

Night of Holy Innocence

A Christmas Tale by Bud Scott

1.

No one knew how old he was, he was that old. Too old to tend sheep anymore, they said. And it was true. He still went out when the sun was up and the sky was clear. He loved it then, feeling gentle breezes there on the hillside, dreaming among the flocks. But the nights now were much too cold for his bones.

Too old for the night watch, but he had Jacob, his little grandson, only too eager to take his place among the shepherds.

Our sheep begin to know your voice, the old man said to his grandson just that afternoon. That's good, he said.

Grandfather, little Jacob said, Uncle Ezra is not well. You heard?

Yes, I know, the old man replied.

And father is still away, Jacob went on, so who will watch the sheep tonight? There's no one.

The old man had to smile. No one but you? he said, the smile spreading as he regarded his grandson.

Is it all right, Grandfather? the boy said. I'm not afraid.

The old man nodded. It will be good for you, he said. .

Oh, thank you Grandfather! the boy cried as he scampered away.

2.

The sun was just setting as Jacob came by to see his grandfather.

I'm going to go now, he said. To relieve Uncle Izzy. Then he said, Would you give me your blessing?

The old man smiled and stretched out his hand. I do bless you, my son. Then he added, Be watchful, Jacob. They caught some thieves two villages over. And the night is long.

The boy nodded and was about to depart when he stopped. Grandfather, he said, do you remember that man who knocked on our door today, looking for a place to stay. He said his lady was going to have her baby.

Yes, I spoke with him, but we could not help him, the old man said shaking his head. Your little brother is due any time now. Your mother sadly could never take in guests, not in her condition.

Are you sure it's a brother? Jacob said brightening.

I'm quite sure, the old man said. I've had dreams and premonitions. And I know that this little boy will give the Lord Our God glory in some special way.

The boy looked up at his grandfather. What does it mean to give God glory? he said.

The old man smiled again. Well, son, he said, we give God glory every time we fulfill his Will, whatever that may be. It can even be that the Lord God will ask for a very great sacrifice. The old man said this with a trace of sadness in his voice.

So my little brother is going to do something big for God, Jacob said, his eyes large as an owl's.

I believe so, yes, the grandfather said. I trust this premonition.

Grandfather, the boy said. What is a premonition?

The old man laughed. Get along with you, he said. Uncle Izzy will be wondering where you are.

And what about me, Grandfather, the boy said, Do I give God glory guarding the sheep?

Even that, the old man said.

So bless me, Grandfather, the boy said.

I already did, the grandfather said with a chuckle.

No, Grandfather, tonight I need a special blessing.

The old man could not help but smile once again at his little grandson. He placed both his hands on the boy's head and prayed, May the Lord Our God keep you, Jacob, throughout the night, and may He show you his great kindness.

And with that little Jacob ran off to the fields.

3.

Early morning light was barely visible in the eastern sky when the old man heard his grandson's voice.

Grandfather! Grandfather! the boy cried, bursting into his room.

The old man whispered, Hush, son, you mustn't wake your mother.

Grandfather, the boy went on, unable to contain himself. We saw angels in the sky, really! And the most unbelievable baby!

What are you saying? the old man said clearing sleep from his eyes. Quiet down now. Tell me what happened.

We were there on the hill, the boy cried unable to calm his excitement, watching the sheep when suddenly this light lit up the sky, and we heard the most beautiful singing.

Singing? the old man questioned.

Yes, Grandfather. And then we saw angels, the sky was filled with them, all praising God.

The old man, fully awake now, drew the boy down beside him. Tell me, Jacob, he said, what did you see?

I saw that Lady and her Baby, he cried.

Where was this, Jacob? the old man said.

She was in that abandoned stable in the east cove, just outside the village. The Baby was lying in a manger.

In a manger? the old man said.

Yes, Grandfather, Jacob said. The Lady was kneeling by the Baby. Her Husband too. She was so very beautiful. But Grandfather, it was this Baby. The angels told us to come and worship Him.

The old man fell silent, studying his grandson. Tell me, he said softly.

I can't explain it, Grandfather, the boy went on, more quietly now. How peaceful it felt to be there. The others held back, but I went right in and the Lady took me and showed me her Child.

Just you? the old man said breaking into a smile.

All the shepherds were there, Grandfather, only not as close as me. They saw the Baby too, a little boy. The Lady said his name is Yeshua. And, Grandfather, I think the Baby blessed me.

The old man looked for a long moment at the boy beside him, a dreamy light settling into his eyes. You have been blessed indeed, he said at length.

Oh, Grandfather, the boy cried, how peaceful it was to be in this Baby's presence!

4.

Just then a woman's piercing wail came from another room. The old man stiffened. Your mother is entering labor, he said getting up. He turned to Jacob. Go to Hillela, the midwife, he said. Have her come at once.

The boy ran off and the old man went outside. He stayed there looking up at the sky. There were no angels. Again he heard a cry of pain within the house, and a deep sadness seeped into his heart. But there was a throb of joy too. He knew those dreams and premonitions were true. He did not understand how it would be, but he knew it was so. These baby boys, the Lady's newborn Child and the child his daughter was about to deliver—both so very innocent—yet both he knew were destined to die, each for the sake of the other and for all, and by their sacrifice to give great glory to God.



Reference: Matthew 2: 16-18, an event commemorated by the Church on December 28th as the Feast of the Holy Innocents.