

## Meditation

### Shepherd devotional

I'll never forget that night. It was clear and bright. And freezing! The stars were shining and there was one in particular that Shem – who reckons he's a right expert on the night sky – was saying he'd never seen before. I don't know about anything like that, but it was certainly low and incredibly bright.

But that was nothing compared to the light that burst the sky just moments later. Light that's made any other light I've seen since dull and dark in comparison. Brighter than dawn, or that blinding sensation you get when you come out of a hillside cave you've been sheltering in. And so pure.

It was like a dream. A normal conversation between a few of the lads ribbing each other. Then a flood of light. And then – them.

I was flat on my face before I could even think "what's happening?" It was just so bright. Too bright. Pure. Holy... glorious.

Of course now I realise they were angels, but at the time I was just terrified. This holy beauty was like nothing a poor shepherd had ever seen – come to think of it, it was probably more than even the richest kings from the east would have seen. So to me – it was breathtaking.

What happened next was insane. They spoke. There was a baby born in Bethlehem. *The* baby. The *Christ*? The Christ! The one people like Shem and me had been waiting for all our lives – someone to save us; deliver us; provide for us; lead us – change this hard life into something worth living.

They were singing glory and praise and peace and the sound was incredible but I didn't stay – I couldn't stay. I was running before I even knew it. Desperate to see this baby and to have seen this change that must now come.

I don't know how long it took me to think of it, but I was already out of breath by the time I paused. What could I give? What could I take to honour the child? I had pretty much nothing – I didn't really have anything – just a few sheep that were my everything.

But surely, I didn't need them in the same way now the Christ had come? I could risk giving everything to him couldn't I?

When I got there and saw his mother, there was so much I wanted to say and yet I was no poet or statesman with impressive words. I wanted to welcome the Christ; to say thank you; to pledge allegiance; to promise to follow. But I just laid down the lamb at the foot of the manger he was lying in and hoped somehow they'd know how much they were worth to me – and how much that meant he – this baby king – was worth to me.

I don't know if he ever understood how much that sacrifice cost me – though I'd do it again and again. But I like to think perhaps he did because one day, more than thirty years later, I was on a hill in Jerusalem when I heard him say that he was a shepherd, and those who followed him knew him by the sound of his voice.

“Master, I hear you,” I wanted to cry out, “and I'm still following”.

And I did cry out on that dark day when he offered up his life on another hill. It was then I knew that my sacrifice had been too small, and I wished I'd have brought every sheep I had to honour this King.