

The Angel's Message
By Ann Lenssen

“Look at this, Andrew” called Seth. “A new lamb!”

Andrew hurried over to see this unexpected baby. The tiny form barely moved as it rested next to its mother. “It’s so small, Seth. I don’t think it should have come yet. I’ll get Father,” he said.

With sheep bleating and shoving, Andrew moved through the flock until he was close enough to call out, “Father, come! There’s a new baby lamb over by those bushes. Seth’s with it.”

“Just born? Now?” asked Father, his long shepherd’s coat flapping around his legs as he joined Andrew. “I’d better have a look.”

“What do you think will happen, Father? Will it get sick? Or starve?” asked Andrew as they walked together.

“I don’t know. I just wasn’t expecting any new babies right now. Usually they come closer to warm weather,” Father said.

“That’s what I thought,” said Andrew.

“You’ve learned a lot your first season out here, Andrew.” Father put his hand on Andrew’s shoulder while they walked.

“We’re twelve now,” Andrew said pointing to Seth. “Old enough to help with the flock at night. It’s quite a job, isn’t it, to keep them from wandering off?”

“Indeed it is,” said Father. “Here’s Seth. Let’s see the lamb.”

Father inspected it carefully before turning to the boys, looking solemn. “This one did come too soon. It’s small and weak. I don’t know if it’ll live until morning. The mother looks weak, too. There’s not much we can do, except wait and see.”

“I’ll watch them tonight, Father,” said Andrew.

“All right, son. But these things happen sometimes. I don’t want you to be disappointed if ...”

“I understand.” Andrew watched his father return to the other shepherds, and saw them all shake their heads after he spoke to them. But Andrew reached down and patted the mother sheep. “I’ll take care of you, and when the lamb is well, it’ll be my very own.”

“I can take care of it, Andrew. I saw it first. It really belongs to me,” said Seth.

Andrew turned to him. “My father said I could do it. The lamb is mine now. There’ll be others in the spring. Perhaps you could have one of those.”

Seth looked sadly at the tiny lamb, then without a word, turned and walked away.

Andrew shrugged his shoulders and sat down. Gently he spoke to the lamb. “You’ll be fine. Here’s some extra grass for your mother, and I’ll stay right here to help keep you warm. Drink some milk, little one; it’ll make you strong.”

For several hours Andrew coaxed the lamb and spoke reassuringly to the mother, but there was no change. About midnight he felt sleepy and decided to rest for a moment. Instantly his eyes closed and he slept, arms still cradled around the lamb.

Suddenly he awoke. Was it morning? he wondered. The sun was high in the sky already. Or was it? The horizon was still dark. There was a bright light above the flock, though. And a sound of some sort. Andrew rubbed his eyes, his heart starting to beat faster. Where was Father? And the other shepherds? Was something dreadful happening to them? Andrew listened again to the strange sound. It was like music. Someone was talking. Yes, that was it. A voice coming from the bright light. Fear gripped him. Even the sheep were trembling. Was this a dream?

“Don’t be afraid,” said the voice kindly. It was then that Andrew saw a person in shining white speak to his father and the others. They were on their knees, hands covering their faces. At the sound of the messenger’s voice, they looked up and listened.

“Fear not, I have good news for you and all people everywhere. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

All at once there were many other voices like the first one. All together they praised God, their white robes shining with a glow that lit up the entire sky: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased!”

The light faded then, and disappeared into the distance. Andrew jumped up and went to his father.

“Town of David,” his father was saying excitedly. “That’s Bethlehem!”

“We’re to find the Christ child there!” said another.

“Let’s go right away and see for ourselves,” said Father. “A child wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger? How can this be? I have never seen a baby in a manger!”

“Who will watch the flock?” asked one of the shepherds. “They’ll scatter if no one is here.”

“Andrew?” asked Father.

Andrew nodded, still dazed by the wonder of this event. “I’ll stay, Father!” He grasped his shepherd’s crook tightly. “I’ll watch the flock until you return.”

“Thank you, Andrew.”

As the shepherds hurried away, Andrew saw Seth glance at him quickly. Then he followed the others toward town. He could see them talking and nodding vigorously. Words like “light” and “message” floated back to him.

Andrew rubbed his eyes and looked up into the night sky. It really had happened. It wasn’t a dream. Right before him, in a light as bright as the sun, God’s messengers had said that the Christ child was born. “Glory to God,” they had said, and “Peace on earth.”

He suddenly remembered the baby lamb and its mother. Returning to the spot where he’s left them, Andrew looked anxiously at the pair, then stopped in surprise. Both sheep were alert, and the baby lamb was nursing vigorously. It was still alive! And getting better! Wait until he told Seth!

Then he recalled the hurt look on his friend’s face when Andrew had claimed the lamb for his own. Peace on earth was a message for him, too, he thought. He and Seth could share the lamb after all. Together they’d help it grow big and strong.

Golden rays of dawn tinted the sky when the shepherds finally returned to the flock.

“We saw Him, just as the angels said we would.” Father reported. “A tiny baby asleep in a manger, with cows and sheep in stalls nearby. How remarkable! We told everyone we saw about the bright light and the baby. I think the entire town is awake early today with this news. They hardly know what to think of it.”

“It’s true then, about the baby. I knew it was, Father. I knew it couldn’t have been a dream.” Andrew paused. “By the way, do you know where Seth is?”

Father pointed to the last of the shepherd returning to the field.

“Seth,” Andrew called, walking over to meet him. “I’ve changed my mind about the lamb. Let’s both take care of it. We’ll share it.”

Seth smiled. “I’d like that, Andrew. Come on, let’s go see how it’s doing.”

“Better. Much better. I think they’re both going to be all right.” On the way to the sheep, Andrew asked, “Why don’t you tell me about the baby of Bethlehem? It’s amazing, don’t you think?”

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