**The Sheepdog’s Tale**

*This monologue is by a sheepdog who was guarding the flocks near Bethlehem on the night the angels appeared to announce the birth of a saviour.*

Woofff! Put another log on the fire, will you? An old dog feels the cold now that I’m retired from shepherding the sheep. That’s better. Now, are you sitting comfortably? Good. And I hope you’re all ears to hear about a night that was like no other.

It all began quietly. It was a clear, chilly night. The sheep were safely in the pen. The Boss was lying asleep across the gateway to the pen as usual, with his club by his side, and Lassie and I were lying on either side of him, half asleep and half alert for any approaching wolves, ready to wake the Boss if necessary. There were a couple of other pens nearby on the hillside. There was just the odd howl in the distance, nothing to be alarmed about.

All of a sudden, I was wide awake, the hairs on my back standing on end. Grrrrr! It was a sound like no other – a whooshing sound like giant wings rushing through the air, starting quietly as if coming from a great distance and getting louder and louder. Lassie and I looked at each other – what was It? I jumped on the Boss to wake him up – better safe than sorry. But there was nothing to be seen.

Then a bright white light appeared over the hillside, heading straight towards us. I’d never seen a UFO before. As It came closer, It took the shape of a giant figure, a bit like a human but with huge wings and glowing in brilliance. You couldn’t take your eyes off It, but you couldn’t take It in – It was too big and too strange. The Boss was standing on his feet staring at It, and Lassie and I were crouching behind him, when It landed right in front of us and smiled at us.

Bow-wow!!! All of a sudden, the Boss was flat on his face trying to make himself small. Lassie and I followed suit, not daring to look up any more. Suddenly a warm breeze floated over us, and I was no longer afraid of It – it was like the smile had covered us with a sense that everything was OK. And I heard a voice – a voice like a tumbling stream combined with a rumble of distant thunder – saying, “Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news.”

The Boss got up, and It spoke to him a second time. I couldn’t make head nor tail of what It said, but the Boss was listening carefully and nodding his head, so I knew It was all right. Then the whole hillside was alive with more of It, hundreds and hundreds of them all glowing, and the streams and the thunders combined into the most beautiful sound I have every heard, and my ears picked up an unmistakeable message, “Glory to God in the highest!” It went on and on, and we were just standing there transfixed, drinking in all the goodness and the glory we could feel around us.

I don’t know how long It went on, but eventually the sound turned into the whooshing and the lights disappeared into the distance as mysteriously as they had come. And we just stood there in stunned silence long after It had gone.

Eventually, the other shepherds around came over to talk to the Boss, and they chattered away. They were talking utter nonsense – about a baby in a manger. The Boss doesn’t even like babies, and why would you put a baby in a manger?

After a while, the other shepherds went back to their pens, and the Boss called Lassie and me over to him. He told us to guard the gateway to the pen until he got back – he was going into town to see this baby. And off he headed into the dark.

Lassie and I looked at each other. Was he barking mad? What chance did we have against a wolf? And then I heard the silence. I mean, I realised that I hadn’t heard a single bleat from the sheep, not a howl from wolf, nothing since It had arrived.

We stood guard there in the gateway, too excited and aware of our responsibilities to even think about sleep. When did shepherds ever leave their dogs in charge of the sheep?

The Boss got back just as the first light was appearing in the sky, and as he greeted us, I heard a howl in the distance and a frightened bleat from the pen, which the Boss soothed with his most reassuring voice.

And ever since that night, he’s been a gentler man, and I hear him humming away, singing away at all times of day and night, the song that we heard that night, “Glory to God in the highest!”

I’ve thought long and hard about that night, and I’m still no nearer to understanding what went on. But I reckon this God who sent It to us must be a good shepherd, because the sheep stayed calm and the wolves stayed away.