

Lost Sheep

The scene is of three shepherds – Jacob, the senior is already annoyed with Caleb and Samuel who are reporting to him the loss of their sheep. This short drama is intended to draw out the idea that while the encounter with angels was clearly spectacular, the “real event” was the very ordinary looking birth of a child. In a similar way, as Christians today, we may sometimes struggle to recognise where God is at work in our world, but the stories and narratives of our faith give us the confidence to believe that his purposes can be fulfilled in the most unexpected of circumstances.

JACOB: So where exactly are the sheep?

CALEB: Well that’s just it

JACOB: Just what?

CALEB: We . . . erm

SAMUEL: *(interrupting somewhat bravely)* We don’t know! They’re gone!

JACOB: *(in measured disbelief)* You’ve lost an entire flock of sheep

CALEB: Technically it was two flocks

(Jacob looks at him with a degree of threat)

SAMUEL: Well we have looked for them

CALEB: We just don’t know where to find them

JACOB: You’ll be telling me your name is Bo Peep next

CALEB: Nah . . .that would be silly

SAMUEL: Yeah .. *(Slightly embarrassed)*– silly!

JACOB: And the reason you have lost your sheep, is because they were frightened by angels *(Caleb and Samuel nod in a somewhat exaggerated way as if to affirm the normality and reasonableness of the situation)*

CALEB: Well it was a terrifying sight . . . almost ran off myself at first.

JACOB: But you did run off!

SAMUEL: But that wasn’t until the angels had finished.

CALEB: Well aren’t the flocks insured?

JACOB: Not against acts of God!

CALEB: Yeah but that means storms and earthquakes and things.

JACOB: *(somewhat sarcastically)* As opposed to Angelic visitations; which are an everyday hazard of modern wool production.

CALEB: No that’s *(he stops – thinking the better of continuing)*

SAMUEL: *(trying to move things on)* I'm sorry boss, but all we can do is tell you what happened.

JACOB: And can you give me any evidence to support the insurance claim, some leftover angel dust perhaps, or the odd discarded wing feather?

CALEB: Don't be silly – angels don't have wings!

SAMUEL: Or angel dust

JACOB: So how do you know they were angels?

CALEB: Well they were all kind of . . . angelic *(Jacob does not look impressed)*

SAMUEL: *(almost interrupting)* We just knew!

CALEB: There was only one of them at first . . . sheep seemed OK with that, I mean a few of the ewes got a bit jumpy . . . but once the entire choir turned up, that was it, the flock just scarpered.

JACOB: And that's supposed to make it more believable is it – *(as if quoting them)* confronted with one angel the situation remained manageable but we were eventually overcome by an unexpected surge in celestial attenders.

CALEB: I'm just telling you what happened boss . . . don't shoot the messenger!

JACOB: Look . . . what I don't understand is why didn't you just round them up again, once the angels had left.

SAMUEL: Because we went to see the baby

CALEB: Beautiful little fella he was . . . poor little mite out there in the night air

JACOB: Baby?

SAMUEL: That's what the angels came to tell us . . . about the baby.

JACOB: *(getting more and more sceptical)* And where exactly was the baby?

CALEB: In the feeding trough round the back of that new travel lodge they've just built

JACOB: O.K. maybe now we are getting somewhere, you had to leave the sheep in order to rescue a distressed infant who had been left in one of the town's feeding troughs.

SAMUEL: Well I suppose that's one way of putting it

JACOB: And you took the baby to the local hospital then; they can maybe vouch for your story?

CALEB: Nah!!

JACOB: Handed him in to the authorities?

CALEB: Of course not, we left him with his mum and dad!

JACOB: So this child was with his parents then

SAMUEL: Well yes . . . , he'd just been born

JACOB: Good! Good! *(feeling he has another credible line for the insurance claim)* So you were summoned on behalf of a distressed young woman, we won't mention by whom, who was in labour and needed urgent assistance with the birth!

CALEB: Don't be daft . . .he was well and truly born by the time we got there . . . bless her, she'd got him all cleaned up and wrapped; and the young lad had made a bit of a crib in the feeding trough – they really had done their best.

JACOB: (getting somewhat exasperated) O.K. O.K. let's just go through this one more time. You were sitting, doing your usual night-shift watching the two main herds on the grazing slopes to the north of the town.

CALEB: Yeah that's right

JACOB: Around 2 am, the sheep are disturbed by an angelic being in the sky – without wings – who announces to you the birth of a child.

SAMUEL: Not just any child!

JACOB: Who announces to you the birth of the Saviour of the world. .Said angel is then joined by a multitude of similar beings who in performing a musical rendition of glory to God in the highest, terrify the sheep which immediately scatter into the surrounding countryside.

SAMUEL: I think you've just about got it boss.

JACOB: OK – this is the thing. . . if I am to believe your story why, having seen the most spectacular, supernatural manifestation since . . . since Moses climbed mount Sinai . . . would you then rush off to visit a homeless couple who had just given birth to a child in a public animal shelter.

CALEB: Because that's what the angels told us to do.

JACOB: (*becoming slightly irritated*) And it doesn't strike you as just slightly incredulous that God; Almighty God; Ruler and Creator of heaven and earth, would go to all this trouble so that a bunch of second-rate shepherds could pop in with a congratulations card on some anonymous, and no doubt unmarried, couple that no respectable innkeeper would have under their roof.

SAMUEL: But that's just it boss – I think that's exactly what God did.

JACOB: And you talk about this baby, a baby born into complete chaos, as though he was more remarkable than your entire army of performing angels appearing in the night sky.

SAMUEL: I know it sounds crazy, and I can't explain it, but he was.

JACOB: And can you give me one shred of reason why God Almighty would send something so spectacular to make *you* aware of something so unspectacular? Or why God would leave the parents of his Messiah to sleep rough, and trust you two to be the only witnesses.

SAMUEL: I really don't know boss; I really don't know . . . but that young couple . . . they were cold, and scared, and exhausted . . .

CALEB: Travelled for miles poor things

SAMUEL I think they just needed someone to reassure them at that crucial moment that this baby really was who God had told them he was. And for some crazy, inexplicable reason, God chose us to do that job.

CALEB: Wow Sam . . . I've never thought of it like that!

SAMUEL: And God probably figured that it was going to take a whole army of angels to convince a couple of thick shepherds like Caleb and me to leave the sheep and do it.

JACOB: *(with an air of realisation - probably more that they are sticking to the story than actually believing it)* And you really do expect me to believe all of this!

SAMUEL: Put it this way boss – if this is going to cost me my job, then so be it. But if you asked me to choose between that and what we heard and saw last night, then I'll settle for having been the first person to see the Messiah.

CALEB: Yeah . . me too!

SAMUEL: A moment in that child's presence was worth the flocks on every hillside in Judea