

Nativity Sheep Raise Questions

BY DR. MARIAN FRITZEMEIER, ED.D.

“Why do the sheep have to be here?” my eight-year-old grandson, Parker, asks.

I suspect they scare him, even though he and his younger sister are standing behind a three-foot-high barrier separating them from the nativity animals.

During our visit to a local church’s live nativity, the sheep trigger questions from our grandchildren. I ought to be able to answer the questions. After all, my husband and I took our daughters to live nativities for years. It was a Christmas tradition that strengthened our family’s beliefs about the true meaning of Christmas.

In between the narrator’s story, music and characters moving about, I answer my grandchildren’s questions.

“The sheep are here because the shepherds were the first ones the angels told about Jesus’ birth. The shepherds brought their sheep with them to find Jesus in the manger.”

“Why did they take the sheep with them?” Parker asks. I sense his hope that the sheep will leave soon.

“The shepherds can’t leave their flocks alone,” I explain. “Their job is to protect the sheep.”

At that moment the Narrator says, “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”

Sheep Poop and Shepherds

Just then, six-year-old Khloe tugs my coat sleeve and asks, “Are the sheep real?”

“Yes, they’re real. Look! One just moved his head.”

“Do they poop?”

“Yep,” I answer without missing a beat.

“Ucckkk. Smelly,” the grandkids reply in unison.

“It is smelly. The shepherds spend their time in the fields with the sheep so they can’t take a bath very often. They even get poop on them.”

I wonder if others standing near us can overhear our discussion.

The Narrator’s voice continues.

“But the angel said to them, ‘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’”

Parker looks down. “I feel sorry for the sheep. Are they cold?”

I assure him. “See the thick wool on their bodies? It’s like your coat. It keeps them warm.”

“But what about their legs?”

Hmmm. That one I can’t answer.

God’s Message

The Narrator concludes the powerful Christmas story. The shepherds “hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

The volunteers provide hot chocolate. We keep warm by the fire. I ask Parker and Khloe, “What part

of the Christmas story did you like best? My favorite part was how God sees every person as special. Even though the shepherds smelled, God thought they were important enough to tell others about Jesus’ birth.”

The grandchildren recount their favorite parts. Even though they giggle again about smelly sheep poop, I know this annual family tradition builds their understanding of the Christmas message. God sent His son to be the Savior of the world.

Thanking the Creator

After I take the grandchildren home, I wonder about the sheep’s legs. Intrigued, I do a couple of searches online to learn more about sheep.

I learn that sheep stay warm because lanolin in their wool keeps their skin dry. And I also discover that when sheep “chew their cud” they are keeping warm, and that the more a sheep eats, the more heat its body produces.

Equipped with a new understanding of how sheep keep warm, I’m prompted to pray.

“Lord, You never cease to amaze me. You create animals with exactly what they need to thrive. Only You are the amazing creator of every detail.”

I come across a devotional and prayer on the Proverbs 31 Ministries website that resonates with me. It urges me to rejoice with the shepherds in the Good News of Jesus’ birth, and reminds me to explore my amazement at all that God provided through the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus. Finally, it encourages me to share the Good News with people I meet.

What will you do with the angels’ message to the shepherds? “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

PHOTO BY ALINA FEDORCHENKO ON UNSPLASH

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

SUNDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Job 22–27
MONDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Job 28–37
TUESDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Job 38–42
WEDNESDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Psalms 1–5
THURSDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Psalms 6–12
FRIDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Psalms 13–19
SATURDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Psalms 20–26

