened, the seven last words of Jesus were exclaimed from the cross. At the moment before Jesus proclaimed, *"It is finished,"* His piercing eyes radiated deeply into the eyes of Daniel's and set the old shepherd's heart aglow with contentment-with peace and joy and love. He felt in his heart that every thing would work together for good for the Son of the living God.

Daniel's life was never the same again for when he heard of what happened on that first Easter morning, he believed most assuredly that the King of kings and Lord of lords lives. It is said, that wherever he traveled, he carried with him the story of the King who brings peace and love and joy to the world. And each place was left a little more peaceful and loving and joyful.

But the most amazing part of the shepherd's story is what happened to the scarlet robe that belonged to Daniel. You will recall that Jesus' own robe was the source of many miracles. But did you not know that Daniel's scarlet robe, down through the years, has had its own wonderful history? Secretly, it had adorned the conference rooms of every place where peace accords have been hammered out

successfully for the past two thousand years. And, the mystery is that no one knows how it gets to these places.

The Story Goes On

The angel, the messenger who revealed to me the story of the Little Shepherds Boy never told me what happened to Daniel. And, I really do not know if the legend is true. What I do know is that whenever and wherever I have told this story, people are always a little more peaceful and loving and joyous.

I first heard of him in the kingdom of dreams, beneath the furry downs of a wintry night's slumber. The story of The Little Shepherd Boy was brought to me by an angel who told me how it was that holiest of nights in Bethlehem, the City of David. Tonight, I share it with you. May your hearts be filled with peace and love and joy tonight and forever. Amen.