

The First Herald Angel

By John Donald O'Shea

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Synopsis

Late one afternoon, shortly before dusk, in early winter, very long ago, a small child was heard singing not far from the Village of Bethlehem in the hill country of Galilee. As she sang, a poor shepherd, named James, hearing the child's clear and beautiful voice was drawn to listen.

The First Herald Angel is a short, illustrated children's Christmas story, that explains two scriptural passages that I have always found somewhat "problematic."

In *Isaiah 11:6*, we are told that "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; *and the calf and the young lion*" Has Isaiah's prophecy ever come true. Has a lion ever laid down with a lamb, a kid or a calf? If so, when? And how did it happen?

And in *Luke 2: 13-15*, we hear of angels heralding the birth of the Christ-child in Bethlehem. We encounter angels and archangels throughout the pages of the Bible. But what about "herald angels?"

My little story, designed to be read to a young child, explains – more or less – both phenomenon, while at the same time, gently introducing the child to the story of the first Christmas, and the nature of the child to be born in Bethlehem.

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Late one afternoon, shortly before dusk, in early winter, very long ago, a small child was singing not far from the Village of Bethlehem in the hill country of Galilee. As she sang, a poor shepherd, named James, hearing the child's clear and beautiful voice was drawn to listen. When he came close enough to see her, he discovered he had come up from behind the child, who was dressed in a clean white robe.



So as not to frighten or disturb the young singer, James stopped and listened.

The song that the child sang, was one that James had never heard before. It soon became clear, that the child, whose name was Micah, was practicing the song:

“Come, sons of men to the village of David!
Come, and pay homage, a Savior is born.”

But then Micah paused, and speaking to herself said, “No, That’s not quite right.” Then quickly changing a note or two, she began again ...

“Come, sons of men to the village of David!
Come, and pay homage, a Savior is born!
This is the night that the prophets of old spoke ...
My song will guide you, the star will give light.”

It was then that James said, “You're far from home child. These hills are a very dangerous place at night for one so young. It will be very dark, very soon. There are lions and bears.”



"I'll be all right. I'm not afraid," said Micah, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"What are you doing here, so far from the village?"

"I'm practicing singing."

"Why? Are you that bad?" kidded James. Micah's response startled him.

"Because I wish to be a herald angel"

Ah ... a very noble aspiration." But then a question entered his mind. "Don't you first have to be an angel?"

"That part is easy. I've been an angel for a long time."

"Uh-huh. How long?" queried a somewhat skeptical James.

"I don't know exactly. It seems like forever."

"How does one become a herald angel?"

"I'm really not certain. It's an entirely new position. I don't think anyone has written up a job description yet."

"What does a herald angel do?"

"We're going to announce the birth of the savior later this evening."

"Which savior is that?"

“The one that Gabriel said would be called, Jesus.”

“I’m sorry, but I’ve never heard of either of them,” replied James, beginning to wonder if Micah just might be pulling his leg.

Not missing a beat, Micah continued, “He's going to be born at Bethlehem. Since he'll be known as the Prince of Peace, my superiors decided to announce his birth with joyous music. Furthermore, royal comings are always announced by heralds...”

“I wouldn’t know. I’ve never met a prince,” noted an underwhelmed James.

“And it will fulfill the prophecies,” the child continued.

“Yes, all the prophecies must be fulfilled. The people need their dreams to come true.”

It was then that James’ wife, Susanna appeared. Even though she was wearing a long robe, it was perfectly clear that Susanna was also just about to have a baby of her own.

“Look, James,” said Susanna, “I found this rose blooming in the snow.”



“Susanna, my love, guess what. The savior is to be born this night in Bethlehem! And his name will be Jesus!”

“Really? Where, dear husband, did you get that?”

Then, pointing to Micah, James replied, “The angel told me!”

“What angel?”

“That one.”

“James, you old fool, that's nothing but a child.”

“But she says that she's an angel. ...”

“If I, dear husband, told you that I was an angel, would that make me one?”

“No, my love, I would never believe that you're an angel.”

“Then don't be so gullible. Would you believe her if she said she was a bear?”

“No, ... but I would have believed you.”

“Then why would you believe a silly child?”

“Perhaps, because I want the Messiah to come. Maybe, because she seems so sincere.”

“I always tell the truth,” Micah averred, joining the conversation.

“You do, eh? Just what sort of angel are you?” probed Susanna.

“I'm a guardian angel, but I was practicing to be a herald angel.”

“Just what does a guardian angel do?”

“We guard the children of God committed to our care.”

"I'm a child of God. Do I have a guardian angel?"

"Sure. All humans do."

"Mine must be as worthless as my husband, or else I would not be living in a squalid cave, surrounded by bleating sheep and married to a penniless shepherd."

"We merely guard and guide," explained Micah, in a matter-of-fact fashion. "We don't provide free housing."

"It would not take a very good angel to guard all that I have."

"We don't guard possessions; just you."

"Susanna, my love, you complain far too much. You should thank the Lord for what you have, and quit fretting about what you lack."

"I did that already, dear husband. It didn't take very long. Now I would like him to know that since my husband does not provide, I could use his help. Perhaps, little 'angel,' this 'savior' of yours might help?"



“Yes, beamed James. If he is to be a prince, he will have great wealth. Perhaps he will share it with the poor. After all, that is what good kings do.”

“If you really are an angel,” entreated Susanna, “could you let him know we were the first to believe in him, and first to ask his help? Let him know we are poor but deserving people?”

“A guardian angel can only guide you to him. You must ask his help yourself,” Micah advised.

“Then, angel, you guide, I'll ask.” Then indicating her belly, Susanna explained, “I am not asking for myself, you understand, but for my child. He should not be born in a cave.”

But James was still concerned. “We have no fine clothes. Will his guards let us in if we are dressed in these rags?”

“If you go to him,” suggested Micah, “no one will bar your way.”

But Susanna worried. “But what kind of king would see poor folk like us?”

“A king like this one. A prince of peace, a wonder counselor, a savior.”

“But where is his palace?” James wondered aloud.

“Don't worry,” said Micah reassuringly, “I'll guide you. It's not far.”

“You best be telling the truth, ‘angel,’” cautioned Susanna, “or next time I see you, I'll box your ears.”

“I think, my love, we should find some present for this king. Let's go and look ...”

But Susanna cut him off. “Give him one of your lambs. Kings are always hungry. I will at least go and fix my hair to try to make myself look presentable.”

With that, James and Susanna went off to prepare for their visit, and Micah resumed her practicing.

“Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Glory to God, our Father above!

This is the night that the prophets of old spoke.

Come, little children, give glory to God!”

As she sang, an “adult-sized” angel, Asreal, suddenly appeared, observed and smiled.



“Micah, what are you doing?”

Turning to the voice, Micah answered, “I was practicing, Asreal, to become a herald angel.” Then glancing toward Heaven, Micah asked, “Do you think they would let me? It's just for a night.”

"I've never heard you sing before. You have a lovely voice. But you never sing with the other angels."

"I can't sing with the cherubim and seraphim. They're sopranos. They always choose a key that's too high for me."

"I suppose I could ask for you... But who's going to watch James while you're gone?"

"I was planning to take him with me. I'm sure he'd like to see the savior."

"You should take Susanna along, too. It will be good for that carping wife to see that she's not the only person born poor."

Then, suddenly, they were joined by a mangy lion.

The old lion sauntered up to Micah from behind, and sniffed her up and down. "But what's this? Asked the puzzled lion. You look like dinner, ... but you don't smell like dinner."

It was then that Asreal replied, "That's because we're angels; we don't smell at all."

"Why not?" asked the lion. "How is an old cat going to find his dinner, if I can't smell you." Confused, the big cat, paused. "But why am I talking to my dinner?"

"You're not really talking," Micah explained. "We just know what you're thinking. We can read your mind."

"Then you know, little one, that I was planning to eat you first." Then turning to Asreal, he explained, "I prefer tender young meat..." Then again addressing Micah, the lion enquired, "Why do you smell like roses?"

“I wasn't aware that I did. Your sniffer must be off,” Micah advised.

“I've never eaten an angel. Do angels taste good? Actually, I'm rather certain I would much prefer eating a young lamb. If you will give me one, I promise I won't eat you — at least not tonight.”

“That's a very generous offer,” noted Micah. “I'll see what I can do for you.”

“Hey, it's nothing. As cats go, I'm really a pretty decent guy. By the way, do angels taste good? That's an important question. I'm really hungry!”

“I'm afraid, you're going to have to wait for dinner. I'm busy right now.” With that, Micah thought of something. “Why don't you stay right where you are. I need an audience. Tell me if you like my singing.”

“I'm not here for entertainment. I want dinner!” It was then that the old lion realized that his feet were stuck. “Why are my feet stuck?”

“Because I need an audience, and you're it.”

“How long is this going to take? I'm starving! Can we just get this over with?”

“Just relax, and see what you think of this.” With that, Micah sang.

“Come sons of men, leave your flocks in the fields.

Your lambs will lie down with the lion tonight.

Glory to God, our father in heaven.

And peace on the earth, to men of good will.”

When she had finished, Micah asked, “Well, how was it?”



“The tone was clear. The placement of the notes, precise. And the phrasing was well conceived. All in all, it was a rather heavenly performance. It made me want to lie down with the lamb.” Then not quite believing what he had just heard himself say, the old beast inquired, “Why did I say that?”

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