

THE TWELVE VOICES OF



CHRISTMAS

— WOODROW KROLL —

The Twelve Voices of Christmas
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SHEPHERDS

VOICES OF DECLARATION

LUKE 2:8-17

The song of the angels was not heard by priests, Pharisees or rulers, but by lonely, lowly shepherds out in the fields at night. Despised and rejected, they were the first to hear that the Messiah had come. They were the first to see Him, other than Joseph and Mary. And they were the first to declare His coming to other people.

We were usually the last to hear any news, especially good news. We lived isolated lives out in the fields, taking care of our flocks. We minded our own business, and people were happy to leave us alone.

There was a reason for that. We lived outdoors and slept under the stars. We could not possibly keep all the laws, especially the ones the super-spiritual Pharisees had dreamed up. How could we go through all the meticulous hand-washings and other rules and regulations? We were excluded from their religious festivities and considered no better than thieves. We were the most despised class of people in Israel.

It did not matter to them what we felt in our hearts. We prayed during our lonely watches and often talked about God. We longed to see the Messiah, and we longed for His coming.

In these pastures, their ancestor David had fought the lion and bear to protect his sheep. We were protecting the lambs that would be offered as sacrifices for their sin in the temple. But that meant nothing to them.

A shepherd doesn't have much excitement in his life. It's lonely and sometimes dull. Our days were spent hunting for what little grass we could find and caring for the animals. In the evening we generally bedded down with the sheep under a tree or led them to some crude shelter – a pen or a sheepfold. We took turns at night watching them to make sure they were not devoured by wild animals.

But one starlit night, while we were resting in the cool of the evening, a figure appeared out of nowhere. We didn't know who he was or where he came from. Suddenly, it became piercingly bright all around us. We fell to the ground in fear.

We'd heard about the Shekinah glory. We knew the stories of Moses at the burning bush and the pillar of fire in the desert. This had to be the glory of the Lord! This figure before us was not another shepherd; it was an angel sent from God.

We were frightened out of our minds. I remember covering my head and my eyes. I thought I might die. Then I heard the angel speak. "Don't be afraid," he said. I felt a calmness, and a quiet awe came over me. He was not going to bring any judgment on us. He was going to give us

some kind of news – good news.

“There is born to you this day in Bethlehem a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” I felt a joy I had never experienced before. The Messiah had been born – the one whom our people had waited so long! This was the fulfillment of centuries of hope and prayer.

Suddenly, the angel was joined by an army of angels. They were coming from everywhere, and the sky was filled with them. They began to praise God, saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!” I’d never heard rolling thunder louder than their booming voices. We were astonished!

When their hymn ended, we saw them ascending to heaven. The light faded out of the sky, and we were left alone. But their message remained with us.

When we found our voices, we could speak of only one thing. We must to go Bethlehem to see the baby. The angel had taken it for granted that we would go. He had even told us how to identify Him. He would be in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloth. We did not question. We did not hesitate. We went.

As we traveled, I kept thinking to myself, *That's not where the Messiah should be, in a manger wrapped in strips of cloth. He should be in the king's palace or maybe at the temple itself, wrapped in purple.*

At last we found the place where Mary , the mother of the baby, and her husband Joseph, were. We found them in the poorest and most humble of circumstances. What a contrast with

the splendor of the announcement of His birth! But we were not put off, for we knew who this baby was.

I can still remember the look on Joseph’s face when we approached. Why were we there? Why were we intruding when he and his wife wanted some privacy? Looking beyond him, we saw Mary, gazing with wonder at the baby in the manger; and we fell on our knees and worshiped Him.

Finally, I told Joseph the whole story about the angels and their message. “We had to come and see for ourselves,” I told him. “We wanted to praise Him too.”

As I was standing there, amazed and filled with awe, a story came to my mind. I thought of what had happened to the four lepers of Samaria years ago.

The Syrians had been menacing our people, and there was a great famine. Four lepers decided to give themselves up to the Syrians to get some food. When they arrived at the enemy camp, they found it empty. All the Syrians were gone. They went from tent to tent and found food, water, clothes – everything they could want.

That discovery saved their lives. One of them said, “This is a day of good news, and we cannot remain silent.” So they determined to tell the people in the besieged city.

That's exactly how my friends and I felt. After we had worshipped the Christ child, we left the cattle stall. “This is good news,” we told each other. “People need to hear that the Savior has been born.” So

that night we joined the twelve voices of Christmas as the voices of declaration. We told everyone we met about the birth of the Christ-child.

After that night I often thought about what the angel said, “There is born to *you* this day a Savior.” Born to *us*? To shepherds? Why had God honored us and not the priests, the scribes and royalty?

To me it was ironic that those uppity Pharisees in Jerusalem, who had studied the Law and kept all the commandments, were not the first ones to hear the news they had waited so long to hear. Neither were they the first ones to see the newborn Messiah. We were the first to see Him – lonely, lowly shepherds. I guess when God has a task as important as telling the world about the Savior, He doesn’t entrust it to those who worship Him out of habit but to those who worship Him out of love.