



RACHEL AND THE CHRISTMAS ANGELS

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Long ago, a little girl named Rachel lived in the faraway land of Israel. She lived with her mother and father, older brother Jacob and older sister Elizabeth. She loved her family and they loved her. She loved living where she could look up at night and see a million stars. Most of the time, she liked being part of a family of shepherd. The little girl with wide dark eyes and long dark hair even had her favorite sheep.

Rachel liked trying to help her mother and sister as they took care of the family. They had to carry water and mend clothes, cook the meals and clean—all the time. Only Rachel had a problem. When she tried to carry the heavy water pot, her leg gave out. She fell and spilled the water. Even worse, the pot broke.

Rachel wiped away tears as her mother shook her head. “Go, child,” she said. “Elizabeth will get the water.”

Rachel felt sad. She wandered up the hillside where she could look down at her father, brother and the other shepherds as they watched the flock. She wanted to run and play with the sheep. She wished she was like other little girls who could run and play. She wished she wasn’t slow and clumsy because of her bad leg. She wondered if maybe God didn’t love her as much as He loved other people. Maybe He didn’t care.

Rachel sat for a long time. She remembered the stories her father told her about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She thought about King David and how much he loved God. She also thought about how King David and other prophets of old talked about the Messiah who would come to save their people.

But when would the Messiah come? Rude Roman soldiers were everywhere, though they didn’t usually bother shepherds. Rachel hugged her arms about her knees. No one bothered them because the soldiers, even other Jews,

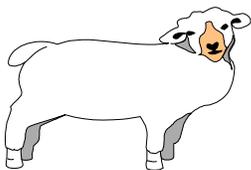
thought of shepherds as poor and dirty and smelly. She knew those who lived in houses in the village looked down on her and her family. Did God care about shepherds?

When Jacob and her dad came for supper, Rachel got up to help serve. Her stomach grumbled as she passed out the food. Winking, her brother shared some of his meal. Her mother frowned, but didn't stop her from taking what he offered. "Thank you, Jacob." Rachel knew that women didn't eat with the men, so she took her food outside to eat.

She looked up into the darkening sky. "Thank you God for Jacob." Jacob always treated her special. He didn't seem to care that she couldn't do the things others could do. She loved him extra-special because of that. "Do you care for me like that?" She asked as she looked up. The stars twinkled, but she didn't even hear a whisper inside.

As the men prepared to return to the sheep, Jacob scooped her off the ground. "Want to come with us? I think the sheep want to see their friend."

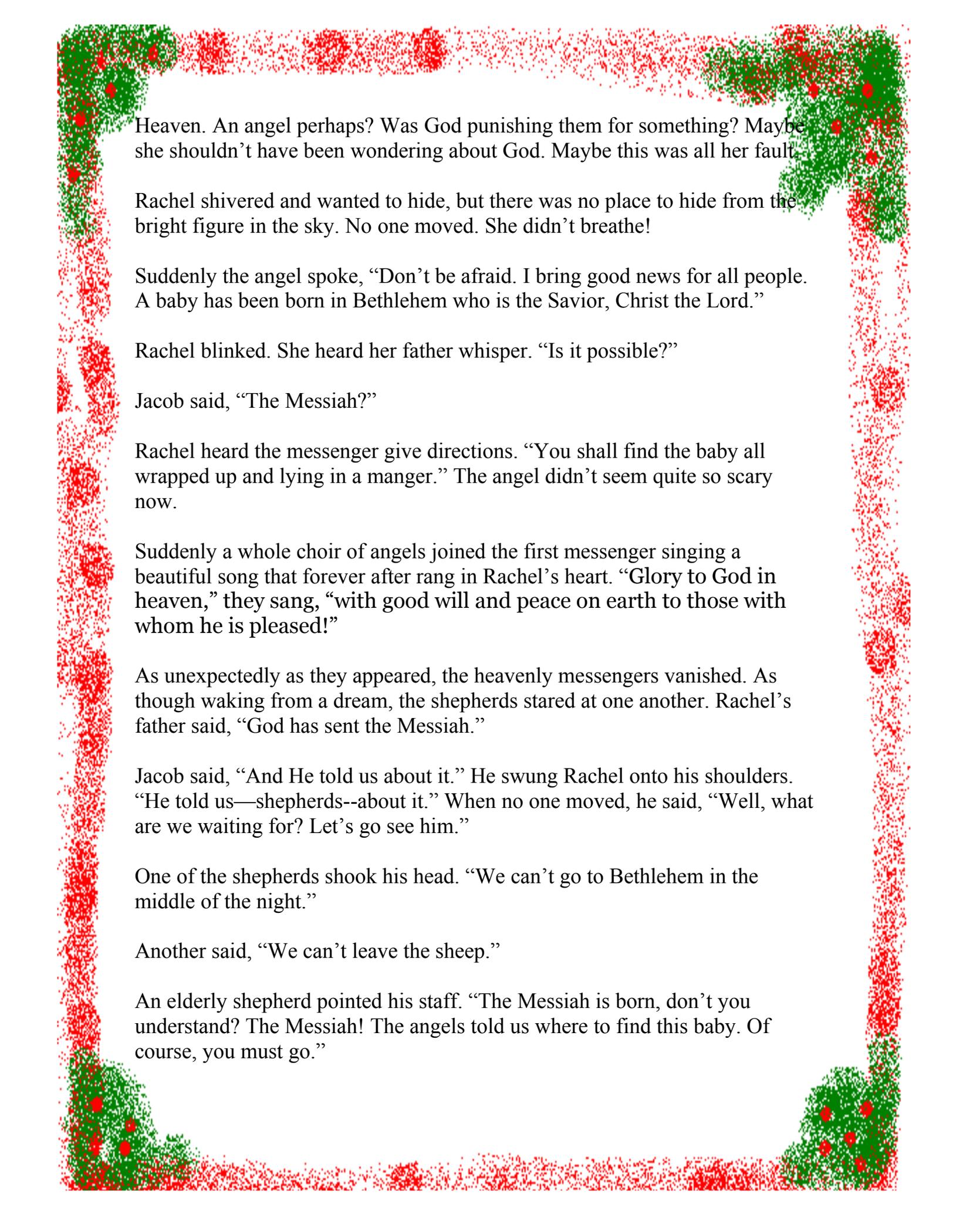
"Really?" She frowned. "Mother? Father?"



"It's all right." Jacob put her on his wide, strong shoulders. By the flock, he gently set her down. A scraggly little sheep rubbed against her, almost knocking her down. A larger sheep butted her. This time she did fall, but laughed as she sat down to pet her woolly friends.

As the night grew darker and scary sounds filled the night, Rachel huddled with the shepherds by the bright, warm fire. She fell asleep as they talked about a time when The Messiah would come. She fell asleep wondering if The Messiah would care about poor shepherds and especially about one little, imperfect shepherd girl.

In the darkest part of the night, she jerked awake. Light surrounded her, and she stared up into the dark sky. Only it wasn't dark any more. As she blinked, she made out a large glowing figure that seemed to be staring down right at them. She huddled between Jacob and her father, but they and the other shepherds seemed just as terrified as she was. This had to be something from



Heaven. An angel perhaps? Was God punishing them for something? Maybe she shouldn't have been wondering about God. Maybe this was all her fault.

Rachel shivered and wanted to hide, but there was no place to hide from the bright figure in the sky. No one moved. She didn't breathe!

Suddenly the angel spoke, "Don't be afraid. I bring good news for all people. A baby has been born in Bethlehem who is the Savior, Christ the Lord."

Rachel blinked. She heard her father whisper. "Is it possible?"

Jacob said, "The Messiah?"

Rachel heard the messenger give directions. "You shall find the baby all wrapped up and lying in a manger." The angel didn't seem quite so scary now.

Suddenly a whole choir of angels joined the first messenger singing a beautiful song that forever after rang in Rachel's heart. "Glory to God in heaven," they sang, "with good will and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!"

As unexpectedly as they appeared, the heavenly messengers vanished. As though waking from a dream, the shepherds stared at one another. Rachel's father said, "God has sent the Messiah."

Jacob said, "And He told us about it." He swung Rachel onto his shoulders. "He told us—shepherds--about it." When no one moved, he said, "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go see him."

One of the shepherds shook his head. "We can't go to Bethlehem in the middle of the night."

Another said, "We can't leave the sheep."

An elderly shepherd pointed his staff. "The Messiah is born, don't you understand? The Messiah! The angels told us where to find this baby. Of course, you must go."

Rachel could tell her father wanted to go. Jacob wanted to go, and she so wanted to go see this baby. But they really couldn't leave the sheep. The old shepherd smiled a gentle smile. "I am old and I believe without seeing. I will stay."

So they left. They found the stable. They found the young couple Mary and Joseph, and they found a tiny baby in a manger. The couple didn't even seem all that surprised to see them. They had a special glow. Did they know this baby was special? Was he really the Messiah, this helpless baby?

As the shepherds knelt in worship, Jacob put Rachel down right in front of the manger. Rachel wasn't sure she wanted to be close to the Messiah. After all, hadn't He given her a bad leg? She was not good enough to see God, even as a baby—a cute baby though, she decided.

As she wondered, baby Jesus smiled. Rachel touched his tiny fist. When it opened and grasped her finger, Rachel remembered something she'd heard written by Isaiah, a prophet who lived long, long ago, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."
(Is 9:6)



As she stared into the baby's face she knew. This tiny baby WAS the Messiah. It didn't matter she was not perfect or the daughter of shepherds. The Messiah had come and He came to save His people.

Joy filled her heart. God cared. He really cared. Her bad leg didn't matter all that much any more, because she knew God made her just the way she was.

When she turned, she saw the same joy on the faces of her father and Jacob and the other shepherds. God had come. She couldn't wait to share the good news.