

The angel's message to the shepherds



Luke 2: 8–20

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In the night that Jesus Christ was born, there were shepherds in the fields with their flocks. Suddenly a bright light shone around them. The shepherds were startled and knelt trembling with fear. The angel brought them the joyful tidings of the birth of Jesus Christ. Suddenly the heavens were filled with angels singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all in whom he delights." Then it was dark again. The shepherds set out to look for the holy child and found it in a stable. The shepherds told Mary and Joseph what they had been told by the angel.

The children rejoice over the angel's message: "Today the Saviour has been born to you."

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ichael helps his father, who is a shepherd in Judaea. Michael already accompanies his father, his older brothers and other shepherds with their flocks from pasture to pasture. He wants to learn all he can from his father so that he can also be a good shepherd. He learns where to find suitable grazing and watering places, how to care for sick animals and especially how to ward off attacks from wild animals such as lions, bears or wolves.

It is evening. The flocks are on the fields near Bethlehem. Michael walks next to his father. Tirelessly two dogs run around the flocks to drive and keep the sheep together. When they reach a field enclosed by a wall, they stop as the animals will be safe here for the night. One by one the sheep enter the sheep-pen through a narrow opening. In this way the shepherd counts his sheep and makes sure that none have gone astray. Michael also counts them.

The shepherds stay near the sheep. They, too, will spend the night out in the open under the stars. The men are tired. They sit down wearily and kindle a fire to warm themselves and keep wild animals at bay. Apart from the crackling of the fire

and the rustling of the wind, all is quiet. Now and again a sheep bleats. Michael also sometimes hears the howl of a wild animal. Otherwise all is calm and still in the clear and starry night.

1

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appears in brilliant light. The boy and the shepherds are startled. They throw themselves to the ground and cover their eyes with their hands. They are trembling with fear! But the angel speaks to them reassuringly: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today, in the city of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger." The shepherds listen with bated breath. But no sooner has the angel finished speaking than the heavens are lit with a great light and a multitude of the heavenly host appears hovering over the fields singing a hymn of such beauty as has never before been heard on earth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all in whom he delights!" Then, slowly, the sound becomes weaker and the light grows dimmer. The heavenly music echoes away, and the countryside is enveloped by darkness again.

2

Michael is afraid to speak. The shepherds are awe-struck. After a while one of them says: "Come, let us go to Bethlehem and look for the Saviour!" Michael hesitates: "What about the sheep, who will look after them?" His father answers: "God will protect them. We shall be back soon." Michael is relieved that he does not have to be alone.

The shepherds soon find the place where Jesus Christ was born. They enter hesitantly and see Mary and Joseph, two ordinary people like themselves. Seeing the child in the

manger, they kneel before him and pray. They are the first ones to see the Saviour of the world. The shepherds explain why they have come and recount what they have experienced in the field, which makes Mary happy. The following day the shepherds tell everyone they meet about what happened the previous night and what the angel has told them. The glad tidings of the birth of Jesus Christ spread like wildfire.

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*The angel says to the shepherds:
"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy! Today a Saviour has been born to you.
You will find the child wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."*

- 1 We look at the picture with the children. What is happening here? (Listen to the children's suggestions, then commence with the story.)**
- 2 After the brightness, darkness returns. What would have impressed the shepherds most? (The angels' song: "Fear not! Unto you this day the Saviour is born, the Redeemer.")**
- 3 Why do we still rejoice as much over the birth of Jesus Christ today as did those shepherds?**