



# The Shepherd's Story





**For Taylor the only one who could get away with  
calling me Granny Annie. You have melted my heart  
from the first time I set eyes on you. My prayer for you  
is that you come to know the shepherd and follow Him.**

## The Shepherd

It started out as a normal day. My oldest brother Eliakim had just finished the night shift and Ariel my younger brother, had taken him breakfast out into the field, as he had the early slot that day. I'm the middle child, Ethan is my name, and I am heading off into town today to gather up the much-needed supplies, for the long nights ahead. Eli was tired and in need of rest, he had warned us that no one could be found sleeping on the job tonight. Although our teenage sons normally watch the flocks in three shifts during the night, it's lambing season so it's all hands-on deck.

Our flocks are fat-tailed sheep, and they are very special. These lambs must be born within 5 miles of Jerusalem. They are bred for Passover in spring and those that are born without blemish will be sacrificed in the temple. They begin lambing just as autumn is turning into winter. It's cold out there and it takes all of us to help the ewes give birth to the lambs, keep them warm and ward off all the predators. The wolves, well they are the worst, they come in packs to devour anything that is vulnerable, so it is up to us to make sure the lambs survive.

Caesar Augustus has decided to demand a census and people are travelling from everywhere to register. The last time the wife went to get supplies the crowds were crazy and she couldn't get everything that was needed. Caesar certainly didn't consider the impact this census was going to have on us everyday folk with all these extra people coming into town. Somebody in an office somewhere had this bright idea with no thought for the rest of us. People must go back to the town they were born in to register. So many tourists, so many strangers. Anyway, I need to stock up because we will not be going back into town until all of this craziness is over. I have left instructions for the firewood to be gathered and the food to be prepared. Slings, stones, and sticks for protecting the sheep can be sorted later.

It took me two hours more than usual for this trip into town. The streets are chock-a-block. Every single inn in Bethlehem is stuffed to the gills with people looking for shelter. It's a great time for the traders I suppose but I was glad when I had gathered all that I had needed and headed back to the farm. A nap would be needed before me, and the brothers headed out into the fields for the night.

I woke to the sound of Eli shouting, 'brother you have overslept, we must get the fires lit.' Groggily I got up and made my way out of the house. The wood had been gathered and the food and provisions were packed. Everyone was waiting for me so I gathered up the remaining bags and we began walking toward the fields where the flocks were oblivious to all the attention they would be getting over the next few nights.

Ari, being the youngest, taught the boys how and where to place the fires to guard and protect the perimeter of the fields. This would be our first line of defence from the wolves. I heard him pass on the words of wisdom that our father had given us when we were that age. 'Make a nest of dry grass,' I heard him say. Abba was a big man but gentle in his ways 'it takes practice,' he would say, but he would never lose his patience with us. I can hear him now, 'dry kindling and dead wood Ethan, otherwise you will spend the night choking on the smoke.' 'A good fire will have dancing flames that are hot, not thick dark smoke, you won't be able to get close enough to keep warm which defeats the purpose,' I made that mistake many times, it was not pleasant sitting around a fire with dark smoke. There is more to lighting a fire than you would think. You can't just pile the logs up and let them burn either, it needs air around it and flowing through it too. I walked away smiling at the memories as I went to check on the flock.

We had five single lambs, and four sets of twins last night and four more sets this afternoon. Now that lambing has started it is vital that we keep watch day and night, we do everything in our power to deliver

them safely and protect them from the elements and the wolves, the mountain lions, and the bears. We have one hundred sheep here and the chances are we could be looking at 150 plus lambs between them. It is going to be a busy night. Of course, the ewes can mostly do this themselves, it's just the difficult ones that we must assist with, maybe a larger lamb or one that is coming out backwards. We are there to keep them warm and protected. It is also our job to separate the perfect ones, born without blemish for the priests to inspect for the Passover. Our flocks are bred for the feast. The perfect lambs are wrapped and placed in the stone mangers to make sure that they don't get hurt or damaged before they can be separated.

King David, we are told, fought, and killed a mountain lion and a bear protecting his flock. Unfortunately, I don't have any hero stories like that. My story is possibly more incredible, more unbelievable but there is nothing that could make us into heroes. I am so glad that my brothers also witnessed what happened otherwise they would have thought I was drunk.

Eli had just called Ari and me over to the main fire to eat and rest. These lambs were coming quickly tonight, ten so far and I am not sure how many more on their way. We also have to separate the sheep that have given birth from the ones who haven't. They get a bit over enthusiastic and try to steal the lambs from their mothers, but their time will come. Keeping them warm is the hardest part. Of course, they are sheltered in the fold, but they are so vulnerable to the elements. Everything was going to plan, and we had just settled into our conversations about tonight's events so far. Eli was in the middle of telling us all about the first set of triplets, which isn't unusual for the older ewes when Ari pointed to a light in the sky.

It was just a star, granted it was bigger than any star I had ever seen, but some nights out here, the skies were so clear, I would imagine that the stars were like little windows that allowed me to look directly into the heavens, that God had created and set above us.

The breeze that was blowing a chill around us suddenly stopped. Eli, who had been trying to finish his story, was stopped mid-sentence and Ari was just pointing towards the sky. Suddenly stood before us was the angel of the Lord. That's not something you see every day. We were terrified and mesmerized at what we were seeing. It felt like a long time before the angel spoke but when it did the atmosphere around us completely changed. No wind, no sound of the night, just the voice of the angel could be heard, and the brightest light lit up the whole area as though day has suddenly come.

'DO NOT BE AFRAID' it was a bit late for that statement because I can assure you, I was terrified, and I knew by the looks on my brothers' faces they weren't feeling too brave either. Suddenly there was a hush, not easy to describe, but a quietening on the inside as the angel encouraged us to listen to what he had to say.

'Behold! I bring you glad tidings of great joy and it will be for all the people. For today is born unto you a saviour in the city of David. He is the one you have been waiting for, the anointed one who is the Messiah. This is how you will know who he is, you will find this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

Now, as if the message the angel brought wasn't enough to take in, the next thing you know we were surrounded by what could only be called a heavenly host. It was as though all of heaven had joined this angel and they were singing praises and glorifying God. It was the loudest noise I had ever heard, not a deafening sound but a magnificent fanfare of trumpets and voices all singing in total harmony. I have no idea how long we listened to that beautiful choir, but I was so engrossed that I didn't want the celebration to end. Nor did I really have any understanding of what was going on, but I knew that if heaven had come to earth, then things were about to change for us. This wonderful scene began to fade as the night became dark again and the music faded. The heavenly display was over and the three of us were left speechless looking up at the stars.



After what seemed like an eternity, Eli spoke. ‘Call some of the boys back from the perimeter to take our watch; we must go to Bethlehem to see for ourselves,’ he said. ‘If this is the Messiah then we have to go now.’ ‘Hold on Eli,’ I said, you have no idea where to find this baby and I was there today there is no way to even know where to start.’ Ari had now come to his senses and pointed out that although the angels were gone the star was still there and it was directly over Bethlehem ‘maybe if we just keep heading toward it?’ It wasn’t really such a crazy idea. As much as we were shepherds, it wasn’t just the fishermen who used the stars at night to guide them. Why would it not work for us? We weren’t that far from Bethlehem, and it was just 5 miles outside Jerusalem. Our flocks were kept right in the middle so we could be there in a couple of hours. ‘Wait, we can’t go without a gift,’ but there wasn’t time to go back home so we took one of our best blankets and headed off.

After making sure that the flocks were safe, we began our journey, walking and talking the whole way. You can only imagine the excitement. I mean, it isn’t every day that an angel speaks to you, and it isn’t any day that a heavenly host spills out of heaven and comes to earth. Finally in town we began the search for this baby. Thankfully, it was now the early hours of the morning and most of the town was asleep. The star was still guiding us, and we were so glad that it hadn’t disappeared behind clouds. For this time of year, it was unusual to have a night as clear as this.

Finally, things started to make sense, the star was directly above the inn the baby must have been in. Then we realized that we would have to knock up the inn keeper and that could upset a few people. Then again, he is an inn keeper and people must wake him all the time looking for rooms. We didn’t even have to knock; the inn keeper’s wife was already on her way out the door with arms full of blankets. We asked her if one of her guests had a baby with them when they arrived. The reply of no did not make sense because the star was right above the inn. Of course, we couldn’t tell her the name of the people



we were looking for nor could we even describe them because we had never met them. This was going to look very suspicious. I had to take the risk and if I sounded crazy well... I proceeded to tell her all about the angel, and the heavenly host and the celebration in heaven and the journey following the star. If you had seen her face, firstly, disbelief, then, wonder, at the thoughts of the heavenly host and when we told her about the star and how it had led us to the inn she looked up. She seemed to understand and began leading us around the back of the inn to the stables. We followed her but we were sure that we were going the wrong way.

Within a few moments all became clear. She went into the stable leading the way. Just as we got to the door, we realized that there was in fact a young couple in there. Well, now we knew what the armfuls of blankets were for because it was a cold night. The inn keeper's wife was explaining that there was no room because of the census but the couple needed a place to stay, and this was the only place they had left. Sometime earlier her husband had to wake her, as the baby had decided to appear. She had been taking care of the young girl, whose name was Mary, ever since.

She explained to Mary that we had come to see the baby and that we had a tall tale to tell her. Joseph, her husband, beckoned us in. We offered our blanket to add to the ones already there and proceeded to tell the couple what had happened in the field. We told them what the angels had said and how we had to come to see for ourselves. They welcomed us and didn't seem at all surprised by our disruption of their night. When we had finished, they invited us to look at the child.

There he was. Just as the Angel said. Wrapped in swaddling clothes. Lying in a manger. The Saviour of the world, the Messiah, was asleep in a feeding trough. This did not seem fitting. But then again, nothing about tonight was normal. I mean, we were shepherds. Why would the angels suddenly appear to us? Especially when the town was in chaos because of the census there must have been others more important

than us. Let's face it, to not even have a room to be born in, well, that just didn't seem fitting at all. But here we are, before the manger that our Saviour lay in. The Messiah that was promised was right there, all I could do was fall to my knees beside him, and at that moment everything was just right.

We spent a while talking to the couple and eventually gave our apologies as it was time to leave. I looked back one more time. I knew this would not be the last time that I encountered this baby. Mary thanked us for coming and for the blanket, she also told us that his name was Jesus which is just as well as the wife would not have been happy if I hadn't asked. Apparently, women like to know the details, you know, name, weight etc.

When we got back home to the farm, we told all the family what happened that night and that the Saviour had come. We knew that we would not see the deliverance of our people for quite a few years, at least until Jesus became an adult, but we knew that he would save the world one day and we were so grateful that God had chosen us to show it to. Our lives changed forever overnight, only God can do that.

Time passed, and we believed, and of course we waited for news of the deliverance of our people as promised in Isaiah, but 30 years had passed, and I was now an old man. There were many rumblings of Messiah's, different men claiming that they were the one but no deliverance and no announcements in synagogues. I often wondered if the baby that we saw made it through Herod's decree to kill all the first born. If the rumours were correct Mary and Joseph had been warned and they had fled to Egypt, but there had been no sign since and it was so long ago my hope for salvation was fading with every year that passed. As a young man I was so hopeful now I had just my memories of a beautiful vision, at times I wondered did that really happen, but mostly I believed.

There is a man who had been arrested. He seemed to be the real deal, also named Jesus like the baby we saw. It was a common name, but I had hoped he was the one. I had been told of miracles he had done which are beyond belief. Blind men could now see, the deaf could hear and the latest one was that he had raised a man from the dead. If the rumours are true, I know why he has been arrested. There is no way that the Roman's would allow anyone so powerful to roam the streets, and I would say the Sanhedrin would be out of sorts and would need to get him under control too. They have a nice wee number going with the Romans. They hate them and the oppression that they have brought to the people, but like Herod Antipas all those years ago, it's all about who is in power, and they have still got some clout, even though the Romans rule.

Passover is coming and as is the tradition of the Prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate, there will be a prisoner offered for a reduced sentence as a gesture of good faith by the Romans. I prayed they would see sense and let Jesus go. Barabas is a rebel who fights against the Romans, a murderer it is said. Jesus, well from all that I have heard about this man, he is a peacemaker, a healer, and a teacher. I was in Jerusalem the day this charade took place. I watched as the crowd gathered for the presentation of the prisoners. Out came Pontius Pilate, proclaiming the goodness and mercy of the Roman Empire which was one of the reasons for Paschal Pardon. Appeasing the Jews before the Passover feast kept everything on a controllable, collaborative level. Normally, there has been a discussion the night before between Caiaphas and Pilate and the prisoner is already chosen to be presented in advance, but today is different. Today there are two prisoners, and the crowd has gathered to see what will happen next.

Barabbas was first. His riotous behavior and accusations of murdering Romans; he was spitting on the guards who walked him out yelling taunts of Roman hatred. It was not a pretty sight. Then they paraded out Jesus. He didn't speak or defend himself and because of this the crowd went silent. There were no accusations against him, he had

broken no laws, in fact Pilate himself said ‘what had he done?’ The gossip among the crowd was that Pilate was trying to convince them to choose Jesus to be saved from death because his wife had warned him, to have nothing to do with the demise of this man. The dreams she had been having lately had told her he was righteous, and they would be cursed if her husband allowed this man to be put to death.

Then the murmuring started at first a whisper from a man somewhere in the middle of the crowd. Crucify him! Someone else joined in from the other side. Crucify him! Then the crowd joined in. Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Louder and louder; Crucify Him! The whole crowd screamed and shouted until the noise was like one thunderous, deafening voice. The last time I heard a noise this loud was when all of heaven had touched earth with the heavenly host singing in harmony. Now I could hear the shouts of evil, hatred and all of hell rising up to condemn a good man, a righteous man, over a murderer. It was too much. It was just too much. My heart, my spirit knew I could not be found here in this place where this man was condemned. Just being in the crowd and seeing him in person I knew, like Pilates wife, call it revelation or just common sense, that there was something so wrong about this.

Was he the Messiah? The one foretold by the prophets and angels, and if he was, why did he not call down heaven? I did not understand. God why have we not been delivered? I still believed my hope rising because now more than ever we needed a Saviour

From the stories that were told later that day, they took Jesus away. But before they did, Pilate, who also knew how wrong this was, washed his hands of the whole thing in front of the crowd. Literally washed his hands as if that would absolve him of his part in this injustice. This didn’t discourage them. They continued to yell and jeer until they got their own way. I moved away as quickly as an old man can, with the words crucify him ringing in my ears.

Discussing all the events with my brothers later we realized the men who began the crucify him chant must have been planted in the crowd. You see, from where I was standing, the second man could not possibly have heard what the first man said so how did he know what to shout. Men planted to steer the crowd Eli suggested. Ari, ever the cynic about the relationship between the Sanhedrin and the Romans, said they must have been responsible for this. They must fear Jesus more than the Romans themselves.

I know that Jesus was tortured and taken to be crucified I'm sure you know it too. You would think that was the end of my story, what else could there be? Well, hold onto your hats, the best is yet to come.

This is how I know that the baby we saw, and the man who was crucified, is the Saviour who was promised. The rumours reached us not long after the crucifixion. There was talk of the strange phenomenon of darkness that lasted three hours as Jesus died on the cross. At the moment of his death, the veil in the temple in Jerusalem tore in two, the earth shook, and the rocks split. Graves opened and people who were already dead were raised. Eli, Ari and I made our way to Jerusalem. We knew the beginning was not as we had imagined. The life of the Messiah was not how we imagined it and certainly we had no idea what was happening now, but we wanted to be part of it. His tomb was empty, and his followers claimed that he had risen from the dead. Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was, by-the-way, the same young girl in the stable that night was among the followers, and they were waiting for him. One of his disciples, Thomas, had doubted that he was raised from the dead, but Jesus had appeared to him too and showed him the scars on his feet, and he had touched the holes in his hands.

We were there in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. We witnessed his followers teaching and preaching on that day in languages they could never have known. Gifted by the Holy Spirit as it fell and the tongues of fire that represented the presence of God rested on them. We fell to our knees once more as we found ourselves in the presence of God

again. We were part of the 3500 who were saved and baptized that day forever changed by the baby, the man and now the Saviour.

I am part of the flock and Jesus is my shepherd. I have chosen to follow my shepherd into eternity for now I am redeemed. His sacrifice, His death has set me free. I was chosen as a witness so I will speak of all that happened daily. Jesus said that those who have not seen and believe will also be blessed. That's why I will tell my incredible story so that others will believe. There is no greater gift than this one and no greater shepherd. Take it from someone who knows.



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