

Third Place: 2007 Short Story Competition

Author – Dorothy Cook

With her story

Tidings of Joy

It was my first job as a fully fledged angel.

“The Boss has a special job for me tonight”, Gabriel told us, “and he’s sending a heavenly host as back up. You’ll all be needed”.

I polished up my halo and preened my wings, so proud to be invited. Mind you, I was disappointed when we arrived at the place. I’d expected somewhere impressive; a holy place or an earthly paradise, not that cold hillside at the back of beyond, and sheep. Silly creatures, sheep. I wondered what the Boss had intended when he created them. The shepherds looked an unlikely lot as well. They were scared out of whatever wits they’d got when Gabriel suddenly appeared and started spouting his stuff. Then we all joined in the chorus. I hovered and glowed, shone to the best of my ability, glorying to God at the top of my voice. It was great, but it was all a mystery to me, though I’d heard the rumours about the Boss’s son being born on Earth. That’s what all this was about, but I found it hard to believe Gabriel’s message to these simple country folk. The son of God, born in a stable; how could that be? I said as much to one the Seraphs, after I’d plucked up courage to speak to such a mighty one.

“When you’ve been at this job as long as I have” he said, “you’ll learn not to question the ways of the Boss”, and he went on and on about the old days. Ladders up to heaven, city walls falling down, a shepherd boy killing a giant..... shepherds again! He must have reported my speaking out of turn to Gabriel, but I didn’t get punished as I deserved. Instead, me and some of the other youngsters were allowed to follow the shepherds, at a discrete distance, and see for ourselves. And of course it was just as Gabriel had said. The stable looked a poor, dreary place from outside, though as we got nearer we could see a wonderful glow coming from within, brighter than any of us could achieve. We hovered above the roof out of sight of human eyes. Of course, the animals knew we were there. The cows lowed softly, then carried on chewing the cud and watching the goings-on with their gentle eyes. The donkey, resting after his journey swished his tail, and pricked up his ears. As for the cat, she pretended not to notice anything different, though much put out by our presence as she considered the roof to be her rightful territory. She made a great play of washing, but I noticed she didn’t move far that night, and refrained from killing, even when a brave mouse popped up to join in the celebrations.

The shepherds were quite overcome with the wonder of it all. They knelt in front of the crib where the baby lay and Ooh-ed and Ah-ed as humans do on such occasions, but they did it with reverence. The Christ child, though less than an hour old, gazed at them with eyes that looked into their very souls, and his mother smiled and gratefully accepted the warm fleece they had brought as a birth offering.

Afterwards, two of the young shepherd lads were sent back to check on the flock while the rest of them went into the town to tell all their friends and relations about

this marvellous happening. That was all part of the Boss's plan, according to Gabriel. I followed the lads back up the hill and watched them stoke up the fire and sit there chattering excitedly. They'd have a tale to tell their children and grandchildren for generations to come. The sheep were all safe; it was a clear starlit night, and even the wolf and fox population knew better than to attack any of God's creatures on this holiest of nights.

Of course, that wasn't the end of the story by any means, just the beginning in fact and now that I am elevated to a senior position in the angelic ranks I understand a little more about the workings of the Kingdom, and the place of sheep. I have learned that the Christ child is the Lamb of God, and also the Good Shepherd. What I still don't fully understand though is why the Boss couldn't come up with a better design for an animal which has such an important place in the Kingdom of Heaven, though I know better than to express my doubts to anyone. The Boss has his plans which are his alone to know, and all will be revealed in the fullness of time.

The End

'Dorothy Cooke' has always lived in Dronfield and started writing after early retirement. She has had a short story published in The Lady, a play performed by Dronfield Players and work published in several poetry magazines and anthologies. She won the Bassetlaw Writers Open Poetry competition 2007.