

Meditation Luke 2:15-21

Voice of a Shepherd

It's frightening when wolves attack, but there are always several of us and we have a fire. We light torches from it and use them to scare the wolves off. We know what we're doing and we can handle it. It can be frightening, of course, when there's a thunderstorm, but that's just an occupational hazard. This was very different.

The light, it was so bright it was overwhelming- all around; there was no where you could turn to get away from it. And there was a strange mental effect which stopped us closing our eyes: it was a sort of paralysis, I suppose, the result of extreme fear. And helplessness, of course; I certainly remember the helplessness. I can't say I was conscious of much else, although there was a strange sensation of the blood all draining to my feet.

Then there was the voice. Somehow it didn't go with the light; it didn't match, if you know what I mean: it was gentle and irresistible. 'Don't be afraid' it said. And suddenly we weren't; we were enthralled. So enthralled we did what the angel said: we left the sheep to take care of themselves and went haring into Bethlehem to find the baby the angel had told us about: Israel's great Messiah.

I suppose, like everyone else, I hoped for a Messiah. But with me it was a vague sort of hope at the back of my mind, and most of the time not in my mind at all: a promise that something wonderful would happen one day, but no real suggestion that it would happen anytime soon, or even in my lifetime. But after the angel told us I was sure: the Messiah was here!

We didn't have to ask around: we found the little one straight away in someone's shed. We didn't hesitate, we just dashed in, and we must have given them quite a turn: great big shepherd-lads, filthy from the fields and dripping in sweat after the run.

A tiny mite he was, and his Mum and Dad just ordinary people, and people who'd found themselves away from home at just the wrong time. But we knew it was him. I'm not quite sure how we knew, but it was obvious his parents knew, too. We could feel their bewilderment and their helplessness, but we felt their peace and their joy, too. That, after the experience of the angel, was enough for us: God was doing more of the wonderful things he'd done for Israel in the past.

Yes, I've been telling people about that night; I tell everyone I meet, whether they ask or not. With some of them I'm a bit of a celebrity. But most of them are sceptical, shall we say, and some have laughed and said we must have been drunk. But I know: I know that night I saw Israel's Messiah. Tiny and vulnerable, lying in that feeding trough, I saw him.

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