

# ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE STABLE

*by Carl Kelly*



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# **All Roads Lead to the Stable**

A set of Advent monologues

by Carl Kelly

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE*

I looked at the Advent calendar before me. Prophet Sunday. Bethlehem Sunday. Shepherd Sunday. Angel Sunday. The traditional names we have given to the four Sundays of Advent felt sort of flat and personless. But what if the titles had names and faces to go with them, real people who could talk to us and tell us the story from their perspectives? What if we would allow our imaginations to flow free for just a little while, sticking to the story but filling in the blanks so the people might seem more alive?

What if the prophet were Isaiah and he spoke to us directly from the Jerusalem temple, telling about his time and why he said the words he said? And what if he could talk to us from our time also? What if the Bethlehem innkeeper had a name and a personality and a wife who had a name and personality? And what if he was scurrying around trying to do his innkeeping business while he talked to us? What if the shepherd thought more deeply and more provocatively than we sometimes give shepherds credit for thinking? What if the angel were more like a human than what we think angels are like? And, finally, what if we could listen in as Mary pondered all these things deeply?

These “what ifs” were on my mind as I prepared for Advent. I found myself wanting to answer the questions. I found myself wanting to meet all these people personally. I found myself writing monologs in which the speakers reveal their own personalities while they tell the story. A prophet, the innkeeper, a shepherd, an angel and Mary. They are now more alive for me than they were before. They now have names to me: Isaiah, Caleb, Beauregard. Though I could only guess at what their personalities may actually have been like, I have enjoyed getting to know them, and they have enriched my experience of Advent and Christmas. I hope they enrich yours also.

Carl Kelly

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## Isaiah: Such a Deal!

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*(This monolog's playing time is approximately five and a half minutes. ISALIAH should have long, gray hair and a beard and be dressed in a plain robe. ISALIAH begins in prayer position before the altar, then turns to the congregation and speaks.)*

**ISALIAH:** Ah, so you have found me in the temple. And why am I in the temple, you ask? You, of all people, should ask this question of me, Isaiah! I am every day in the temple. You know that I am every day in the temple, like I was when it all began. I was in the temple here in Jerusalem that day also.

It was the year that King Uzziah died. The country was on the brink of civil war. It had been less than two hundred years since the great reign of Solomon, but those glory days were long gone. The country had split in two: two countries, two kings, where under David and Solomon it had been one, as the Lord is one. Bless his holy name.

The faith of the people had gone to ruin, worshipping false gods instead of the one true God of Israel. *(He addresses no one in particular, but everyone.)* Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is God and there is no other! *(Explaining to the congregation)* The people, the merchants, the nobles, the kings, and even the priests were running after these gods of the Philistines and Syrians and Egyptians, these false gods of commerce, gods of power, gods of war, and gods of fertility — all false, all idols, all impotent. We were no longer clean. So I was in the temple making sacrifice for my unclean people.

Then all of a sudden, there he was *(He indicates an area above the altar)*, the Almighty, the Lord, Adonai, sitting on his celestial throne, high above the altar. His robe filled the sanctuary. Seraphim flew about him. I hid my face. *(Covers face in fold of robe.)* I had no right to see the

1 Almighty.

2 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,” the angels sang.

3 “The whole earth is full of his glory.”<sup>1</sup>

4 The temple shook and I trembled in fear. “Woe is me,”  
5 I cried, “for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and  
6 I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; yet my  
7 eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!”<sup>2</sup>

8 Then, while I cowered, one of God’s angels took a set of  
9 tongs and picked up a burning coal from the sacrificial  
10 fire. He flew to me, touched my lips with the coal, and  
11 said, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.”<sup>3</sup>

12 Then I heard the Lord say, “Whom shall I send? Who  
13 will be our messenger?”

14 And I heard myself answering God. I don’t know. I  
15 didn’t think. I just blurted out, “Here am I. Send me.”

16 And the Almighty did! Bless his holy name. He sent me  
17 to King Ahaz, the grandson of Uzziah. He was now on the  
18 throne. He was a good man, but he was weak. Syria was  
19 building his armies up north, and Ahaz was afraid. He  
20 started making alliances with all the pagans around us,  
21 trying to make his defenses stronger. He let them bring in  
22 their false gods, all because he was afraid of Syria.

23 He should have put his trust in God. That’s what I told  
24 him. I told him he should ask for a sign from God that God  
25 would protect him. It could be anything, any sign he  
26 would choose. But Ahaz would not.

27 “Is it not enough for you that you try the patience of  
28 men? So now you have to try God’s patience also?” I  
29 ranted. “The Lord himself will give you a sign. A young  
30 woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his

31

32

33 <sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:3

34 <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 6:5 (Slightly paraphrased)

35 <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 6:7

1 name Immanuel.<sup>4</sup> Before he is old enough to know right  
 2 from wrong, the kings who terrify you will be gone and  
 3 your people will live in peace.”<sup>5</sup>

4 And that is what God did! The king’s wife had a son,  
 5 and before he was two years old, the land was at peace  
 6 and the Syrians, gone. So I came here to the temple and I  
 7 prayed. (*Returns to prayer position, facing altar.*)

8 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great  
 9 light; those who dwelt in a land of great darkness, on  
 10 them has light shined... For the yoke of his burden, and  
 11 the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou  
 12 hast broken. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
 13 and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his  
 14 name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 15 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Of the increase of  
 16 his government and of peace there will be no end.<sup>6</sup> (*Faces*  
 17 *congregation.*)

18 Well, that’s what I prayed. But Ahaz was a weak man.  
 19 He had a lot of trouble trusting in a God whom he  
 20 couldn’t see. He kept his foreign alliances and pagan  
 21 rituals, and I need not tell you where that leads.

22 Ah, well, I spent a lot of time with Ahaz, telling him the  
 23 wonders of God’s Word that he wouldn’t listen to before.  
 24 I devoted myself to praying and sacrificing in the temple.  
 25 Such a deal! I rant and rave like a *mishuggah*. I bring the  
 26 word of the Almighty God to the King, and what does the  
 27 King do? Like so many of his fathers before him, he  
 28 ignores God.

29 But I learned something in all that. When God gives  
 30 you a word, it means something for now and it might  
 31 mean something for later. You see, there was another  
 32

33 <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 7:14 (Slightly paraphrased)

34 <sup>5</sup> Isaiah 7:16 (Author’s paraphrase)

35 <sup>6</sup> Isaiah 9:2, 4, 6, 7a (Slightly paraphrased)

1 young woman, many years later, centuries after Ahaz.  
2 This other young woman also conceived and gave birth to  
3 a son. He was called Immanuel also.

4 This was different, though. The Almighty made this  
5 Immanuel King. He wasn't born in a palace. He was born  
6 in a stable. But the Almighty made him King. This  
7 Immanuel was strong in faith, and he led his people into  
8 salvation. They call him Christ, his people do.

9 That happened many years ago. But people say he's  
10 coming back again in great power and authority, this  
11 King Immanuel. All his followers are waiting.

12 Why am I in the temple? Such a question you should  
13 ask. I am in the temple waiting. Praying and waiting for  
14 Immanuel to return to his throne and to reign in peace  
15 and justice. *(Returns to prayer position.)*

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## Caleb: I Moved the Goats

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*(This monolog's playing time is approximately six and a half minutes. CALEB should be dressed in the fairly nice robes of an innkeeper. He speaks to the congregation.)*

**CALEB: Don't blame me. I didn't turn them away. I gave them a place to stay. Gave it to them at no cost! So don't blame me.**

**Look. I'm a businessman. I run a caravansary.** *(Looks at congregation who doesn't seem to understand the word. Pronounces it one syllable at a time.)* **Car-a-van-sa-ry?** *(Still apparently no understanding; CALEB explains.)* **OK. I run an inn. Travelers come by. They stay for the night. I provide beds and food. They pay a fair price. It's a business.**

**So late last night, this young couple comes. My caravansary is already full. You know, Caesar has called for a census so that he can get more taxes. People are coming in from everywhere. My caravansary is full. I've got people sleeping wall to wall, all over the floor on mats. I can't hold any more. What can I do?**

**And all the time I'm explaining this to the man, his wife is saying, "Joseph, we've got to find a place soon."**

**So I look at her. She's very pregnant, maybe going to have the baby right now.**

**He says, "My wife is going to have a baby."**

**I say, "I can see that."**

**"We need a place to stay," he says.**

**"But my inn is full. People all over. More than full. The census, you know."**

**He says he knows. They've walked all the way from Nazareth because of the census.**

**"From Nazareth?" I say. "Your wife is going to have a baby and you walk from Nazareth?"**

**"What can I do?" he says. "It's the census."**

**"Look," I say, "you've got to find a place for her to have**

1 that baby.”

2 “But where?” he says. “Nobody has any room.”

3 “Look,” I say, “I’ve got a little place...”

4 “Anything. We’ll take it,” he says.

5 “No. Wait till I tell you. It’s a stable.” He gives me a  
6 look, so I say, “It’s a natural cave in the hillside, and I  
7 don’t have many animals. We can move them to one side  
8 and put some clean straw in there. It’ll be dry and warm.  
9 It’s all I’ve got.”

10 “Good,” he says. “We’ll take it. How much?”

11 “No cost,” I say. *(Almost an aside to the congregation)* Look,  
12 I can’t charge the man for the stable. Besides, I could see  
13 they were barefoot — dirt poor.

14 I led them out behind my caravansary and up the hill  
15 to my cave stable. It’s small and dark, but the kids will be  
16 out of the weather. I move the goats over to one side *(He*  
17 *goes through the motions)* and pen them in. I toss in some  
18 fresh straw. The girl sits down on the straw, and I see  
19 that she’s going to have that baby soon.

20 “Look, you get...ah...comfortable here. I’ll send my  
21 wife. She’s helped with babies before.”

22 The man says, “Thanks,” and I go. *(Moves across chancel.)*

23 I find my wife. “Hannah, I’ve put some people up in my  
24 stable.”

25 “What?!” she says, “with the goats?”

26 “I moved the goats, Hannah. I even put in some fresh  
27 straw. Look, it’s all we’ve got. They’re a nice young  
28 couple, kids from Nazareth. She’s going to have a baby,  
29 maybe tonight.”

30 That fast she’s gone. *(Follows with his eyes, then gestures*  
31 *with one hand, the direction HANNAH has gone.)* I didn’t ask  
32 her to go. She just went right up to the stable, all the way  
33 muttering, “A baby! She’s going to have a baby, and Caleb  
34 puts them in with the goats.”

35 *(CALEB cups one hand beside his mouth for a shout.)* I

1 moved the goats, Hannah!

2 Later, I'm taking care of my customers — food, drink,  
3 you know — when my wife comes running. “There’s  
4 people all over the place!”

5 “I know,” I say. “It’s the census.”

6 “No,” she says. “It’s shepherds, all over. They say there  
7 are angels out there singing.”

8 (*CALEB replies calmly, explaining.*) “It’s a cold night,  
9 Hannah. They’ve gotten into the new wine.”

10 “I don’t think so, Caleb. I don’t think they’re drunk.  
11 You better go up there.”

12 So I climb up the hill. (*He moves across the chancel.*) She’s  
13 right! There are shepherds all over my stable, standing at  
14 the mouth of the cave and all around. (*CALEB speaks to the*  
15 *shepherds.*) “Don’t you have any sheep to take care of?” I  
16 say. “Somewhere else, maybe?”

17 “We *were* watching our sheep,” one old man says. Then  
18 he rattles on so fast I can hardly understand him,  
19 something about an angel in the sky and a Savior born in  
20 a stable, *my* stable, and the sky full of angels singing.

21 So I pull him aside (*He acts out pulling the old man aside*)  
22 and say, “Wait a minute. You’re telling me this peasant  
23 baby in my stable is the Messiah? ... Nah!”

24 I walk to the stable and look. It’s dark and hard to see,  
25 but the young mother is lying there with the baby, and  
26 the father is beside them. Nothing special. The father  
27 stands up and steps over to me. He thanks me for the use  
28 of my stable and tells me it’s a boy. I ask if they have a  
29 name for the baby.

30 He says, “Jesus.”

31 “Jesus,” I say. “That’s a good name.”

32 He tells me what it means: “The Lord saves.”

33 “That’s a good name,” I repeat. Then we introduce  
34 ourselves. He’s Joseph. His wife is Mary. “Look,” I say,  
35 “do you know what all these shepherds are doing here?”

1           They say an angel told them to come here, but I don't  
2 know. I don't think they're drunk."

3           So Joseph tells me how he had a dream of an angel that  
4 told him Mary would have a baby who should be named  
5 Jesus.

6           Strange! I don't know what's happening. I know the  
7 Lord works in mysterious ways. The Almighty sometimes  
8 does things we don't expect. But this peasant baby in my  
9 stable is the messiah? I don't know. (*Thoughtful, almost to*  
10 *himself, as though working it out in his mind*) But, what if...I  
11 know the Almighty picked David, a shepherd boy from  
12 Bethlehem, to be King. What if he picked this peasant  
13 baby to be the Messiah?

14          (*Talks again to JOSEPH.*) And there were angels, you  
15 say, in the sky, singing, "Glory to God and peace on  
16 earth." But the Messiah? In my stable? (*To himself again*)  
17 What if he *is* the Messiah? The Almighty does seem to  
18 work with weak people and make them strong, with little  
19 people to make them big. (*He thinks on this, accepts it, then*  
20 *says to himself with assurance.*) The Messiah. In *my* stable!

21          (*CALEB faces the congregation, as though someone is*  
22 *speaking to him.*) What? You say I should have known? I  
23 should have given them my best room? But how was I  
24 supposed to know? What was I supposed to do? People  
25 sleeping all over my caravansary, on the floor side by side  
26 by side by side by side. All I had was my stable, and I *gave*  
27 that to them for the night. So don't blame me. Did you  
28 ever think maybe that's the way the Almighty wanted it?

29          (*Walks off talking to himself.*) The Messiah. In my stable.

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## Shepherd: Star Watcher

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*(This monolog's playing time is approximately four and a half minutes. The SHEPHERD is sitting on a large rock or a stool, if a rock is not available. He should be dressed in a simple robe with cloak and should sport a two-week growth of beard.)*

**SHEPHERD:** It's that night again. Every year I sit here on this rock and look up into that same sky. The stars are the same. *(He points them out in the sky.)* The Pole Star, and the Small Bear and the Big Bear opposite one another across the Pole Star. It is a clear and cool night again, a night for pulling your cloak up around your shoulders *(He does so)*, a night when important things can happen.

It's all the same. Every year, the same. I come here. I sit. I watch. I remember.

We were watching our sheep then. There were several of us here. Everyone guarding a small flock of sheep, sheep gathered inside the circle walls of rocks, shepherds at the gates.

We talked to one another through the still night. A young shepherd boy complained. *(Imitates a youthful voice and his own in dialog.)*

"It's cold tonight."

"Yes, cold."

"I wish I were lying in a warm bed at home."

"Don't think about it, boy. Sing a song or something."

So he sang a silly song about a shepherd boy and a wealthy girl. I looked over Bethlehem. The streets were dark. No one was moving about. It was very still and quiet, except for the boy's song. *(He pauses, remembering, then speaks directly to the congregation.)*

Some people ask whether I don't get lonely or bored or scared up here on a dark night. I do get scared sometimes. There are wild animals. But never lonely or bored. Sitting here looking at the stars is a good time to

1 think. Shopkeepers and rulers are too busy to think, but  
2 I have long, quiet times for thinking and wondering.

3 I often think and wonder about that night when the  
4 angels filled the sky and broke the silence of the night. At  
5 first it was just one angel (*He makes a floating gesture*),  
6 floating bright in the dark air above the hillside. I  
7 thought I was dreaming, but the boy stopped singing his  
8 silly song and called out my name. He was scared. I could  
9 tell he was scared by the way he called to me. My stomach  
10 was jumping, too. But before I could say anything to the  
11 boy, the angel spoke.

12 “*Altirah.*” Don’t be afraid. Something about the way he  
13 said it quieted my insides. And the boy calmed down, too.  
14 That’s when I knew it was an angel.

15 “Behold,” he said, “I bring you good news of a great joy  
16 which will come to all the people; for to you is born this  
17 day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.  
18 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe  
19 wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”<sup>1</sup>

20 (*He puts his hands to his head and sways slightly.*) While he  
21 was saying this, my head was filled with the sound of his  
22 voice, as if it was coming from inside me, as if there was  
23 nothing else to hear or see or know at all. Then the whole  
24 sky was full of angels, and they were all singing. It was a  
25 beautiful song, not like anything I’d ever heard. And that  
26 song was inside me, too!

27 “Glory to God in the highest,” they sang, “and on earth  
28 peace among men with whom he is pleased.”<sup>2</sup> As quickly  
29 as they came they were gone, and the sky was empty, very  
30 empty, and the air was cold again.

31 (*He dialogs with the boy again, doing both voices.*) “Did you  
32 see that?” The boy was running toward me. “Did you hear  
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34 <sup>1</sup>Luke 2:10-12

35 <sup>2</sup>Luke 2:14

1 that? Angels! Angels in the sky!”

2 “Yes, boy. I saw. I heard.”

3 “Well, what should we do?”

4 “We should go and look for the baby, the Christ.”

5 Some of us went to look for the baby in the manger,  
6 and some stayed to watch the sheep. (*Stands, walks, looks,*  
7 *finds.*) We found the baby just as the angel had said, in a  
8 stable in a hillside cave. He didn’t look any different than  
9 other babies, but the angel said he was the Messiah. We  
10 told them, the mother and the father, about the angels.  
11 We sang a song of praise to God. Then we went back to  
12 our sheep. What else should we do? We’re shepherds.

13 So now it is that night again. I sit here on this rock  
14 again. (*He sits.*) I look at the stars again. I think and I  
15 wonder, why us? Why did the angels come to shepherds?  
16 Why not go to the king to tell the news of the Messiah’s  
17 birth? Or maybe to the priests in Jerusalem? Why us?

18 (*He offers and rejects a few answers.*) We were close by?  
19 Nah! Everyone is close by to an angel.

20 We were worthy? Hmmph! Who is worthy before the  
21 Almighty?

22 We were looking for the Messiah? So? So were the  
23 Pharisees and the Zealots. Who wasn’t looking for the  
24 Messiah?

25 We knew deep inside that we needed the Messiah? I  
26 don’t know. (*Pauses and thinks.*)

27 I sit. I think. I wonder. What will the Messiah do when  
28 he is grown? Will he change things? Will it all still be the  
29 same then? Same night? Same sky? Same troubles? I  
30 wonder. (*Pauses.*)

31 Ahhh. Enough wondering for this night. (*He stands.*) I  
32 have sheep to watch. (*He exits.*)

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## Beauregard: Angelology 101

*(This monolog's playing time is approximately five minutes. BEAUREGARD has a full head of brown hair and a full beard, very curly. He should be dressed as a stereotypical college professor, with a tweedy sport coat and tie and out-of-style glasses, possibly perched on his forehead. He should have a pair of white cardboard wings attached to the back of his coat. He enters. The congregation may or may not giggle. Regardless, BEAUREGARD acts as though they have.)*

**BEAUREGARD:** What? What? Oh, these silly things. They said you wouldn't know I was an angel if I didn't have wings. You know I'm an angel. Don't you? No? I don't look like you expect an angel to look? Well, you should be glad you didn't get a seraph. Seraphim don't look like anything you expect of angels.

*(He begins to instruct.)* The seraphim are fiery serpents. Snakes. *(Reacts to apparent disbelief.)* They are. They have six wings and a face like a man. That's the truth. I'm not fooling you. Not many humans have seen seraphim. That's why you don't know what they look like. Isaiah saw some in the temple once, and he thought he was going to die. A fiery snake with six wings is scary. *(Somewhat to himself)* Can't imagine why they want all those wings, though.

You should be glad you got me to come here to talk to you instead of a seraph. *(Thoughtful)* Of course, you could have gotten a cherub. *(Directly to one member of the congregation.)* What do you think of when I say the word cherub? *(Doesn't wait for answer.)* A chubby little child with two wings, right? Wrong!

If you think seraphim are strange and scary, just wait till you see a cherub. Imagine this: four wings, four hands under their wings, and four faces, all different. One face is their proper cherub face, one is like a man, one is like

1 a lion, and one is an eagle's face.

2 Oh, cherubim are the fierce ones. They are. That's why  
3 the Almighty used cherubim to guard the gate of the  
4 garden when he threw Adam and Eve out. Cherubim are  
5 big and tough. Nobody argues with a cherub. Just think  
6 — you could have gotten a cherub to come and talk to  
7 you. Be glad you got me, even if my wings look a little  
8 funny.

9 I'm told you want a lecture on angels on this Fourth  
10 Sunday in Advent. You want a sort of Angelology 101,  
11 Freshman Studies in Angels, with good old not-so-scary  
12 Beauregard as your professor. Beauregard. *(Realizes they*  
13 *don't know his name.)* That's me. I know. You were hoping  
14 for Gabriel or Michael. Well, they're too busy.

15 *(Begins again to instruct.)* Gabriel is the Lord's special  
16 messenger for only the most important messages. He  
17 went to Zechariah to tell him he was going to be the  
18 father of John the Baptist. And Gabriel went to Mary to  
19 tell her she was going to be the mother of the Savior.  
20 Gabriel only does *important* messages.

21 And Michael? You thought maybe you'd get him? No  
22 chance. Michael is the chief angel over all other angels.  
23 And if that weren't enough, Michael is also the Guardian  
24 Angel of Israel. That's a tough job. I wouldn't want that  
25 job. No, you couldn't get Michael. He's too busy.

26 So you got me, Beauregard, second baritone in the  
27 heavenly choir. *(Gets lost in a little reverie.)* The heavenly  
28 choir. Now there is a great choir! Such a sound! Too bad  
29 we don't get to sing more often. We've only done a few  
30 concerts since the Creation.

31 Oh, did we sing when God created the heavens and the  
32 earth. The morning stars joined together with our choir.  
33 What a time that was! We also sang when God called  
34 Isaiah to be a prophet. He let Isaiah see right into heaven  
35 and hear us sing. *(Begins to sing, improvising a melody. This*

1 *is BEAUREGARD's real love.)*  
 2 Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.  
 3 Heaven and earth are full of his glory!<sup>1</sup>  
 4 Great part for a baritone. But the really big song we  
 5 sang over Bethlehem. The shepherds looked into heaven  
 6 and heard us sing it. *(He sings, improvising a melody.)*  
 7 Glory to God in the highest,  
 8 And on earth peace among people with whom God is  
 9 pleased.  
 10 It was marvelous! *(Becoming excited)* And there in that  
 11 tiny little cave in the hillside above Bethlehem lay a baby  
 12 peasant boy, the Savior of all creation, the Son of God.  
 13 That's the way the Almighty works, you know. Humble  
 14 starting points for momentous events. Little beginnings,  
 15 but big endings.  
 16 Nothing pleases the Almighty more than making  
 17 something out of nothing, like taking a nobody goat  
 18 herder named Abraham and making him the father of a  
 19 mighty nation, or taking David, a shepherd boy, and  
 20 making him King of God's people, or taking the  
 21 inhabitants of Israel, a little backwater country, and  
 22 making them the chosen people. Really, nothing pleased  
 23 the Almighty more than saving the world with this  
 24 peasant baby born in a stable. Little beginnings, but big  
 25 endings.  
 26 We *had* to sing. You couldn't stop us from singing. The  
 27 Almighty let the shepherds look into heaven to see and  
 28 hear us.  
 29 *(Thoughtful)* Those shepherds were never the same  
 30 afterward. You can't stay the same when you are touched  
 31 by an angel. *(With a wry smile)* Just pray the angel who  
 32 touches you is not a seraph or a cherub!  
 33  
 34 <sup>1</sup>Isaiah 6:3 (Slightly paraphrased)  
 35 <sup>2</sup>Luke 2:14 (Slightly paraphrased)



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