

## The Shepherd

### Luke 2

What do you see? What are you all looking at? What's up there that you all are facing towards? How come you're all facing towards the front. I don't see anything special or out of place. Why doesn't someone answer me? I am right here you know. I am a person, you could answer me. Come on, shepherds have feelings too, you know. Just because we shepherds live like hermits, uneducated, spend all our time outside, never bathing, with sheep, living off the land, you think your better then me and so won't answer my questions. Okay maybe I will sit here and wait with you for what ever is about to happen. (((((((sit down in front a bit)))))))

Wow, this is boring! Do you do this kind of thing often? I mean this is worse then watching sheep. At least there we get to watch the sheep grazing, looking out for wolves or lions who may come by trying to steal away one of our sheep. At least out there we can see the sky and stare at the stars conjuring up images and dreams. You all are just sitting here staring at nothing. And still you won't tell me what your all looking at. You folks are boring. At least with wolves you get some action once in a while.

Just like the other week I had this really persistent and clever wolf near my flock. It all started on this quest night and I was standing up keeping watch, my mind a keen steal trap ready for action. When suddenly this wolf comes slinking up along that outcrops of rocks over there. Quickly I picked up a stone and I throw it at him glancing a hit off those other rocks on the hill, which actually scared him enough to make him retreat back around the hill. But like I said he was persistent, I saw him not less then an hour later, sneaking down the hill over there by the high brush. And I picked up another rock to scare him away, but he was already taking off towards a little lamb that had gotten to close to that side of the hill. I knew he was in his attack craze and a little rock wasn't going to divert him. So I took off running also. Swinging my trusty staff. You don't want to mess with me when I am swinging this wood stick at you. And that wolf quickly learned something, I swung down on him from the right and from the left, and drove him yelping away for his life. Wheeh! Now that is exciting. That's something to see and watch. But you all just sit here starrng at.... What??? Is this exciting for you?

Since you all seem to be waiting for something and your not doing anything, let me tell you another story of what excitement means. This happened a few years back now. And it was another quiet night out on the hillside. My friends and I were over in the Kidron valley, you now just Southeast of Jerusalem. The sheep were all gathered together for the night. And we had our campfires going and most of us were settling down for the night.

Matthias was over on top of the hill keeping watch while the rest of us ate dinner and got some rest. This was actually always my favorite time of the day, when the heat of the sun was gone and the

coolness of the night was just coming on and the stars were all coming out brightly across the valley sky. The fire crackling and the food cooking. That was a nice time of the day. And that is when it happened. We were just sitting there when suddenly Matthias is hooping and hollering at us. We grabbed our staffs and off we all went. What raced through my head was that he had seen some of those dirty thieves who had been coming out of their caves at night to steal out sheep. As I ran I thought maybe it was just a wolf and he was overreacting. But I never thought it was what it turned out to be. I mean, Matthias was waving his arms and gasping out some mumbled words that none of us could understand. We tried to calm him down and ask him what he saw or at least where. But the man was just simply in shock and just kept mumbling. Finally he pointed at something behind us, back where we had run from. And we all turned as one, to see what it was that had shocked him so much. That's when we all saw it. It was a light, flashing through the sky. I know your saying okay a star falling. Yeah we all have seen those, But this light was different, because it would stop and turn and then come closer, it wasn't just falling, it was coming with a purpose. And as it got closer it got brighter, brighter then our torches, brighter then our campfires, pretty soon it was so bright it was as if it were day. Pretty soon we had to squint, just to keep looking. It felt a lot like when you look at the sun on a bright clear day, you know when you eyes automatically shut and tear up because of the brightness of that fire ball. I mean this light was bright, flashing through this night sky.

And as you can imagine by now, we all looked like Matthias, mouths hanging open and frozen to our places. That is until we saw what the light was. Squinting to see, as the light came to a stop right before us just hovering there right above the hill where we stood, I finally could make out what this bright light was. It was a man, But not a man. It was a creature, but not a creature. It is hard to describe. It was awesome, it was beautiful, it was magnificent. It really goes beyond words. There before us stood this glowing creature in the shape of a man but with wings, large powerful wings that just closed in the entire being. It wore shining clothes that dazzled like lightening, and in its hands it had a flaming sword. A sword that was at least four feet long, but when he swung it around it was as if it had no weight at all. I grasped my staff even tighter at this point. I was so scared I know my knuckles were turning white.

I had heard about these creatures before as a kid. Back when I went to worship with my folks, when they made me go, long before I became a shepherd. Back then the priests would stand up and tell us stories of these angels. These soldiers of God that were sent by God to give messengers, to fight wars, to battle evil. I remembered the story of the angel that protects the Garden of Eden from humanity swirling his flaming sword at any one who would come near. I remembered the story of the angel who fought with Jacob all night long and then snaps his hip like a toothpick near the dawn of the day. I remembered the story of Michael and Gabriel who Fought against the armies of Persia and

took time out of the bloody battle to visit with Daniel the prophet of God. I mean whenever these angels showed up it was usually because they were going to kill someone or declare a message from God, and I was not sure at that point if I wanted to have either of those things happen to me.

Anyway as you can imagine we were terrified. I mean here was this angel, brighter than the sun shining before us, and we just had our staves to protect us, and I really didn't think they were going to be much help against that flaming sword. I remember thinking about how fast I could run away, and where I could hide from this being.

But before my feet would even move, before I could shut my gaping mouth and run for my life, the being spoke. With a booming voice, the angel spoke to us and told us to not be afraid. Right, a glowing angel visiting us at night, tells us not to be scared, sure thing. It was a bit too late for that, we were all scared.

But he continued on. He told us that he was there to bring us good news. Well this made us feel a little better, since he wasn't there to kill us or punish us for something. I'd much rather have good news than bad any day, and his news was the greatest I have ever heard. He told us that he brought us good news of great joy for all people, for to us is born that very day in the city of David a Savior, who is the messiah, the Lord. And that we could find him wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. That's great news, the messiah, the one those old priests kept telling us about when I was a kid and went to worship. The one who would save us from all pains and evils. This angel told us that this Messiah had been born, the Lord himself was born down in Bethlehem. And as he finished telling us this, the entire sky lit up like campfires of an army on a hillside. Suddenly all those little campfires filled the entire sky and there were hundreds, thousands, no tens of thousands, of those bright angels shining down upon us and blinding us to their glory. And they sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace upon all those whom he favors."

Squinting through my eyelids I tried to see this magnificent sight as they sang more praises and glories. Then suddenly, BAM, like a flash they were gone. We were standing there in the darkness of the Kidron valley once again. We could see the sheep, and the stars, and our campfire. But all those beings, those angels, those heavenly beings were gone, not even a trace of them was left.

After a moment or two we all started to come out of our stupor. I turned back to Matthias and he was looking down at me, and I looked over at Justice and Petras. I could tell they were all thinking what I was thinking. Could this be true. Could the messiah have been born. It must be true, the angels were here, we all saw them, it wasn't a hallucination, it was a daydream, or a nightmare. They had been real and their message was real. Even as Petras asked if we should go to see this thing that has taken place in Bethlehem, Matthias was already turning and running down the hill towards the

South, towards Bethlehem over seven miles away. Quickly we chased after him. Not one of us thought about the sheep, or about those bandits who had been stealing our lambs, or even the wolves. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I mean really now, the sky had moments before been filled with angels, more than any of us could count. What else could matter right now.

We hurried down the valley towards that ancient city of King David, all excited to see if what the angels told us was true or not. We were just all filled with excitement and joy.

And the scene that greeted us when we got near the city of Bethlehem was not disappointing. As we ran up the hill towards the city walls, we noticed that off to the one side there was a crowd of people that were gathered around this animal shed. We decided this must be what the angel had said about the baby being found in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Because when we got closer and edged our way up to the front of the small crowd we saw right there before us in the hay stall was a baby, folded in clothes and lying in the feedbox of the manger. And we knew right away that he was the one. We told the people there that he was the one. We told them about the angels and what he had said. We told the parents, and especially his mother seemed comforted by our words. For some reason I didn't want to leave that spot, I just wanted to keep telling the story. You know that when you get an adrenaline rush, and you just don't want it to end, that's how we were feeling. It was tremendous, that entire night we stayed there singing psalms of praise, and telling the story over and over again to everyone who would listen. The Messiah, the Lord is born, he is laying here in the manger and he has come to save us.

Now that is exciting news. That was an exciting time. And I am still waiting for his final glory. I know one day soon that he will call down those angels again, and the battle will end, and the pain and suffering of this world will cease. The messiah has promised to do this. And that day is coming. You can wait here and think about that. You can even sing songs and watch for something that might happen up here, but as for me I wait in the world for that great day to come. I know he is born. That is the good news. I know he is coming, that is the great news. I know he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that I can't stop sharing that message everywhere I go.

May you get excited this night. May you celebrate that great gift of his coming and may you always know that he is with us and one day he will bring down the kingdom of God to reign for ever as our Lord. He has promised this, a day when there is no sorrow, pain, suffering, sin, or evil, just peace and love. Rejoice and get excited in that Glory. Amen.