

Merry Christmas from Cladach Publishing



Here is a little gift for you: the Christmas story from a new point of view.

The First Christmas

It was Jethro and Aaron's turn to watch the sheep. The other shepherds were all asleep, in their tents or wrapped in their cloaks. Jethro and Aaron huddled together in the cold night on a rise, carefully guarding. Their sheep-herding dogs, including a black-and-white puppy, snuggled next to Aaron and Jethro, close to the warmth of the small fire. Many of the lambs lay next to their mothers; some quietly grazed, but most had settled down for the night. The livestock-guarding dogs lay alert among the flock in pairs, quietly doing their job, protecting the sheep from predators. These special Passover lambs had to be carefully guarded.

Aaron, the youngest, who was always full of questions, spoke in a hushed voice. "Jethro, have you noticed how clear the sky is tonight? And how quiet and still it is?"

"Yes. Even the animals are unusually still, as though they are waiting for something."

They sat awhile in silence, watching the stars. Then both men noticed that the livestock-guarding dogs were getting up--not stealthily as when they detect a predator, but springing up as if preparing to greet a friend. Then the sheep-herding dogs stood, looking toward the sky and slowly wagging their tails, as if anticipating someone's arrival.

Jethro and Aaron looked around but could not see or hear anything; yet the dogs definitely sensed something.

Like a sudden flash of lightning on the dark hillside, there appeared an angel before them! An angel of the Lord! And the brilliant light of heaven's glory was radiating from the angel. Aaron and Jethro fell to the ground, frozen in fear, certain that they were about to die. The other shepherds rushed out of their tents and also fell to the ground. But the sheep-herding dogs stood calmly and fearlessly; The livestock-guarding dogs watched trustingly. And the sheep never stirred.

"Do not be afraid." The angel's beautiful voice spoke peace to their souls and brought clarity back to their minds. "I have good news to share that will be for all the people," the angel continued. "This very night a Savior has been born. He is the Anointed One. You are to go to Bethlehem to find him. You will know him by this sign: The baby will be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The shepherds suddenly noticed a whole host of angels in the sky, and their heavenly voices rang with pure, contagious joy: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased."

When the angels had gone into heaven, Jethro, Aaron and the other shepherds continued gazing at the stars shining brilliantly in the sky. Then, with a quick glance of wonder at each other, and completely forgetting the sheep, they all started running down the hill, hurrying toward Bethlehem. They must find this babe in a manger!

But the dogs knew that they had to stay on guard; even the sheep-herding dogs stayed behind--that is, all except one. The black and white puppy quietly trailed behind the shepherds.

When the shepherds found the manger, they knelt and worshipped the newborn babe. They did not see the young dog quietly creep to the manger and gently kiss the baby's hand. Mary looked down at the pup and whispered, "Good dog." The puppy wagged its tail. Mary smiled. Perhaps she knew that her son would someday be a shepherd to men.

On the way back to the fields the shepherds felt calm, until it finally dawned on them that they had left their sheep--the special sacrificial Passover lambs and their mothers—alone! They quickened their pace to get back, filled with anxiety over what they might find.

As they came over the last hill, they could see their flocks peacefully sleeping, the livestock-guarding dogs on duty and the sheep-herding dogs alert and watching for the shepherds' return.

As they talked through the night (for no one could sleep) the shepherds remarked that none of the sheep or dogs had been afraid of the angels, but they obviously had seen and heard them. Could it be that the animals knew something the shepherds didn't?

Aaron spoke, his voice filled with awe. "Brothers, isn't it a wonder that lowly shepherds and their animals should be the first to learn of the Messiah's birth? And did it occur to you that, besides the baby's parents, the first beings to see the baby were the stable animals! Cows, donkeys, chickens..." His voice trailed off in wonder that the Most High, the Creator of all things, would send His Son in such a way.

The shepherds marveled at this and reached out to pet the loyal animals beside them. The black and white puppy snuggled close to Aaron.

by
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