

The Epiphany of the Lord

Even before darkness young Aachim could see the new star burning through the day sky. Standing with the flock, he looked down the long slope that led to the empty Jerusalem Road. Looking in the uphill direction, the buildings of Beth Lehem were washed gold in the setting sunlight.

Aachim slowly followed the sheep as they grazed the rivers of grass flowing in the soft evening breeze. He gazed further up the hillside and decided not to go higher. It would be safer to stay near the town. Beside, Ruth's house was in Aachim's view and it would help him to pass the time by imagining her inside.

When darkness came Aachim began to circle the perimeter of the flock, watching his steps by the bright starlight overhead. As he went along he could almost make out his shadow. The hills seemed to be dusted with a pale white mist from the stars glittering above. He looked up at the star and was amazed by its brightness.

In the murky distance down the Jerusalem Road Aachim saw that a caravan was heading his way. Searching his immediate area, Aachim saw movement across the field outside the stable behind Beth Lehem's travelers' inn. Two people were going into the shelter.

Aachim settled down to watch for awhile, glad that there were these diversions to help pass the night. Slowly the caravan continued up the road toward Bethlehem. The young shepherd reclined on his elbow and closed his eyes. He decided to rest for a moment, but reminded himself to keep his ears on alert. He fell asleep and dreamed of a night ablaze with stars and the sounds of people singing

A bleating lamb awoke him and Aachim blinked his eyes at the sight of three stately riders sitting tall atop their camels. They passed directly in front of him and headed toward the traveler's inn. Aachim watched in amazement as they dismounted and led their camels toward the stable where he had seen the other two earlier. The sheep seemed okay for the moment and Aachim hurried across the field to get a better look.

The three strange men had dropped to their knees at the entrance to the stable. Inside the dim flickers from the oil lamp revealed three more people looking out at the



foreigners. There was a man and his wife who was holding a newborn infant in her arms.

Aachim glanced back to make sure the flock was not moving. Their white backs were where he'd left them.

In turn each of the men returned to their camel and brought boxes from their packs which they gave to the family inside.

Hurrying back to the flock Aachim wondered about this strange event. He circled the flock, rounding up a few stragglers. He sat down and watched. The camels were still there, so the strangers were probably spending the night.

Aachim drifted on his thoughts, dozing off to sleep, then waking with a start and dozing again.

When he opened his eyes it was bright morning. He scrambled to his feet and surveyed the flock. All was well. Across the slope the camels were gone. He hurried down to the stable and looked inside. It was empty too. Aachim began to ask himself if all he'd seen had been a dream. Then he noticed a sweetness in the air. It was like perfume. At his feet were a few small jewel drops of shiny brown resin spilled on the smooth dirt floor. He picked up a resin pebble and held its rich aroma of frankincense to his nose.



What the shepherd boy witnessed that night was a Mystery confirmed only by a few spilled pebbles of aromatic gum. In a few decades the same shepherd would be in Jerusalem for the Passover and would see the Mystery again.

Aachim's encounters are no more than our own. Each of us has been gifted with a few pebbles of recognition that confirm his presence in our lives. These confirmations lead us to our own epiphany of the Lord.