

12/24

“The Arrival Foretold”

Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”



Special Music: “Somewhere in Your Silent Night”

Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT-5cP4BeoI>

I OVERHEARD A SHEPHERD

I overheard an amazing story tonight. I had just come into town and was having a hard time finding anywhere to rest. I was tired and filthy from my journey and still had a way to go. Because of Caesar's edict, I was forced to travel from Idumea to Cana, just so I could be counted. Bethlehem was one of many small towns on the way. Although he had no rooms available, the local innkeeper agreed to sell me some bread. It had just come out of the oven and was warm and fresh, and I was so very hungry. I decided to sit for a while, eat my bread and then continue my journey. Jerusalem was only about six miles down the road. I could be there by sunrise. I was sure I could find a room there.

Looking into the night sky, there seemed to be more stars than usual. It was a peaceful night, so very serene. There was a soft breeze blowing but it gave presence to an almost an unnatural calm. I settled into a bench under a juniper tree.

There were some shepherds walking and talking nearby. They seemed to be returning to their flocks outside of town. There was an energy about them that did not fit the calmness of the night. They were animated and waving their hands in conversation. It was hard not to notice them and their excitement. One was telling the other about seeing an angel and then a host of angels. The angel had told them to come into town and see the child. A very special child. A newborn. A child born in a stable on the outskirts of town. A child born out of prophecy who would change the world.

At first, I just dismissed all this as made up story to get some attention. Who would think to bring a child into the world in a stable? Maybe the inn didn't have room, but someone, someone would have taken this mother in so that she didn't have to give birth out in the elements. It made no sense that this child would be born in barn.

I finished my bread in silence. Since I really wasn't in much of a hurry, I decided to check the story out. If it was true, maybe I could help in some way. Making my way to the edge of town I saw some people lingering around an old barn. There were a couple of oil lamps, some cows, chickens, and a couple of donkeys. The barn had definitely seen its better days, hardly any real protection for anyone inside. The people seemed excited, almost in awe. I walked over to the group and asked what was going on.

"He's here," they said quietly, "he's finally here."

"Who's here," I asked.

"The child," said an elderly woman.

"His father named him Jesus," said a man in the group.

So, it was true. These people were standing around gawking and letting this woman and her newborn baby stay in a barn. This was totally unacceptable. I tried not be sound angry when I asked the question, "Why are we allowing this mother and child to stay out here? Surely, surely someone has a place for them to stay."

“You don’t understand,” said an older man, “It is he, Immanuel, the Messiah.”

How ridiculous. This could not be the Messiah. This could not be the one called Immanuel by the prophet Isaiah. Such a divine child should not, could not, be lying on straw in a broken-down stable. It was unseemly. Who would allow such a thing? Any child born within these drafty barn walls could not be the Messiah.

I pushed past the crowd to look inside. And there, ‘neath the glow of an oil lamp, in a feed trough filled with hay, lay the child; mother and father close by. They turned their heads, looked at me, and then they smiled. I gazed at the child. I felt a tear fall from my eye at the sight of that child, so small with his tiny hands and feet. He had a face that radiated joy. And I knew. I knew it was true. This, indeed, was Immanuel, the Christ child, the Messiah born to deliver us.

It was then that I realized that there could be no more fitting place for this King of Kings to be born than here, in this dilapidated, drafty, filthy, stable that was more glorious than the greatest chamber in a magnificent palace. Here lay the redemption of all humankind in a in a trough filled with hay within the town of his ancestor, David. This was a birth in humility meant to bring the world to its knees. This was the birth that would forever change the way the world looked at the Creator. Laying before me was the salvation of every soul. A child born to take away the sins of the world. Somehow, I knew, that although his presence was meant for all of God’s creation, he would have come even if it was only for me.

I fell to my knees and worshipped the Light of the World.

AMEN