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Shepard's Version

Harold DePuy
St. John Fisher University

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Shepard's Version

Cover Page Footnote

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Wie die Blätter
verwehen,
So verwehst du
auch....

The Shepard's Version

It was a kinda chilly, gusty night;
The brightness of the stars above our heads
(Especially a big one in the east)
Made it seem much colder than it was.

So all the guys scrunched closer to the fire
And watched the smoke whip off and settle
In the hollows of the hills around.

You know what we were doing there, of course:
Baby-sitting with a bunch of stinking sheep!
But like he told us, when we asked the boss:
We hadn't brains enough for better work.

So there we were, just waiting. Hoping
Our relief would be on time for once:
Them other clods ain't very fast, y'know.

Me, I was off a little from the rest,
Sitting staring at that biggest star
—Kinda hypnotized, y'know—wondering
Why it moved: the others didn't move.

I must've dozed a while, 'cause suddenly
That star got *very* big and *very* bright:
Almost like the sun, though not that hot.

I kinda rubbed my eyes a bit, and belched.
(My stomach wasn't very good, y'know
—Believe me, neither was the room 'n board—
And now and then I saw things that I didn't.)

What I was seeing didn't go away:
If I was "seeing things," the other guys
Were, too; 'cause they were rubbing just as hard.

The place was really Bedlam, believe me!
The guys were shouting, and the cruddy sheep
Were twitching, jumping, baa-ing—lord knows what—
As if the world was coming to an end.

Then all at once I heard a lot of singing:
The kind you hear in church on Sabbath day.
(Not that I got there much—that stinking job!)

Boy, *then* I *really* belched: it's bad enough
Ya see things, but when ya *hear* them, too . . .
That's the time to take a bromo, right?
I coulda used a *couple*, let me tell ya.

Then I scen the other guys kinda
Putting up their arms to shield themselves
From something—who knew what, with all that fuss?

Sheesh, was I scared! I didn't know what way
To turn. I wouldn't wanta take no bets
On who was scarerder: the sheep, the other guys,
Or me. Just take my word, we *all* were scared.

Then all at once the butterflies stopped tickling
My guts. Some guy (I think)—up *there*—was talking
In a soothing voice. The uproar died.

I don't remember all he said to us
(I ain't ashamed of being not too bright);
I know I got the gist of it, at least,
And for a dope like me, that's pretty good.

(Y'know—now that I think of it a bit,
It maybe wasn't really some *guy* talking:
Let's say it was a voice, deep down inside.)

Well, anyway, the voice was saying something
That I really couldn't understand:
Something about us going to see some Kid;
And even told us *where* we hadda go.

You *bet* we didn't wait around to argue!
We just took-off, like crazy, down them hills,
Picking up a few stray lambs along the way.

Funny thing, but all the way to town
I kept on thinking of that moving star:
Which wasn't very strange, 'cause there it was,
Pink and pretty, right in front of us.

Well, *you* might think I'm kidding, but that star
Stopped—dead in its tracks—just as we reached
The place the voice told us we hadda go.

Hey—what does the word “adore” mean? That's what
The voice told us we oughta do: I mean.
Adore the Kid. Oh, I know how to *do* it;
I just don't know exactly what it *means*.

Well, like I said, the star stopped. You'd think
With all that fuss and bother it would stop
Over some really high-class house, y'know?

But not *this* time, 'cause there we were, standing
Outside a rickety, run-down, shanty hut
You see alongside any lousy inn:
Funny—it didn't stink like all the rest.

Sure, there was a smell of honest sweat,
But *we* smelled like that, too, so what the heck!
Just so it wasn't like them stinking sheep.

It wasn't exactly cozy inside, either.
But—funny thing—it didn't seem to matter,
'Cause everything felt good inside of *me*:
First time in years my stomach didn't hurt.

Me and the other guys, we stood around and stared
—Kind of embarrassed-like: know what I mean?
We must've looked like rubes, or dopes, or worse.

There was this kind of middle-aged Guy there
Who looked as if he might've been in charge:
Not like a big-shot from Jerusalem,
Or one of them snotty Romans like ya see.

Instead, he was the nice and quiet type:
Says what he means, but never shonts, y'know?
There's far too many of that other kind.

He had a grin on him, from here to here:
I figured something good had happened to him,
Like being grandpa of this Kid we came to see
And hadda—what's that word?—oh, yeah, *adore*.

He comes right up to us and shakes our hand
Like we was quality—like neighbors, even.
(Him and his silly grin: I hafta laugh...)

Then he looks over in the corner, and kinda
Nods—like this. On a neat bed of straw
Lies a Girl, looking kinda bushed but happy.
Just a kid: sixteen, maybe, at the most.

Hereabouts, they all get married young.
They tell me it's the custom for the girls:
Why should *she* be different from the rest?

But she's not grinning like the Old Guy is:
 She has more like—you know—a look of peace.
 Happy the job was over, probably.
 (Boy, am I ever glad I ain't a woman!)

I see this bird—a Dove, I think—roosting
 And cooing on a ledge above her head:
 If it was a pigeon, I'd of wrung its neck!

The Father wasn't anywhere in sight;
 Yon'd think he'd be around at such a time:
 I know *I* would. (I must be foster father
 To about a *million* lousy lambs.)

I don't know why they wasn't at the inn.
 If I was married, I'm sure I wouldn't want
 My wife to have her first kid born in *there*.

Anyway, while we was standing there
 Sorta gaping at this nice young Girl
 Lying there so still and peaceful-like,
 The Old Guy ambles over to the crowd.

"Mae," he says to her—and he says it
 With a sorta choked-up sound, y'know?—
 "These gentlemen have come to see the Child."

That's the first time in all our lives
 Anyone called *us* gentry. It made us
 —Well—*feel* good. That nice Old Geezer *knew* it would,
 I'll bet ya anything ya want to bet.

Not that he *hadda* be polite to us:
 It wasn't any special holy day,
 Like the Romans got, to make the cruds feel good.

"Joseph," the Girl says—and *she* says it, too,
 In that choked-up way I can't describe—
 "Joseph, dear, the Child is fast asleep:
 Do you think we ought to wake Him up?"

"I'm *very* sure we should," the Old Guy says.
 "An Angel—perhaps the very one I saw
 In *my* dream (you remember?)—sent them here."

Funny he should've said it was an Angel:
 I didn't even know it was. But then,
 He was a smarter guy than me, I guess,
 So I let it go at that. An Angel—sheesh!

Without another word, the Girl reached down.
(It must've been a sort of crib or cradle
There, tucked out of sight beside the bed.)

She took a tiny bundle in her hands;
The careful way she held it, you'd of thought
That it was really made of solid gold.
(Gold I don't know about, but lambs I do.)

Then she unwound the stuff they had Him in.
(Why do they hafta wrap them up so tight?
The lousy sheep don't do that to the lambs.)

Finally, this little face peeked out,
All red, and raw, and wrinkled-like:
Just another Jewish kid for all
That any one of us could tell, y'know?

The Angel's voice had told us to adore
The Kid; so that's exactly what we did,
Touching our foreheads to the ground, and all.

Even old King Herod would've had
To be satisfied the way we done it:
And we done it pretty good, considering
We don't get too much practice in the hills.

What the *Kid* could've thought about
All this bowing and scraping, I don't know;
But I kinda *liked* doing it for Him.

Anyway, no matter *what* He thought,
While we were doing it, that same bright light
Came back; and all the choir-singing, too:
You must admit that *someone* up there liked it.

When we got through adoring Him, y'know
It came to me that, here was this Kid born,
And none of us had brung Him any gifts.

Knowing the local custom, I felt bad,
Although it wasn't any fault of mine.
So I went over to the other guys
And asked them what we ought to do about it.

I looked at them; they look right back at me,
And we all sorta shrugged. And then I asked,
"What about the lambs we brung with us?"

Again they shrugged. We really didn't know
What we should do: they weren't ours;
 How could we give away what wasn't ours?
 Y'know what happens, here, to guys that steal!

"Look, guys," I said, "Sure it might take us all
 A little while, but we could pay it back.
 After all, we *hafta* leave a *gift*."

"Yeah, heck," said one of the other guys,
 "What do we do with our money, anyway?
 The wine they sell us at that lousy inn
 Just poisons all our guts. It serves them right."

We gave them all the lambs, and when we left,
 I thought the Old Guy was about to cry.
 The Girl kept saying, "Thank you. God bless you."

I found out later why they were in town:
 Some Roman big-wig said they hadda leave
 Where they were, and go back where they came from,
 To be enrolled. *Enrolled*—and what the heck is that?

Something to do with taxes, I suppose.
 Well, maybe in a coupla thousand years
 They won't *have* taxes. Yeah—fat chance of that!

I wonder why old Herod got so mad
 When them three Magicians from the East
 Stopped in to see the Kid? A guy would think
 He'd of been glad they took the trouble to.

Anyway, I'm glad we got there first.
 Maybe *you* guys haven't felt a change,
 But I ain't had no stomach trouble since.

You think it was the Kid? I think so, too.

harold de puy