

# Interview With A Shepherd



**A Christmas Story by:  
Dale Heinold**

Copyright 2014 by Dale Heinold

All rights reserved.

**Dale Heinold**  
**Lacon, IL 61540**  
**[www.lambchow.com](http://www.lambchow.com)**

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

## -The Reporter-

One morning I was sniffing around the Jerusalem market, not for spoiled artichokes but for a story. Somewhere between Persian spices and dead chickens I ran into Denny, one of my favorite sources. Denny was just a nickname, one he picked up because of his annoying coin flipping habit. “Denny, whatcha been up too?”

“You know I hate that name Squint,” he said in retaliation. Taking out a denarius, he began to flip it in the air, “I’ve just come up from Egypt, traded a load of Galilean dried fish for some spun cotton.”

“Pick up any news? My editor is about to fire me if I don’t come up with something good.”

“Pretty straight trip, roads were busy because of the crazy census. Even had to sleep under the stars one night, the inns being full and all. Now there’s a story for you, price gouging in the wake of the census by highway innkeepers. The headline could be something like - Innkeepers the New Highway Robbers?! Watcha think?” Denny smiled, trying to sell me on the story.

“Naw, my editor’s uncle runs an inn in Bethlehem, he’d never go for it.”

“Bethlehem, I hate that place it always stinks of sheep. You know I wasn’t the only one trying to sleep under the stars.” Denny said still trying to sell me the Innkeeper story. “There was this caravan from Persia, strangest thing I ever saw.”

“What?” I encouraged.

“Well, they weren’t selling anything. No trade goods at all. More like they were going to some royal gathering. I’d hope to trade with them before they came to the market, you know get a good deal, but they didn’t have anything or want anything. Well...” Denny thought for a moment, “that’s not true.”

“Come on, what did they want?”

“Information, they wanted to know where the king was born.” Strange I thought, wanting to see a king’s birthplace.

“Anyway, I told them to head south to Edom. Perhaps someone down there knows where Herod was born. Turns out that they weren’t looking for Herod’s birthplace but some new king. They even had gifts for the baby.”

“Running a story like that wouldn’t get me fired, it would get me killed. You know how jealous King Herod is.” In my annoyance, I snatched Denny’s coin in mid flight. “Come on Denny, you always see something worth writing about out there. Think! Anything strange, anything out of place? Egypt, Beersheba, Debir, Hebron, Tekoa, Bethlehem. You went through all of those places there has to be something.” My annoyance turning to desperation.

“Bethlehem, there was something strange going on there.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. I had to camp out to the west of town. The Innkeeper wanted triple the average rate. I really think you should run with that story.”

“Forget the price gouging story, what happened in Bethlehem?”

“Okay,” Denny paused for a moment composing his tale. “I was just about asleep when I heard several people running through my campsite. Looking out the tent flap I saw a group of shepherds running towards town. When I stepped out to get a better look at the commotion an older shepherd ran into me. ‘Whoa, what’s up friend?’ I asked. Well the old boy just stammered and pulled away. All I could get out of him was ‘angels’. Wondering what had startled them, I sent a servant backtrack the way they came and returned to my hard bed. The next morning the servant reported finding a shepherdless flock of sheep. He stayed with them for a watch and quietly left when the shepherds returned.”

“That’s your strange thing, a bunch of drunk shepherds?” I asked incredulously.

“No, that’s just it. The old shepherd wasn’t drunk, I didn’t smell it on him. Although the sheep smell was a bit overpowering. Anyway, whoever heard of shepherds abandoning

their flock and running into town where everyone would see them?”

I thought about Denny’s suggestion. It might work. Anything with angels would stir controversy between the Pharisees who believe in angels and the Sadducees who don’t. And as my editor always says - “controversy sells.” Slapping Denny’s coin back into his hand I explain my angle.

“It might work, but I think the innkeeper story is better,” he observed.

“You never give up,” I retorted.

### **-Bethlehem-**

It took a bit of fast talking to convince my editor to let me pursue the lead in Bethlehem. Two things were in my favor; the news desk was slow and I could stay at his uncle’s inn for free. Finally, he agreed. Giving me a letter for his Uncle Levi and a few coins for expenses he sent me on my way.

Bethlehem was still bustling with travelers when I arrived, much different than my last visit. I had stopped by on my way to Debir to chase down a lead about the olive crop failure. Bethlehem was quiet then, almost drowsy. It was more like Jerusalem on market day the day I began my search for the shepherd. With the letter in hand, I approached Uncle Levi’s inn and gave the door a few quick raps. After a few minutes, I heard a gruff, “No Room.”

“It’s Nate from the Jerusalem Journal, Benjamin sent me,” I yelled through the door. After a few moments, I heard the bar being raised and the door creak open.

“Nate! Out traveling again for my nephew? Come in,” the old innkeeper invited. “Lets see, your last visit was what, three months ago?”

“Something like that. Nice to see you again.”

“So where are you off to this time? Egypt perhaps?” Levi asked.

“No, I’m following a lead right here in Bethlehem.” Levi’s

eyebrows arched a bit wondering what story could be found in his village. I handed him the letter which he immediately read.

“So my Benjamin wants me to put you up as a favor, feed you too I suppose. How long are you planning on staying?”

“Only a day or two, it shouldn’t be hard to find one shepherd.”

“It might be harder than you think, there are many shepherds, and they are all scattered about in the hills.” Levi thought for a moment before continuing. “Tonight you’ll have to sleep on the floor. Tomorrow will be another story, but you are welcome to stay for as long as you need. Since you won’t be paying in denarii you’ll have to pay me in news, supper is ready, come and tell me what is going on in the big city.”

As requested, I told Levi all the news that I could come up with. He took great interest in court gossip and asked if there had been any unique visitors. Since that wasn’t my beat, I couldn’t answer him. Eventually, the conversation came around to why I was at his table.

“So what’s this about a shepherd? Expecting a drought of Passover lambs?” Levi asked.

“Nothing like that this time. A trader called Denny told me about something that happened the last time he passed through.”

“Denny? Who’s Denny?”

“Oh, that’s my nickname for him. His real name is David Ben Aaron. I call him Denny because he is always flipping a denarius.” Levi’s eyes reflected remembrance when I mentioned Denny’s habit.

“He’s a rascal Nate, I wouldn’t give a copper mite for anything that he says.”

“Well, he told me that a few days ago when he was in town...” I went on the relay Denny’s story about meeting the shepherd and the report of angels.

“Yes that was a very busy and strange night” Levi remembered. “We were full up, I had to turn a dozen or so away including your friend. There was one couple that I took pity on. They had traveled from Nazareth because of the census. She

was soon to give birth, maybe a little sooner than they expected. Anyway, the inn was full, but I couldn't turn them out into the cold like I did to your friend. My stable boy suggested that we could clear out a stall for them. With my approval, he quickly moved the cows, mucked out the stall, and laid down some fresh straw. The young woman's birth pains began soon after they were settled. She is the fifth, no sixth, to give birth at my inn, although she is the first to do so in the stable."

"I can think of worst places." I thought there may be a human interest story worth looking into. "What did she have?"

"A lovely baby boy. But that's not the strange part. The next morning I visited the new family to assure them there would be a room for them later that day. Joseph, the new father, informed me that more shepherds may come to visit the infant. It seems that a group came out of the hills and more may do the same." Levi looked at me and shrugged. "Who am I to argue with a new father?"

"So that was probably the shepherds that Denny saw," I reasoned. "Did Joseph say anything about how the shepherds knew about the baby?"

"I asked him that very question. 'God must have told them,' was all he would say." Levi rose and began clearing the table. "Its getting late Nate, give me a few minutes to make up a mat. You'll be warm at least, we can talk more in the morning.

I was tired but had one question I had to get out of the way. "Say, Denny told me you raised your rates because of the census. Anything to that?"

"What exactly did that weasel tell you?" Levi quickly asked.

"That you wanted to charge him three times the expected rate."

"I warned you not to trust him, the truth is the exact opposite. We were full when he arrived, he offered to pay me three times over if I would kick someone out so he could have a room. I told him no."

I knew Denny's story was a non-starter, but there seemed to be plenty of others to investigate.

## -The Stable-

The next morning Levi introduced me to his stable boy. “Perhaps Dan can tell you more about the shepherds,” Levi said by way of introduction. Dan was only about thirteen or fourteen and a bit tall for his age.

“Want to see the stable?” Dan asked enthusiastically.

In my mind if you’ve see one stable you’ve seen them all. “Sure, why not,” I replied. Dan’s stable was an opening in the rocky hillside, primarily a cave that had been adapted for its purpose. Walls of stone and mortar separated the various stalls. And yes, it did smell like a stable; pungent manure mixing with dried straw, sweet hay, and dusty animals. All in all, though, it was cleaner than most I’d been in.

“This is where they had the baby.” Dan said pointing out a space near the rear of the cave. The stall was still empty, the straw looked like a nest around where the family had slept. Carved in the back wall was a shelf of stone with a rounded bottom, a kind of manger for the cows to eat from. In the manger was a smaller nest of straw.

“So tell me about that night.”

“Well for most of the night I was putting up guest’s animals, the stable was overflowing between our milk cows and the assorted horses and donkeys of travelers. When I went to report to Levi that I had finished the chores I found him talking with some travelers. I overheard Levi turn them down, but I could tell his heart wasn’t in it. Seeing the woman’s condition, I suggested that we could move the cows and make up a place in their stall. The couple agreed, and Levi sent me off to get everything ready. When Mary entered the stable she doubled over and moaned. I thought she disliked the smell, but the husband, Joseph, sent me to find the midwives. I spent the rest of the evening running errands for them, getting water, towels, and such. After the birth I ran to the inn to give Levi the good news. He asked me to see if the family wanted anything to eat. When I returned the midwives

had gone and the mother was suckling the newborn. I asked about getting them some food, Joseph thought some bread and a little cheese would be nice. As I was leaving a group of shepherds came striding towards the stable entrance.”

“Did they say anything?” I asked.

“They only wanted to know where the baby was. I pointed to the stall and left to fetch Joseph’s request. By the time I got back the shepherds were all gone except the oldest one. ‘Thank you so much’ I heard Joseph say. ‘We will treasure your words and tend this little one as you suggest.’ With that the shepherd left.”

“That’s it? Did you know any of them? Did you hear them say anything about angels?”

“They were all from Judah’s flock. The last to leave was old Samuel, their head shepherd.”

“Any idea where they might be?”

“Like all the flocks, they keep to the hills. Who knows where they are at right now. You asked about angels, I didn’t hear the shepherds say anything, but I did ask Joseph how the shepherds knew they had a baby. He said that angels told them.

“Do you know if Mary and Joseph are still in town?”

“They left the night before last after the kings came to visit. Joseph said something about it not being safe. I’m not sure what he meant, what could be safer than Bethlehem?”

I was disappointed I had missed the young family. But I was curious about Dan’s mention of kings, surely Herod had not been here. I questioned him about it but he clammed up and suggested I ask Levi. The rest of my day was spent fruitlessly roaming the hills in search of the shepherds.

### **-The Magi-**

“Good morning Nate, breakfast is ready,” Levi called from the hallway. I moaned as I lifted the blanket. Yesterday’s search had only yielded achy muscles. The consensus of the shepherds I did find was that Samuel had moved his flock further south.

“Alright, I’ll be right out.” I yelled back.

Eating breakfast in the great room was like a geography lesson. I had fun guessing where each traveler was from and where they were heading. With the census still underway its a bit more challenging given the similar dress and appearance of those from Israel. After Levi had seen to the needs of his other guests he came by to enquire about my search. It didn’t take long to fill him in.

“The hills to the south are more rugged, perhaps you should borrow one of the donkeys. I’ll have Dan get one ready for you,” Levi decided, leaving to find the stable hand. Alone with my thoughts I tried to assemble the basic story lines I had come across. Three stood out, the baby born in a stable because of the census, the angel sighting shepherds, and the mysterious kings. I decided to corner Levi about the kings when he returned.

“Dan will have a donkey ready in a few minutes,” Levi reported when he returned.

“Thanks Levi,” I replied although I wasn’t to sure about the idea of bouncing over the Judean hillsides, but it was better than walking. “Say, I’ve heard bits and pieces about some kings coming to Bethlehem, but no one has told me the story, what do you know?”

Levi paused, weighing the request. Leaning forward he whispered, “I’ll tell you what I know if you promise to never publish the story.”

“What! Why?”

“Because the baby’s life is at stake, Herod will kill the child if he finds him.”

“Can I publish something after the child is safe?” I implored.

Levi again weighed the issue. “If you promise to hold the story until the child is safe from Herod then I agree.”

“I promise by heaven to hold the story until then,” I solemnly spoke.

Levi leaned back, “First of all the caravan was not of kings but magi. They came from the east, probably Persia.”

“Magi? What are they?”

“If you are going to be a good reporter you’ll need to expand your knowledge outside of Jerusalem and Rome. Magi are a group of learned men, kind of like our priests. However, instead of seeking God in the Holy scriptures they look to the stars. Something they saw in the sky led them here, to this very house.”

“Did you speak with them? How did they know to come here? Where did they go?”

“So many questions. Yes, I spoke briefly with one of them. It appears that they started their journey many months ago. Their observations of the stars led them to believe that a royal birth was about to take place in Judea. So they came west expecting the birth to be heralded and, therefore, easy to find. Eventually, they enquired at Herod’s court. However, even King Herod was surprised at their news. He summoned the High Priest and scribes to court. ‘Where is the Messiah to be born?’ he demanded the priests. They replied that according to the prophet Micah it was to be in Bethlehem. Herod asked the magi a few more questions and sent them on their way to find the baby.”

“I’m surprised Herod didn’t lock them up.”

“Herod’s too much of a fox for that. Instead, he’ll use the magi to find the child and then deal with the threat as he did with his own sons.”

I grimaced recalling how Herod had recently executed several of his sons. “Let’s talk about something better, when did the magi come and how did they find the baby?”

“They came the evening after the birth. By then we had moved the family from the stable and into a room. Shortly after supper there was a knock. ‘No room’ I replied. Someone answered that they were looking for the baby. I expected to find another group of shepherds or other well wishers when I opened the door. Instead, I was confronted with a royal court. ‘Pardon the interruption’ one of them said. ‘The star guided us here,’ said another. ‘May we see the child?’ asked the third. Knowing that Joseph and Mary’s room was too small for such a visit I asked the magi to wait in the courtyard while I prepared a place. We quickly

cleared the great room and created a reception area. I told the family what was happening and invited them down to the hall. Joseph asked a few questions and then decided it would be okay. Once they were settled I opened the door and invited the magi to come in.”

At that moment, Dan burst into the great room and announced that my donkey was ready.

### **-The Gifts-**

Now what do I do? Levi’s half-way through his story about the magi and the donkey’s ready for my shepherd search. “The donkey can wait,” suggested Levi. I thought for a second and remembered my editor’s advice, “never interrupt a man that’s talking.”

“Alright, lets finish the story,” I agreed.

“Each of the Magi carried a small chest as they walked in,” Levi began without noticing that Dan had joined us at the table. “For a few moments they stood and admired the baby cradled in Mary’s arms. Then one of them, the oldest one I think, began to explain their presence.”

‘We have come from a far off place in search of the newborn king of Judea. The heavens foretold his coming and a star led us to this very house.’

‘We are told,’ began another, ‘that your scriptures prophecy concerning his birth, and that the baby is more than a king - He is the Messiah of God.’

‘Therefore, we have sought the child in order to worship the newly born king and Messiah.’ explained the third magi. “At this point each knelt before the family,” continued Levi. “It was a strange and awesome sight. The magi in fine silks, bright sashes, and tall turbans kneeling before a poor family from Nazareth dressed in dull homespun.”

“Tell him about the chests,” Dan encouraged.

“I’m getting to that,” Levi replied momentarily distracted by Dan’s presence. “The older one spoke next. ‘We bring gifts for the

child from our homeland to honor and bless him, gold.’ The older magi opened a small chest filled with gold coins. ‘Frankincense,’ the middle magi announced. The sweet aroma of frankincense spilling from his open chest. ‘And Myrrh,’ intoned the final magi.

“I understand gold and frankincense, but why myrrh?” I asked.

“It is a bit odd to give a spice used to anoint a body for burial. I asked the older magi about it later, ‘we brought what we were impressed to bring,’ was all I got out of him. Anyway,” Levi said wanting to continue the story, “after the gifts were presented the magi bowed in worship.

‘We are blessed by your gifts,’ Joseph replied.

‘We will treasure this moment and tell the child about it always,’ added Mary.

‘What have you named the child?’ the older magi asked.

‘Jesus,’ the mother softly replied.

The magi conferred briefly and then the old one spoke, ‘I understand that, in your tongue, Jesus means God saves, it seems to fit the child.’ With that the magi rose, bowed once more, and proceeded from the room. The next morning they, the magi, and the young family were mysteriously all gone.”

“Where did they go? I asked. “Did they leave a note or anything?”

“Both left a gold coin, well beyond what was owed. But I have no idea where they went.” Levi answered.

“I know where,” injected Dan. We both stared at him for a second.

“Go on boy, you won’t get in any trouble,” assured Levi.

“Joseph came to the stable early the next morning to get his donkey ready. He asked me to help him pack and that I was not to tell anyone. I asked him why they were leaving so suddenly. ‘Do you believe in angels?’ he asked. I nodded. ‘One came to me in a dream and warned us to leave for Egypt because King Herod is going to try and kill Jesus. The angel also told me that the magi have also been warned in a dream not to return to Herod.’”

“Did Joseph say anything else?” I asked.

Dan thought for a moment, “Oh, yeah, I’m supposed to tell Levi something. ‘Thank you for your hospitality and the gold coin should cover our expenses. May God’s blessings be with you.’”

I sat back to ponder Dan and Levi’s story. Levi’s right, I can’t publish this until Herod is dead, it would be too dangerous. But, could this baby, this Jesus, be God’s Messiah? That would be the scoop of the millennium. I made a mental note to ask a rabbi friend about the prophecies concerning the messiah when I returned home. Well, that leaves my angel sighting shepherd. “Dan, show me the donkey. I need to find a shepherd.”

### **- Angels-**

For two days I bounced on the back of a donkey searching the Judean hill country for a specific shepherd named Samuel. I encountered several flocks along the way. All of them knew Judah’s flock and Samuel, but none knew their location. I must have recrossed my path five or six times chasing down their suggestions. Near sunset I crested a small hill. The lowering sun painted the clouds orange and purple in celebration of the waning day. In the darkening valley I spotted another flock. With faltering hope of finding Samuel, I rode down to the nearest shepherd.

“Is this Judah’s flock,” I yelled when I got into range. The shepherd turned looking annoyed, but waved me to come nearer.

“Don’t yell like that,” he hissed when I was close enough to hear, “we are getting the sheep settled for the night.”

“Sorry is this Judah’s flock or do you know where they may be?” I hissed back.

“This is Judah’s flock. Is something wrong?” A worried look creasing the shepherd’s eyes.

“No, nothing’s wrong I’m looking for Samuel.”

“Do you see the man standing on the rock? That’s Samuel.” the shepherd said pointing across the valley.

I could just make him out. “Thanks,” I said starting towards

Samuel.

“Hey,” the shepherd hissed again, “Don’t go through the flock, go around.” Changing direction I again thanked the shepherd and rode on.

Darkness was complete long before I arrived at the rock. However, the shepherds had built a small cooking fire which helped to guide me in. Looking up, I marveled at the night sky. The brilliant stars reminded me of the magi, and I wondered what they saw that led them to Jesus. As I approached the fire the one I took to be Samuel greeted me.

“Good evening traveler, will you sup with us?” he asked, pointing at a spit of meat above the fire.

“Perhaps, I’m looking for Samuel.”

“I am Samuel, do I know you?” the shepherd quizzed.

“Let’s just say that we have a mutual friend. Do you remember the trader you ran into a week or so ago by a tent outside of Bethlehem.”

The old shepherd thought for a moment, “you mean the night the child was born, the night the angels sang.”

Bingo I thought to myself, “yes, I’d like to hear your story, maybe do an article about it for the Jerusalem Journal.”

“Sit traveler, I will never tire of telling about that night.” Samuel looked at the other shepherds sitting around the fire. “We were all there, we all saw it.” Samuel studied the stars for a moment. “It was just about this time. We had camped near Bethlehem to replenish our supplies.” Samuel again stared into the night sky. “The stars were brilliant, just like tonight. Whenever they light the sky like this I am reminded of God’s promise to Abraham; that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. I was pondering that promise when I saw one star seem to come closer and closer, growing in the night sky. Before I knew it, an angel was standing right in front of us. I fell to my knees, we all did.”

“What did the angel look like?” I asked.

“He was taller than most men, bright, almost like looking into the sun. But it wasn’t what I saw that frightened me, but what

I felt. It was like being warmed by the sun but knowing that your heart was exposed before him. The angel must have sensed our fear because the first thing he said was, ‘Do not be afraid!’ That voice, deep and powerful, for a moment I feared that it would cause the sheep to run but they seemed unconcerned and calm. Then the angel said, ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’ The Savior? The Messiah? In Bethlehem? What wonder is this I thought. ‘How shall we find the child?’ I stammered. The angel explained, ‘you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’ All of a sudden the sky was filled with angels as if all the stars of heaven had come down to where we were at. With one voice they sang, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased!’ They retreated back into the sky as their last note faded. We were all speechless. Finally Joseph here exclaimed, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem!’ I agreed, ‘let’s see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.’ Without further discussion we all ran to Bethlehem to search for the child.

At that moment, the fire crackled throwing sparks into the air. I watched the sparks rise to join the stars and wondered what my reaction would have been. How marvelous and frightening to encounter those beings we call angels.

(Scripture quotation taken from Luke 2 New Living Translation)

### **-The Search-**

“How is the meat?” Samuel asked. During our meal, the other shepherds had shared their own experiences and feelings of that special night. I had a thousand questions. How many angels? Why announce to shepherds and magi, why not to the High Priest? Why is this baby special? You get the idea.

After they had all spoken, I told them about the magi’s visit and the mysterious way they had been led to the baby. The

shepherds enjoyed the news and wondered about the star. When I told them about the young family's hasty departure they became worried and quiet. Desiring to keep the conversation going I asked, "can you tell me about your visit to the stable that night?"

Samuel straightened, his thoughts shifting from worry to his remembrance of that night. "We all ran towards Bethlehem, it was foolish and irresponsible to leave the flock like that."

"Your flock was watched while you were gone," I interrupted. "The trader outside of Bethlehem sent a servant to discover what caused you run through his campsite. The servant found the flock unguarded and watched it until you returned."

"Praise God," Samuel rejoiced, "that is welcome news. Well, as you know, the younger ones of us ran ahead while I lagged behind. We were all excited and somewhat out of our heads with joy and wonder. But we managed to gather ourselves when we reached the outskirts of town. For a few moments we debated how to proceed. It made sense for us to try the inn's stable first, it being the largest one in town. As we neared the stable we spotted Dan the stable hand. I ran up to him and asked about the newborn.

'How do you know about...?' he stammered.

'Where is he?' I demanded.

'In the rear stall,' he said hurrying off.

Samuel looked at me and asked, "Do you go to the Temple?"

"Yes, of course," I answered, surprised at the question's sudden shift.

"I always wondered what the priests felt when they entered the holy place, now I know. The stable was still a stable. The sights and smells were exactly the same. But the feeling, it was completely different. There was a quiet awe in that moment. I don't know how else to describe it." The other shepherds murmured their agreement.

"For me it was like the deep watches of the night, when everything is still, and God seems so close," added one shepherd.

“Thank you Asher,” nodded Samuel in agreement. “From the entrance we could see the glow of a lamp near the rear of the cave. We quietly walked toward the light. The baby was laying in a manger lined with fresh straw just like the angel had promised. The mother and father stood over the child, marveling at the new life before them. One of my shepherds knocked over a pot or something, alerting the mother and father to our presence. The father quickly positioned himself between us and the child.”

‘Why are you here?’ he demanded.

Stepping forward I meekly said, ‘I am Samuel, we are shepherds, an angel told us that the Savior, the Messiah, is born this night and how to find him.’ I knelt, and the others followed my lead. ‘We have come to worship the gift God has given this evening.’ The father glanced at the mother who nodded in approval.

Stepping aside the father said, ‘I am Joseph of Nazareth, and this is my beloved Mary, the babe is called Jesus.’

‘Please tell us more about the angel,’ Mary asked. I recounted their appearance to her and repeated the angel’s words. We continued to kneel before the babe, pondering the marvelous promises of God and worshipping Him. I didn’t notice it, but soon I was the only shepherd left.

Standing, I said, ‘the babe will need care like a young lamb. Keep watch over him, protect him, and keep him always close to his mother.’

‘Thank you for all you have said,’ Joseph responded.

‘We will cherish it always,’ Mary added. With that, I bowed to each and slowly left them.” There was silence around the campfire as the shepherds pondered their experience.

“Samuel,” I said breaking the silence, “who is this child, what is he to become?”

“I’m only a shepherd, not a rabbi, scribe, or priest. But, I have studied the scrolls. All of these events; the angels, the magi, and the baby, have reminded me of a passage from the prophet Isaiah. ‘For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!"\*"

Somewhere in the flock a lamb bleated for its mother. The fire crackled, a shepherd stirred, and a mama sheep softly replied. I slowly stood and wandered away from the shepherds, pondering all that I had heard. Staring into the night sky I searched for a glimpse of whatever had lead the magi or some residual trail of the angels. "You're looking in the wrong place for the answers you seek." A voice whispered. I turned, expecting, hoping that the voice was that of an angel. It was merely Samuel. "I too have pondered the stars, looking for some trace of God. Now I have seen angels. As marvelous and wonderful and frightening as that moment was they are simply messengers of God's grace."

"How do you know what I'm looking for?" I asked.

"Because it is common to all of us. We all seek some assurance that God is with us. I didn't understand it myself until I saw the babe. For years I had searched nature, searched scriptures, even searched other religions, but I gave up looking and became a simple shepherd. That night in the stable I finally understood that I had only been seeking with my head. When I saw the babe my heart was opened, changed in some way. Now everywhere I look I see the hand of God. Did you see the sunset tonight? What did you think?"

"I thought it was beautiful." I said, recalling the vivid purples and oranges.

"A few weeks ago I would have said the same thing. But tonight, as I stood on that rock taking it all in I saw the handiwork of God, the brushstrokes of a master painter, a reminder of God's presence."

"All because you saw a baby?" I asked incredulously.

Samuel shook his head, "No, because I started looking with my heart. There is a promise in the law of Moses, one I had long

overlooked. It goes, 'But from there (exile) you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.'\*\* That night in the stable I searched with my heart and found the Lord as the scripture promises. You too will find him, if you search with all your heart. And when you find Jesus you will find your answer." Samuel turned and walked away, leaving me with the stars and the sounds of the night.

\*(Isaiah 9:6–7, NLT) \*\* (Deuteronomy 4:29, NTL)

### **- Something is Changing -**

Denny rolls the scroll and hands it back to me. "Nice story Squint, when are you going to publish it?"

"Not until it's safe for the child," I reply. For months I had watched for Denny's return to the market. I felt like I owed him the rest of the story. "So what do you think?"

"I don't know. Most folks think I'm this hard-nosed trader, always looking for a way to skin the other guy. But I spend a lot of time on the road, a lot of time thinking about life. I've come to agree with King Solomon - there's nothing new under the sun, all is vanity, a chasing after the wind. But this Bethlehem business doesn't seem to fit."

"That's a pretty brief summation of a whole book. You left out the part about there being a time for everything, perhaps this is a new time?" I suggest.

"I might disagree if I hadn't seen some of it with my own eyes. Angels, prophecies, magi. Something is changing." Denny responds.

"Something is changing, and it revolves around the child born in the stable." I add.

"So Squint, did you publish anything from your trip to Bethlehem?"

"I did get one story, but I won't tell you unless you tell me something first."

“Okay, what is it?” Denny asks.

“Why do you call me Squint?”

“Oh, that's simple, you're always squinting around, looking into things. Like this baby thing, it started with a shepherd that knocked me over and muttered something about an angel. You look into it and discover not just a shepherd, but, a baby. And, not just a baby, but the long promised Messiah that angels declared and magi sought out. So are you going to keep looking, keep squinting, for the child?”

“My editor isn't interested, so officially no. He says there are already too many stories about people claiming to be the messiah. I tried to remind him about the angels; he didn't buy it. It will probably be years from now but, if the child is the Messiah of God we won't be able to ignore him. And when he does show himself, I'll be there.”

Denny nods in agreement, “so, what story did you publish?” Putting on my best conspiratorial look I reply, “The Injustice of Bribery, how some selfishly use their money and position.”

“Sounds interesting, I could have given you all kinds of examples of how other merchants use bribery to get better prices.”

“Well, I had a really good example. It seems that one trader tried to bribe an innkeeper in Bethlehem for a room, offering him three times the proper rate if he would kick out a family and give him the room.”

“Ooh, you didn't?” Denny moans.

“I did,” I affirmed, “but I left your name out of it.”

### **-Afterword-**

I hope that you enjoyed this little story with the reporter unknowingly searching for Jesus. If I may offer two points. The first is that like the shepherd Samuel observed, searching for God, for Jesus, is not simply a logical exercise but one that involves our whole being. Yes, faith in Christ can be reasonably explained. But, it can not be understood unless the heart is involved. Too often folks search with one or the other and

completely miss Christ. The second point is that Jesus cannot be ignored. Sure, he can be rejected or embraced. But once someone hears the story of Christ they have to do something with it. Everyone must answer Christ's question - "Who do you say that I am?"

