

Do You Hear What I Hear?

A Shepherd's Monolog

It was not a silent night. I don't know if I have ever experienced a night that was. We shepherds work outdoors and are surrounded by sounds. Sheep are noisy animals, they "baaah" back and forth, they "baaah" at the sheep dogs, they "baah" at any and every noise, or smell, or puff of wind. The dogs bark, they bark to keep the sheep herded, they bark when the sheep "baah", the sheep "baah" when the dogs bark, silence is not a part of shepherding.

And we shepherds, well we're not so quite ourselves. We talk, we share stories. Some sleep when they are not on watch, and when most shepherds sleep, then snore! Imagine if you will, the baahs, the barks, the chatter and the snoring -- all the time, every night. Normal enough, but noisy!

Then add in the sounds of nature, the crackle of the fire; the rush of the wind; the prowling of wild animals, large and small; the hooting of the owls, and the scampering of the field mice. Such is a shepherd's world. Yet me and my friends, we are not just any shepherds; we are the shepherds which watch over the temple flocks. Our flocks live and feed close to town, and so we hear those noises too. On that night, the night of the light, there was also the noise of all those travelers. At the demand of Caesar so many were streaming into the city, adding the sounds of pack animals, of all their belongings clinking and clanging, of their weary voices and sometime shouts. It was not a silent night; it was one of the loudest, nosiest, most "unpeaceful" nights I can remember.

It would have been easy to not notice that messenger. It would have been easy to simply allow the sound that messenger brought to be incorporated into all the other sounds that night held. There were those who did not notice, who thought those of us who claimed to hear the messenger, the angel of God, simply had over active imaginations; stirred by all the travelers and excitement around the census. Just as it would have been easy to try to explain away or simply name of one of those odd, unexplainable happenings, that which I can best describe as the glory of God, shining, inviting, warning, scaring, challenging us. That sense that could not be captured nor fully described, yet which I knew to be an extra helping of God's presence with us, and with that messenger – that angel.

When the army of heaven, the heavenly host, made themselves visible, it certainly helped us to hear the message with our hearts as well as our ears. There was so much love in the air. There was so much trust, so much which called us to consider the wonders of God rather than the worries of this world. Their noise, their song, was not for us; it was directed towards and surely was their gift to God. They were celebrating that God was and is God alone, we were privileged beyond measure to hear.

Yet even their sounds did not drown out the sounds of that not so silent night. Neither the messenger nor the army intruded upon anyone in such a way that they were forced to listen, forced to receive; forced to hear; and some did not.

Others heard, part or all of the God sounds in the midst of the night sounds, and then began to rationalize them away. Others devised ways that they might test out the message of the messenger, that they might have added assurances and proof before taking the words to heart. Still others quickly fell into debating what had really happened, debating if the heavenly hosts sang or spoke their words, debating on which aspect of the night was most important, even debating on who and how the story was to be best told and where God was most present.

Others were suspicious. Were these noises from God, or some type of plot to trick them and take from them what was rightly theirs? Stay and guard the sheep they would. Stay and ensure that everything remained the same. Stay and dispute that God might interrupt their lives or have a word to speak to them. Stay and hold onto their concept that they were unimportant in the sharing of God's story, that their comfort, their getting by, even if just barely, was the only sign of God they had to assure themselves or share with others.

A few of us listened. A few of us opened our hearts and felt the wonder. A few of us knew that whatever this was, it was not to be explained, it was to be experienced. A few of us give this message priority, received it with urgency and haste. A few of us longed for our lives and the world to be changed so deeply that we listened. That we went. That we believed.

A few of us continue to listen, continue to hear. A few of us know that God came not only in that amazing night and beautiful baby, but that God is always coming, always here and always breaking through that which divides heaven and earth; that which binds us to this noisy, confusing world. We listen and we hear the angels deep in the quiet of our own hearts. We listen and we believe that the message shared that not so silent night is the message that is to be shared this day, every day. A few of us are now adding our voices to the noises all around, as we proclaim that which was told to us:

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all on whom his favor rests."

Do you hear the wonder in those words? Do you hear the urgency in those words? Do you hear the possibility in those words? Do you hear what I hear, what I will continue to hear each day of my life?