

[I wrote the first version of this first person monologue over thirty years ago. It is not exegesis, but hopefully reflects on the broader story of God’s grace revealed in the Gospel.]

A Shepherd and The Lamb (based on various texts)

By Pastor Steve Nash

Call me Yitzak, Yitzak ben Yakov. I am a humble shepherd, as was My father, and his father before him. I am a son of Abraham and a follower of *Yeshua ha Meshiach*, Jesus, the Christ... I am what I am by the grace of the Most High – that is really the Story I have come to share – the story of His Grace! The One True God, the God of Israel, has acted in history of our good—but I am getting ahead of myself—I am old now, fourscore, 80 years?... but I come today to tell you of a night many years ago, I was but a boy... Well, my 10th birthday had passed, in my culture, I was nearly a man, it was time to work, time to join my father and the other men in the fields!

Yes, I know that we Shepherds are not the most respected of people... especially by the pious Jews... People say we smell like sheep... [sniffs himself, and then shrugs]. I say is that such a bad thing? If I minded the smell of sheep, I wouldn’t be a shepherd! It is true that it has always been difficult for us to be observant Jews—we need to be in the fields taking care of the flocks—how can we get into the city for worship and sacrifice? Of course, that has changed for everyone since the Temple was destroyed last year, almost 40 years after our Lord’s departure... There will be no more sacrifices! Most of us Shepherds are not educated... few of us learn letters, but then why would a shepherd need to read? But even those who can’t read can still hear the Word of the Lord, and learn it, and hide it in our heart...

הָעָם הַהֹלְכִים בַּחֹשֶׁךְ רָאוּ אֹרֶךְ גָּדוֹל יֹשְׁבֵי
בְּאֶרֶץ צִלְמוֹת אֹרֶךְ נָגַהּ עֲלֵיהֶם

hā‘ām hahōlkîm baḥōšek rā’û ’ôr gādōl yōšbê

bə‘ereṣ ṣalmāwet ’ôr nāgah ‘ălêhem

Oh, you don’t speak Hebrew? Excuse me my Gentile friends! Let me translate into you strange tongue: *“The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.”* Do you now recognize the words of the great prophet, Isaiah? 7 centuries before the Master’s birth He spoke of the coming of the Light of the World! Did he know that the Light would be both the Shepherd of Israel and the Lamb of God?

Yes, for centuries shepherds have been at the heart of Israel's faith... The fathers were shepherds were they not? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob... Moses himself tended sheep—ahh, and this is the heart of the matter—when God was hardening the heart of Pharaoh, he told the people through Moses to sacrifice a Lamb, a spotless Lamb—and to put the blood over the door and on the door posts... The blood meant life in that home instead of death...

I am a just shepherd, and like my father and his father before him I tend my sheep in the fields around a small and humble hamlet in Judea. The name of our town means "House of Bread," "Bethlehem" you call it... a small place but with a great history... Our father David was from this same village, he too tended sheep you know, on these very hills... Ahh, the City of David... The great prophet Micah spoke of this place when he wrote centuries before the Master's birth...

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the clans of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."

This would be the place from which the Messiah would come... The Promised One, the Son of the Most High... the Son of David for whom we had been waiting for so long. [*Looks aside with a sneer of disdain*]

...We were under the thumb of Rome even in those days, we needed our Rescuer, we were looking and waiting for the Hope of Israel. There was so much we did not understand...

It was a quiet and cold night 3 score and ten years ago... can it be that long, 70 years? It seems like yesterday... We were in the fields taking care of the sheep with my father and a few other hardworking, humble shepherds. It was a clear night... how I love such nights, the Heavens truly declare the glory of God! Oh, so many stars! I tried to count them more than once but I always ran out of numbers long before I ran out of stars! (I wasn't the brightest candle in the Menorah!). It wasn't a dream... I was laying on the ground, looking up at the marvel of the heavens... Suddenly, a glorious sight, I can hardly describe it even after all these years... There suspended above us in the sky a shining angel of the Lord! I was already laying on the ground, but we all knew we were in the presence of holiness! My father and the men with him fell to their faces in fear before that powerful creature from heaven... Why was he here... what had we done... what did this mean??? And then, the incredible Word...

"Fear not..." Fear not? How could we not be afraid at such a glorious sight? Though his voice was powerful, at the same time his words were

comforting, calming, peaceful. And you know, somehow, immediately, I was not afraid. But he went on, and his next words brought a message that our people had longed to hear for so long... He said, *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11).

Christ the Lord... Messiah had come? MESSIAH HAD COME!

For centuries our people had looked for the coming of the promised One... It was our “blessed hope” at that time to be sure. Messiah! The prophecies had started almost from the beginning... from the time of the Fall... Adam and Eve sinned, and brought death and the curse upon humanity... But even then God promised a Seed, a Rescuer who would crush the Serpent’s head... And God gave them skins for a covering... Think of it... the Author of life, God himself, killed one of his creatures, shedding its blood, to provide a covering for the man and the woman... Yes, they learned quickly: sin would require a price, a life, it would require blood... The hope of a savior, the messiah, took many shapes in the Scriptures... The sacrifices yes, also... The great prophet Isaiah spoke of a suffering Servant when he said,

“He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth... (Isa 53:2-7).

Like a sheep...He, the Messiah, the King, the Good Shepherd, He was also the Lamb... The Servant, the sacrifices, another strand of our hope was the promise made to David. He was promised a Son, an ideal Son who would have an eternal reign, and who also would be called the Son of God... Yet... who also would be a rejected, righteous sufferer. This cord of three strands, the Lamb, the Servant, the promised and rejected King was woven through the fabric of the Scriptures...

How could they come together? *When* would the promised One arrive? The Angel announced that day, to us, the joyous news...

“TODAY, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you... He is Christ the Lord...”

Messiah! Could it be true? Today? Generations before had longed for this day, and now it had come! The Son of David, the Servant, the Lamb, my King, he was here!

But what did the angel say? Could it be true? “Onto YOU has been born a Savior...” To us? Including humble shepherds like us? We were not the pious ones, the tsaddaqim! We were not the religious elite! We were not aristocracy or royalty, we were not powerful or influential. Could it be that he came for the meek? Could it be he had come for sinners?

I must say that it didn’t strike me at that moment on that starry night, but for many nights afterward I heard my father and the other men speculate, “Why did the angel bring this news to us?” Why *not* the priests, or the Scribes? Only years later did it dawn on us... we were in those fields caring for the sheep, animals destined for Temple Sacrifice. He was THE sacrifice, God’s Lamb, who would take away the sin of the world. It was as though the angel was saying, “*Why are you here watching over these lambs? Get down to Bethlehem and see the Lamb of God!*”

Thirty years later, as he presented himself to John the Baptizer to begin his public ministry, John saw him and said: “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” The blood of our sacrifices could not take away sin—the blood of bulls and goats or the ashes of a heifer could not sanctify those who were unclean... a perfect sacrifice was needed, one of infinite worth... The Eternal Son, Emmanuel, God with us—The Lamb had been born! How could we imagine that one day, His precious blood would be shed?

The word the Angel spoke was more than we could imagine... “*This will be a sign for you... You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.*” Where? In a manger? The Messiah? Our King and Savior? The Great I AM, now incarnate, in a humble stable, his first bed, an animal’s feeding bin?

Suddenly, there was with that Angel a multitude of Angels, the hosts of heaven, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Peace! How long we had waited for it. God’s favor had truly rested on us. Simple people, and yes, sinful people... But God

chose us to receive the Good NEWS, he chose us to be his own, to be his witnesses, even to be his messengers...

We hurried to town, and found them... exactly as the Angel had said: Emmanuel... A baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger... Have you held a newborn baby? So weak, so fragile. Think of it—on such a slender thread as the feeble throb of an infant life, the salvation of the World should hang!

“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.”

His first bed in this cold world a feeding bin, his first shelter, a grotto used as a shelter for animals. But his name told the story: Jesus, *Yeshua*, the Savior.

We shouted to whoever would listen that Messiah had been born. The Rescuer was here, the Lord had come, let earth receive her King! But, many had shouted that before—who would listen to a handful of Shepherds?

We were the first, but not the only ones that received a revelation that the Messiah had come. Sometime after His birth the Magi came from the East to see the new born king, they offered Him gifts and worshipped Him, and then left by another way to return to their own land. What followed next was the most horrific experience our village would ever know. That madman Herod! We had no warning, Herod’s soldiers stormed into town, ripping babies and toddlers from their mothers’ arms... slaughter... every male child under 2! Oh, the wailing! The unspeakable grief! *They could not be comforted.* The pain of violently losing a Son... Do you know it? God does... [*pauses, looks downward and sighs*] ...but His time had not yet come. We later learned that Mary and Joseph had escaped with the Son to Egypt. Only after Herod died did they return to his family’s home in Nazareth.

You know the rest of the story... He grew up as did I, and for years, we heard almost nothing more about him. It was only later that we began to hear reports of a rabbi who taught with authority... a prophet, miracle worker and preacher. When I heard the stories, I thought, it must be Him. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, cured lepers, cast out demons, he gave sight to the blind, he even raised the dead! When I heard his name, *Jesus*, there was no doubt. The name his parents had given him that night in Bethlehem! We thought he would soon assume the throne of David and establish his kingdom. Even we, the shepherds, forgot what the Lamb had come to do.

He entered Jerusalem that last week... At first to cheers, “*Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. The King of Israel!*” A week is such a short time... the days pass quickly... Then it happened. Betrayal. Denial. Scourging. The cross. Darkness. How could they do it? Why did he let them?

We should have known: “*Without the shedding of blood, there could be no remission of sins.*” There was sadness and confusion among us for three days. What had happened? What did this mean? Three days later, all doubt was removed forever! The tomb was empty! He appeared, first to Cephas, then to the 12, and on one occasion to over 500 of the brethren at once! I have spoken with those who were there—they saw him, and touched him, they even ate with Him—he is alive! He is the resurrection and the life... the Way, the Truth and the Life!

For forty days he appeared to His disciples and taught them about the kingdom. The time came for him to return to heaven... The disciples then asked Him: “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” The Master is so patient with us! He didn’t rebuke them, like a Shepherd guiding a lamb that was wandering he simply “redirected” them. It wasn’t a stupid question after all, it was just the wrong question! Rather than ask “when?” the kingdom will come they should have asked “what shall we do until that day?”!

He said they were to wait for the Comforter to come, the Spirit who would empower them, then they would be His witnesses starting in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth! When He finished speaking, before their very eyes, He ascended into Heaven! As they stood, gazing heavenward, an angel spoke: “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing upward? This same Jesus, who you saw go into Heaven, will return in like manner!*” HE WILL RETURN! Now, in faith, we wait. Our beloved brother Paul said in a letter to Titus (2:11-14),

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works...

That is my hope, that is how I must live. And you? Have you put your hope, your trust in Him? He is the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who laid down his life for the sheep...

Yeshua, Jesus, there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved. Are you looking for the Blessed Hope, the glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ? As surely as he came the first time, in fulfillment of Scripture, he will come again, according to his promise. Are you waiting? Is He your Blessed Hope? Good. How will you live until he returns?

I have looked about your town... Your trees and lights and decorations are beautiful. But even more beautiful is this truth: *The Word was made flesh, and lived for a while among us... and, ...as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become children of God, even to those who believe on His name.* Do you know Him? Have you received the true gift of Christmas? Will you follow Him? During these days of celebration, tell someone you know and love about the Gift the Father offers them! *Baruch ha shem Adonai, Yeshua, ha Meshiach!* Blessed be the Name of the Lord! Jesus Christ. *Shalom!* Peace! Go, tell your people, and all who will listen, what the Lord has done for you! Amen.