

“Listen to Christmas” – Pastor Elizabeth “Tizzy” von Trapp Walker
July 29, 2018 (Christmas in July)

Friends, this morning, we want to think together about the Christmas story and try to imagine what it would have been like to really have been there in Bethlehem on that first Christmas Eve. What would we have seen? What would we have heard?

I am going to ask all of you here to help me tell the story of Christmas by making some of the sounds that were heard on that night.

(Audience is divided into 4 groups.) Let’s practice the following by groups:

Group 1: sleepers – light snores sound like stacked Zzzzzs

Group 2: lambs – soft baas

Group 3: cold blowing wind – “ssshhh”

Group 4: angels - “Glory to God in the Highest”

Scene 1 – The Hillside



The story begins many years ago. It was a chilly night. There was a ***cold blowing wind***. Out on a lonely hillside a group of shepherds were ***sleeping***. They were very weary. All day they had followed their flock of sheep up one hill and down the other looking for grass. Now the grass was white with frosted dew. The sheep were huddled together against the cold hill. Some of the little ***lambs*** were still awake and could be heard. It was a dark night and cold. There were no beds for these resting shepherds. They wrapped themselves in their cloaks and lay on the hard, cold ground and tried to ***sleep***. The ***cold wind*** continued to blow over the tired shepherds. The little ***lambs*** nestled closer to their mother to stay warm. One shepherd was awake, pacing to and fro by the fire, keeping watch that no prowlers would come thieving to steal the sleeping flocks or no wild animals come to drag off a tiny lamb. He stopped to listen. He heard the ***sleeping shepherds***. He heard the little ***lambs***. He heard the ***cold blowing wind***. Suddenly all was still. The dark sky became brighter and brighter until it was a flash of silver light. The voice of an Angel was heard. ***Angel:*** Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. The shepherds awoke startled, amazed. They hid their frightened, dazzled eyes. The huddled flocks began to stir and mill about. The sky was as bright as morning. Suddenly a multitude of angels appeared praising God and saying: ***“Glory to God in the highest”***.

This is how it might have sounded on a hillside in Bethlehem long ago.

Scene 2 – The Manger



How do you picture the stable where Christ was born? Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Do you see Mary? and Joseph? Do you see the manger with straw? What do you smell? Do you see any animals? “Through the centuries since the starry night when the Christ Child was born in a manger at Bethlehem, people in all countries have joyfully told and retold legends of the first Christmas Eve. In so many of these

Christmas legends there are so many animals and birds and other creatures that it seems as though man must always have felt that, in the best-loved festival, all living things should have a share.”

There is a Christmas carol from the Twelfth Century called *The Friendly Beasts*. As we sing, you will also be the animal noises.

Let's practice. Shall we? Group 1: donkey - bray; Group 2: cow - moo; Group 3: sheep – baa; Group 4: dove – coo) Ready?

Verse 1 - Jesus our brother, strong and good, Was humbly born in a stable rude, And the friendly beasts around him stood, Jesus our brother, strong and good.

Verse 2 - "I", said the **donkey**, shaggy and brown, "I" carried his mother uphill and down, I carried her safely to Bethlehem town; "I", said the **donkey** shaggy and brown.

Verse 3 - "I", said the **cow**, all white and red, "I" gave him my manger for his bed, I gave him my hay to pillow his head; "I", said the **cow** all white and red.

Verse 4 - "I", said the **sheep** with the curly horn, "I" gave him my wool for his blanket warm, He wore my coat on Christmas morn; "I", said the **sheep** with the curly horn.

Verse 5 - "I", said the **dove**, from the rafters high, "Cooed him to sleep, my mate and I; We cooed him to sleep, my mate and I; "I said the **dove** from the rafters high. (**Group 4**)

Verse 6 - And every beast by some good spell, In the stable dark was glad to tell, Of the gift he gave Immanuel, The gift he gave Immanuel.



A donkey was there, a cow, a sheep, a dove. What other animals might have been there? There are legends about the animals around the manger from countries all over the world.



A dog might have been there. Among the Albanian people, the first bite of food on Christmas morning is given to the house dog as a sign of the sympathy which people believe animals have with the Nativity. In some parts of the world, (and perhaps this is a custom we can adopt) every animal indoors and out had food on Christmas.



Bees and glowworms have been connected with Christmas. In some parts of England, it is believed that if you listen outside the bee-hive at midnight on Christmas Eve, you will hear bees inside humming in honor of the Holy Child.



There is also the legend of the little beetle that made his home on the roof of the stable in Bethlehem, and heard the angels tell the good news of the Christ Child's birth. Flying to one of the angels, he begged that he might be allowed to tell the other animals the good news. The angel was pleased and placed a tiny glowing spark between the beetle's wings.

Animals, birds and insects saw the little light, and knew what it meant. When the little beetle returned to the stable, he continued to fly about all night, giving out a faint light by which Mary and Joseph could watch the child. Ever since then, the beetle has been known as the glowworm.



Have you heard the legend of the Christmas robin? This legend says the robin’s breast is red because he fluttered his little wings to quicken the dying fire which had been built to warm the Christ Child as he lay in the manger. As the fire grew brighter, the feathers on the robin’s breast caught the glow from the flames and has remained red ever since.



There might have been a spider at the first manger. There is a Polish folk legend that says that on Christmas night, the Christ Child began to weep with cold. A little spider that lived in the stable brought his silken web and laid it at the baby’s feet. It was soft as thistledown and warm as wool. The child stopped crying and smiled at the little grey spider.



And there is a final legend that says at midnight on Christmas Eve, all the animals kneel to pray. “Horse and cow and wooly sheep, wake themselves from their heavy sleep...Far away in the forest dark, Creatures timidly wake and hark. Feathered bird and furry beast turn their eyes to the mystic East...Christmas morn, the legends say: All the cattle kneel to pray; Even the wildest beast afar; Know the light of the Savior’s star.”

Scene 3 – The Wise Men

For our third, and final scene, we want to think about the visit of the Wise Men to the stable. Again, I’d like you to be the sounds of Christmas.

Let’s practice. Shall we?

Group 1: star of Bethlehem – soft whistle

Group 2: people whispering – “What does it mean?”

Group 3: camels – soft footsteps

Group 4: servants of the king saying – “Yes, O King.”



In the east, where the Wise Men came from, there were great astrologers. They studied the stars to determine the weather, winds and storms. The stars told them many things. When Christ was born in Bethlehem, a new *star* arose. It was greater and brighter than any they had ever seen before. The astrologers whispered together in awe, “*What does it mean?*” At last,

one said, “This is a mighty sign. A king will rise, his power beyond all kings, and he will be born beneath the *star*. They hurried to tell their king. The king knew their words were filled with wisdom, and he quickly called his servants. “Servants make ready my swift departure across the desert. Toward the west I travel many weeks.” “*Yes, O King.*” “With retinue in full of camels.” “*Yes, O King.*” “With servants, raiment, food.” “*Yes, O King.*” “Wait, one thing more. Let frankincense of costliest kind be carried on the camel of mine. Go.” “*Yes, O King.*”

Two other kings from the East had also seen the wondrous star. They, too, assembled a proud array. One carried a marvelous box full of gold, and one a barrel filled with costly myrrh. The three kings came riding from far away (*camel footsteps*). And they traveled by night and they slept by day. They were always guided by the beautiful white *star*. Sometimes they stopped to rest, and they would talk with the people they met. “We go to find the King of the Jews.” And when they left, people would whisper together, “*What does it mean?*”

Can you imagine them traveling? (*camel footsteps*) Camels with huge, soft strides plodding through sandy deserts, where there were only oases and cloudless skies; on and on, to forest and plains and grasses and trees and splashing of rain on their backs; through Persia's sandy plains, through Syrian land, now through Moab they went (*camel footsteps*). And a large, white *star* of Bethlehem led them.

Can you see the kings riding on the camel's backs (*camel footsteps*), dressed in robes of crimson silk with turbans on their heads and slaves walking by their sides? They stopped at Jerusalem, and asked Herod the Great where the new king was born. Herod was troubled. He sent for his wise men, but they could only whisper together, "*What does it mean?*" And so, they rode away again (*camel footsteps*).



And then the *star* stopped. It stood over Bethlehem, the city of David, where Christ was born. And the three kings rode through the gate (*camel footsteps*) and the guard, through the silent streets, until their camels turned into an inn-yard. The windows of the inn were closed, and the doors barred, and there was only a light shining from the stable. The kings climbed down from their camels, and entered the stable, and saw Mary

and Joseph and the baby, and falling with reverence on their knees, they laid their offerings at the baby's feet: gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Invite people to bring their gifts (food and school supply items for the Food Pantry) to the altar (Mary, Joseph and cradle) as we sing hymn 254 *We Three Kings*.



That's how it might have been that very first Christmas Eve on a hillside in Bethlehem. *Sleepy* Shepherds, little *lambs* bleating with the *cold wind* blowing, and angels from on high singing, "*Glory to God in the highest*". And all of God's people said? AMEN!

Original script was written by Judy Gattis Smith. It has been adapted by Rev. Tizzy von Trapp Walker for use with the Fairfield-Emory Charge, Virginia.