

### *One Shepherd's Story*

*Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. The Worship Commission at Hope Mennonite Church decided to offer a pre-recorded worship service for use at home rather than an in-person service at the church. I will record myself reading the scripture while seated in front of the church's manger scene. For the sermon, I will wear a robe and carry a walking stick while standing in front of the pulpit.*

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Lk. 2:1-20 (NRSV)

I thought Sarah would understand. I knew many wouldn't, but I surely thought my wife would. She just said, "You really are getting to be a silly old man, Amos. Maybe you're too old to be out with the sheep."

I wonder if some of you will believe me? I suppose some will and some won't. Anyway, I'll tell you what happened and let you decide. It was the most wonderful moment of my life! And think that I, old Amos, was one of those to have such a night! It was the night of all nights!

I'll tell you what happened. My two old friends, Jonathan and Isaac, and Isaac's young grandson, Ezra, and I were out in the fields with the sheep. It was the last night. It was cold and we were all huddled into our cloaks talking quietly, when young Ezra jumped up shouting, "Look, look! Angels!"

And there were angels! Lots of them in the sky! Shining and bright! And there was music like I never heard! Ezra was frightened and ran to his grandfather, throwing his arms around his waist, saying, "Grandfather, Grandfather, what's happening?"

Then the angel said to us – his exact words are etched in my mind – “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

At first we were all terrified, and then a deep peace came over me – and I knew! I knew that the day I had prayed for every day of my life had come. Hadn't the prophet Micah said that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem! I said to my startled companions, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

As we trudged to the village, I kept thinking. A baby! I thought he'd be a man! In a manger! Seems a strange place for a King! But I remembered what I had heard last Sabbath in the synagogue from the scroll of Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is 55:8).

You know, I am an old man, and through all these years I've found out that surely God's ways are not mine – but they are right and so much better. I didn't know why God chose the four of us to hear this message, but God surely had a reason. Maybe it was a reminder that everyone is important in God's eyes.

As we stood in that stable and looked at the newborn baby the angels told us about, we three old shepherds knew that God had answered our prayers – just in a different way than we had expected.

The first thing I did this morning was to hurry to the rabbi and tell him about the wondrous event.

I couldn't believe it when he laughed at me and told me I was having hallucinations. “Too much old wine for an old man,” he said. “If God was going to send angels to announce the Messiah, He would have sent them to me, the rabbi, not to shepherds in a field. The Messiah will not come as a baby and certainly not in a stable. Go home Amos and rest.”

He clearly thought we shepherds were not very important.

But I couldn't rest when I got home, either. There was Sarah, and she couldn't believe our story, either.

And young Ezra! He was shaken by the rabbi's disbelief. He asked his grandfather, “Grandfather, we did see angels, didn't we?” His grandfather told him, “Yes, my grandson, we did see them.” Then he asked me, “Amos, is it really true? Is this really the Messiah come as a baby? Is it true?”

And I told him – and myself – “Yes, it is really true!”

And I tell you. It is true. It's surely true.

You can believe it or not. But I know it is true. It's surely true.

Thanks be to God. It's true.

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#### Selected Bibliography

Quinn, Randy L. “One Shepherd's Story.” Sermon preached December 24, 1993 and December 24, 1995 at Allen Blanchard; based on Luke 2:8-20.