

Intended for use on either STEREO or mono phonographs

Electronically rechanneled to simulate Stereophonic  
FOLKWAYS STEREO FTS 35001

# NANIVINNY

Sholem Asch's Story of the Birth of Jesus  
Narrated by Pete Seeger with Traditional Christmas Carols





## Pete Seeger

I waited twenty years for the right voice to tell this story.

The voice of a professional actor or announcer would not do. Sholem Asch's *Nativity* must be told, I felt, by someone with an affinity for art and the folk idiom, and with a deep sense of social understanding as well. Carols are the oldest folk song expression in our oral tradition, and the ageless story of the birth of Christ is a basic theme in folk balladry.

When Pete Seeger and I worked together in creating *Abiyoyo*, a folk tale for children, I realized that here at last was the right person to tell my father's story. Pete is one of the truly great folk singers of our time—and his instinctive awareness of the tragedy (and the triumph!) of the human predicament is a significant part of his artistry.

And so here is the recording. It represents the combined efforts of three generations—my father, myself, and Pete Seeger. But at the heart of it is the story itself—a basic, eternal story, rekindling in all of us the universal hope that all men, rich and poor, are seeking—“Peace On Earth, Good Will To Men.”

### Side I

Band 1 — THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM	7:55
Band 2 — THE MAGISTRATE	1:57
Band 3 — THE WEALTHY MAN	2:49
Band 4 — THE BENEFACITOR	2:30
Band 5 — THE TEACHER	2:57

### Side II

Band 1 — THE SHEPHERDS	7:15
Band 2 — THE MANGER	6:47

### Side III

Band 1 — THE THREE WISE MEN	7:37
Band 2 — PEACE ON EARTH	10:40

### Side IV Carols

Band 1 — THE FIRST NOEL	5:41
Band 2 — MARY HAD A BABY	2:42
Band 3 — GLORY TO THE NEW BORN KING	2:34
Band 4 — WHAT CHILD IS THIS?	2:16
Band 5 — RISE UP, SHEPHERD, AND FOLLOW	1:36
Band 6 — LO, HOW A ROSE E'ER BLOOMING	1:57

## The Nativity

The story of the birth of Christ is unique among Sholem Asch's stories. It is the only one he ever wrote in English (the others were all translated into English). And it was written specifically for the phonograph record. This is how it happened.

In 1942 Sholem Asch was living in Stamford, Connecticut, and studying English speech and literature. He could converse freely in French, German, Polish, Russian, and English, and he was literate in Hebrew. But his natural tongue was Yiddish, a language whose idioms were second nature to him and to which he had contributed much in new words and expressions.

After writing *The Nazarene*, however, he felt that the Yiddish language, with all its richness, had certain literary limitations—he felt that English would provide a broader means of expression for him.

At this time I had already earned a modest reputation for my recorded works of literature and folk materials. My particular specialty was in children's records. I had already put out my father's *In the Beginning*, a book based on the Talmud interpretation of the Creation. I had long felt that there was a great need for a concise telling of the birth of Christ as a social document, a work which could tell in literature what only a few painters—notably Breughel—had achieved in another medium. I asked my father if he would write such a story, designed for telling by way of the phonograph record.

This story was the answer to my request. Since records in those days were limited in size by the requirements of 78 rpm equipment, the story was constructed in six episodes. I have kept it ever since that time, waiting for the right time to present this never-before-published story.

## Sholem Asch

The seventh son of fourteen children, Sholem Asch was born at Kutno, a small village near Warsaw, Poland, on November 1, 1880. His father was a shepherd, and Sholem Asch began working at an early age. But at night, by candlelight, he studied.

When he was 18, his writing came to the attention of the poet Israel Peretz, dean of Yiddish literature, and soon stories by Sholem Asch began to appear in the Yiddish newspapers. With publication of *The Shtetle* (The Little Town), a collection of his tales, he was immediately recognized as one of the important literary voices of the new century.

From the beginning, his writing showed an intense involvement with social themes and biblical backgrounds. When his play *God of Vengeance* was first shown, in 1904, its unusual treatment of a religious motif created a furor. However, Max Reinhardt's outstanding production of the play in Berlin in 1910 won Asch an international reputation in the theater. Later, when the play was produced on Broadway, a court fight resulted in one of the first challenges to theater censorship in the United States. A man of strong convictions and the ability to translate his beliefs into profound literary works, Asch was frequently attacked by agnostics and religious fanatics alike.

Asch's interest in the Judeo-Christian heritage stemmed from his first visit to Palestine, in 1911-12. His physical presence on the soil where the early prophets and martyrs had walked and lived and died evoked a creative identification with the process of human development in the Holy Land. His historical novels are modern, human interpretations of the Bible—in the light of tradition, but expanded by 20th century discoveries, new and more significant translations from the Scriptures, and the most up-to-date archeological findings of his day.

Sholem Asch first visited the United States on a lecture tour in 1910. He returned in 1913, became a United States citizen in 1920, and considered himself an American author from that time on. The sounds and scenes of New York City became background for many of his novels.

Sholem Asch died in 1957 in London, while working on revisions for his last book (never published), a novel dealing with the Essenes people. During his lifetime he authored more than 50 books and major plays, most of them with historical religious themes. His best-known work, *The Nazarene*, took 30 years in the writing and sold over 600,000 copies.

Notes by Moses Asch

Booklet with complete text accompanies 2-record set.

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Story of the Nativity  
**THE BIRTH**  
by SHOLEM ASCH



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## CHAPTER I

On the Bethlehem road which lies between Jerusalem and Hebron in the land of Ephriam, a young couple were mounting the stony path which leads toward the city. Mary, the espoused wife of Joseph, was rocking on the back of the little ass which her husband was leading. They had endured a long weary journey. From the depths of Galilee they came, and in order to avoid unfriendly Samaria they had taken the road to Ephriam along the banks of the river Jordan. It was the longer way, but pleasanter and more comfortable. The summery climate of the Jordan basin had transformed all the countryside into a scene of everlasting beauty. And they went in midwinter through fields of green corn, of blooming pomegranates and oleanders that were already sending forth the sweet perfume of their reddish flowers. Such was the whole long road until they came to the rich vineyards and fig orchards of Jericho, which at this time of the year were in the full bloom of spring.

But when from Jericho they started to climb the desert mountains of Judea, the whole landscape changed into an ash-colored wilderness. Cascades of stones ran down empty river beds from the mountainside; there was not a tree under which to hide from the sun of day and no shed to shelter them by night. They had eaten their supply of fig cakes and they had drunk the last drop of water from the pumpkin bottles which they had brought with them from their last station in Jericho. The climate had changed now from sunny spring to the cold of winter. Coming from mild Nazareth, they were not prepared for the winter, and they shivered from the chilly winds which blew on them as they mounted the barren, rocky hills. Joseph covered his weary wife with his cloak while he himself sweated under the heavy load he carried on his shoulder in order to ease the burden of the little ass. The sun sank early in these alien mountains and the shadows of the *night* fell soon, but as they descended from those stony, desert mountains, they came unto green pastures covered with a thin coat of hoarfrost, their fresh verdure pushing through the miry clay. In the distance were seen several shepherd huts which gave promise that they were approaching a place inhabited. And sure enough, the friendly lights from the thickly populated town of Bethlehem greeted them happily from the foot of the mountain. With the last shimmering rays of the sun, they neared the gates of the city.

It took them a long, long time before they passed the publicans who collected the taxes at the gate, for there was approaching a great multitude of men and beasts from all roads leading into the city. There were many mighty men, richly adorned with silks and jewels and boasting numerous attendants. Some of them came in long, elaborate caravans of camels carrying their provisions, their jars of spices, their mattresses, their garments, and their ornaments. Others were carried in sedans by slaves, and others were even in chariots drawn by spirited horses. For some of them, heralds proclaimed their coming on silver trumpets, and pages carried the banners of their family. All of them passed through the gates with great clamor and stateliness.

The rich and mighty were coming to Bethlehem to claim their descent from King David. The Caesar of Rome had ordered the governor of Syria to take the census of the population in order to learn where the people belonged. (Many rich men from Jericho and many aristocrats from Jerusalem were claiming their descent from the House of David.) As such offspring they must come to Bethlehem, the birth-place of David. And Joseph and Mary also were coming from Nazareth to register and to pay their taxes, for they too were of the house of the ancient king.

When they approached the publicans and the guards at the gate and stated that they too were of David's line, the publicans did not want to believe them. They stepped from their huts and asked, "So you are also from King David? Where then are your chariots and mighty caravans and your heralds and pages? And where are your jars of spice, your ornaments, your fine garments and slaves like those of your rich relatives?"

Still they let them pass, for it was the order of the governor that all descendants from David must return to Bethlehem to register.

When Joseph and Mary with their little donkey approached the inn of the town, they found it lighted up with many oil lamps, and great merry-making was going on. The mighty and wealthy were celebrating their reunion with kinsmen who resided in other sections of the land. Flute players and cymbalists accompanied the meals of the rich banqueters and Egyptian dancing girls, oiled and decorated with lotus flowers in their glistening hair, entertained with their dances. The

wealthy owners of the vineyards of Hebron and the aristocrats from Jerusalem and other great cities lolled comfortably on their couches near richly laden tables attended by their slaves.

When Joseph came before the innkeeper, he asked, "Can you furnish my wife and me with a corner of your great House? Even the humblest place will do! A stable or an attic! We are not very rich, I am only a carpenter by trade."

"That you are not rich I can see from your sackclothes, and that you are a carpenter I know from your rough hands. Will you tell me what a poor carpenter is doing in this famous town at a time like this when the mighty are assembling for the census?"

"I came for the census, for I too am descended from the line of David."

"If you are of David's line then you belong inside with the lords at their rich banquet tables."

"King David had no flutes and cymbals at his banquets. With them he only sang his psalms in praise to God."

"You cannot blaspheme King David in this town! Don't you know that he came from this place? We have pride in him here. To think that you have the effrontery to claim him as an ancestor! Beware!"

And Joseph and Mary went out.

For the first night they slept among the pillars of the market hall where most of the poor sought shelter from the night. Joseph covered Mary with his garment and protected her from the cold, comforting her the while with kind words. Mary was burdened with a great concern because she was big with child.

"What is it, my dear wife? What troubles your spirit? Tomorrow I will go out and look for a place of shelter."

"I feel the time has come to bear what God has promised me. But where am I to lay the head of my child?"

"Be of good spirit, my wife! The child must be born in Bethlehem according to the prophecy. And surely God will guide us to a proper place among righteous people where you can deliver the child in peace and security."

When the sun rose, Joseph got up and led his wife to an enclosure for donkeys where he left her and the little ass. And he went to look for a place of shelter.

The first man whom Joseph approached was the magistrate of the town. In his simplicity he thought that here as in every other Jewish village shelter would be provided for poor strangers who happened to be within its gates. Before the home of the magistrate he found great confusion of men and beasts, and there was a babel of voices. But in this time when the rich were gathering together, the official, like many of his kind, was much taken with his importance. All the signs of his position hung on his round belly so that he perspired under their burden. He shouted orders to many attendants around him. These men too were decorated with all the insignia of officialdom, and they busily plied their whips to maintain order. It took poor Joseph a long time before his turn came to appear before the face of this mighty one.

"What is it that you wish?" demanded the magistrate.

"My wife is big with child and her delivery is very near. We have no place where the mother can bear her child in peace."

When the magistrate heard Joseph's humble request, he blew himself up like a balloon, and all the bronze medals on his breast and belly began to clink and rattle. His face turned red and his oily, black beard jutted forth as he shrieked in a voice that no one could believe came from such a short, thick neck. Screaming to his assistants, he did not even deign to look at poor Joseph. "Such impudence! Such ignorance! Coming to me at a time like this when I have to provide places for all the attendants and slaves, and all the camels and asses and horses which all the mighty people have brought with them! And he wants a place for his wife to give birth to a child! Why did you allow this impudent one to appear before me when I am so taken with important affairs of the state? Take him out of my sight!"

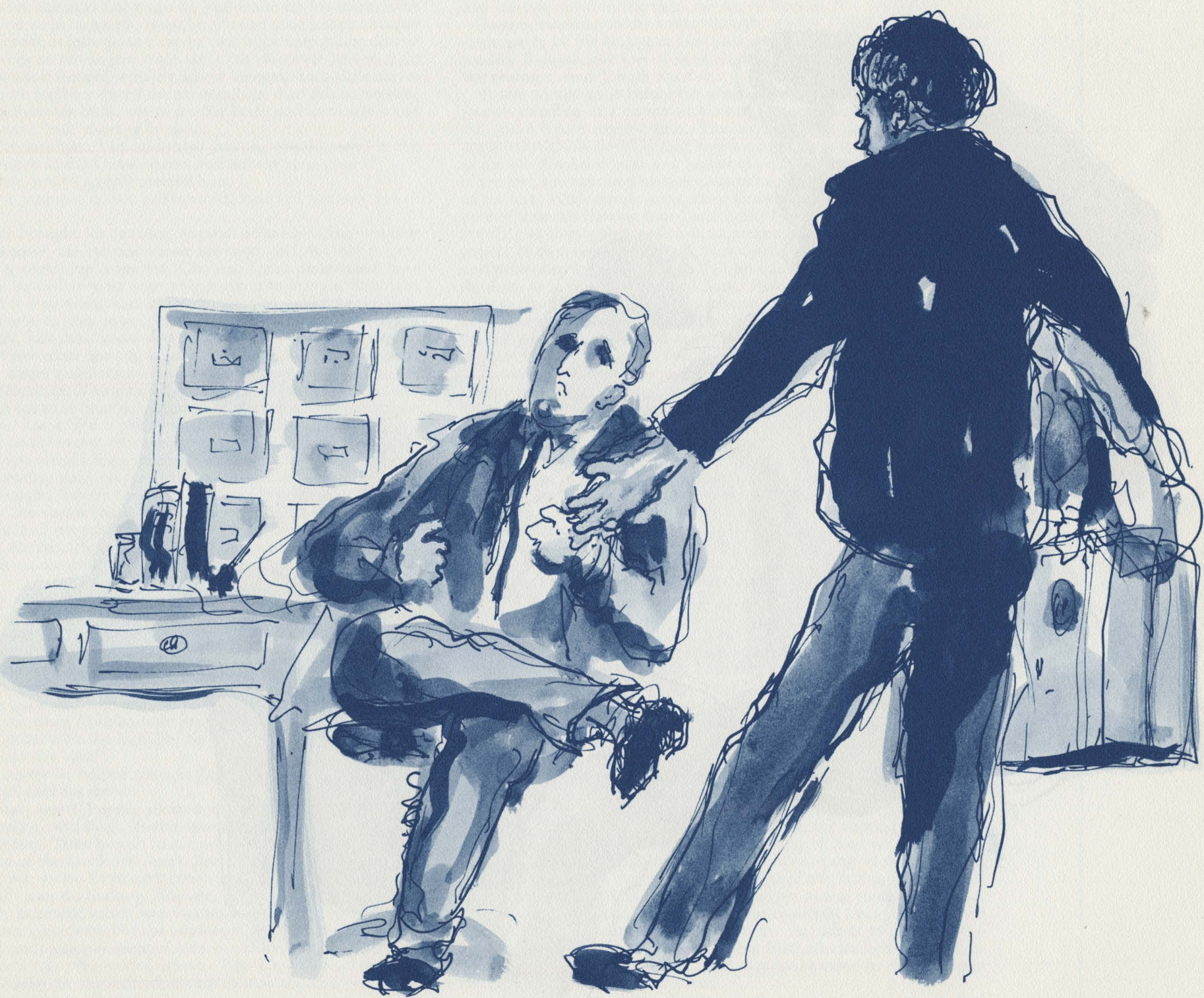
And Joseph went away.

Under the burden of his troubles he walked through the crowded, crooked streets of Bethlehem thinking of whom he might approach next. He came to a tremendous castle ornamented with many towers and gables. Slowly he went to the guards at the gate and asked in humility, "Who lives in this great house, pray tell?"

"Where do you come from stranger, that you don't know the home

## CHAPTER II











of the rich? This is the house of the oil merchant, Cephas, whose vessels cross every sea to carry their riches of the land to the market of the world."

In this fine home, thought Joseph, I shall surely find a tiny corner for my poor wife. And he begged the guard to let him in that he might speak to the lord of the house. After long argument, the guard went away bearing his request.

The lord of the house, like every rich man who lives in assurance and comfort, could afford even to be courteous. He had no fears and no one to whom he owed homage. Long ago he had made up his mind to be polite to everyone; so in his graciousness he allowed poor Joseph to come before him. In order to impress him he donned his golden robes, placed many golden rings on his fingers, then sat in his elaborate hall with its numerous pillars surrounded with clouds of incense. Two little slaves with fans of ostrich feathers waved the air over him. And this he needed, too, for coming from his bath, where his big body had been oiled and massaged, he was a little short of breath.

"Come nearer, stranger," he addressed Joseph, who lingered in the doorway, bowing to him. "Come nearer and tell me your desire!"

"Peace be with you!" Joseph greeted him.

"A nice word, stranger, and a polite word, too. Tell me now how I can help you."

When Joseph brought his pressing request before him the wealthy man started to move his lips and shake his head, Ai! Ai! Ai! A very sad thing and a very urgent matter. Oh, yes, I can understand how urgent this is to you when your poor wife is about to bring a child into the world. And it is very important also. But do you not know the time you chose to come to this town? Alas, my home is reserved for my numerous family. You must know that I come from a very great family, and I need all my space for my cousins and nephews and brothers-in-law and my aunts and uncles. They, being mighty people, must be kept in rich attendance. If you had asked me for a shekel or a half, my treasurer would see to it, that is, of course, if the amount provided for charity is not yet spent. But a place in my house I cannot provide. My home is for my family and not for strangers whom I do not know. Good day! God bless you! And I hope your wife will bear a fine son in Israel." Smiling, the wealthy man clapped his hands and his attendants led Joseph from his sight. Joseph began to wonder where he could go. He had heard of a benefactor living in town whose charity was known to everyone, for he had especially seen to it that his benefactions should be recognized. All Bethlehem was proud of this virtuous man because he was a credit to the city. So to the godly gentleman Joseph made his way.

Without any difficulty or tedious waiting he was admitted to the chamber of the benefactor, Accolonamus, whom Joseph found sitting near his table with his hands folded across his heart and his eyes bent to the floor. Sanctity was painted on his face and beard so that everyone might notice how humble he was.

"Come here, good man! Please be seated!" And the benefactor brought forth a chair and even assisted Joseph to it. "From your dress," he said, "I see you come from humble people. But don't be ashamed of it. Yes, God watches over the humble. Now, tell me, to what occasion am I indebted for this visit?"

Here I shall surely be helped thought Joseph. This is a true man of God. And Joseph told his desire.

The benefactor heard Joseph, stroked his beard a few times and stared at the ceiling with large, round eyes as if the very heavens had been opened for him. Then he said in a low voice, "Ah, yes, God is very near to the man of the burdened heart. But be of good spirit, for God is ever guiding our ways. I am sure you will yet find shelter for your wife. I personally can do nothing. You see, my good man, we have a principle, a holy principle which says we can give charity only through established institutions created by the wisdom of our leaders and guided by that spirit of compassion (inherited from our father Abraham). No, I can give no charity to private individuals. This I have found to be a bad method. Charity for the individual creates laziness, and you know how laziness and idleness encourage sin.

The procedure for receiving charity from our institution is to make out a petition to the office of alms. We then send an investigator to you and if he finds you eligible for assistance, we will take action in due time."

The benefactor crossed his hands over his heart and assumed again

his look of piety and humility for everyone to see.

And Joseph went out.

Passing along a narrow street of Bethlehem he pondered the words of the psalmist, "From whence shall come my help?" and answered himself also from the psalmist, "My help cometh from the Lord." Then Joseph heard a sing-song voice from the open casements pouring forth the laws of God with such feeling and emotion that the whole street was full of his shouting. Even passersby stopped in their tracks to listen to his moving words. And men said to one another, "There sits a great and learned teacher, Barajah, the son of Barajah."

Joseph, standing in the street, thought, surely I shall be heard. This must surely be the help that God had sent me in my distress; the great teacher Barajah, the son of Barajah, will certainly fulfill the words of the psalmist. And Joseph went in.

It was a long while before the venerable teacher noticed the humble Joseph standing in a corner of his study and continuously bowing his tall spare figure toward him. The learned man had been so much occupied with his teaching that he was now deep in trance of inspiration as though lifted suddenly to a higher sphere. With eyes full of the glory of the law, he explained his teachings to his numerous disciples gathered at his feet. With thirsty faces, they drank in the word of God which poured from his flowing beard and bushy eyebrows. He was a spring of learning to thirsty sheep. Countless parchment manuscripts and many papers of papyrus were spread all around him; they lay on his beard and protruded from his pockets. On his hands he carefully enumerated the laws as if God Himself had hung them on each of his ten fingers.

Poor Joseph trembled in his corner until the teacher caught his breath from so much overwhelming inspiration. Sooner or later he must get his wind again. At last he noticed Joseph, who whispered his request in a voice scarcely audible.

It was several minutes before the teacher could come out of his swoon sufficiently to understand the secular nature of this common petition. When finally he grasped the meaning of what Joseph wanted, he grew furious.

"And for this trivial matter you dare come before me and disturb me in my holy work! Who let this man in here to interrupt and take me from my inspiration?" Then he went to Joseph and glared at him while his eyebrows and beard bristled dangerously.

"Don't you know it is sinful to disturb a teacher? But from your garments I can see you are from Galilee! Has anything good ever come from Galilee? It is only through your ignorance that God can forgive you for bothering me with such petty, human weaknesses. To give him a place to bear a child! To provide a place to bring another ignorant one into the world! God forbid!"

And Joseph stumbled out.

Before Joseph had finished his rounds to the mighty of the city, the short winter day of the hill country had ended. Looking for refuge for his wife, he found that the day had gone by and he was standing alone at the edge of the town weary and depressed with no hope of human aid. His only assistance must come from God. With the quietly enveloping shadows of evening, a milky cloud descended from the sky and settled over the green, hilly countryside. The fine, woolly, white flakes of snow were beginning to cover the pastures of the valleys here and there among the hills. Suddenly the sheep, which had been pasturing peacefully in the shadows of evening, began to run in fear after their leaders. From out the cloudy thickness of falling snow, the ringing of the bells from the necks of the beasts and the barking of dogs were clear and distinct. Joyful laughing from running children rang in the air. From ghostlike sheds they ran in joy at the sight of the falling snow, which sometimes came at this time of the year yet was a thing infrequent. Here and there a light or two peered out modestly from the doorways of the sheds, proclaiming the time for the shepherds to return. Tiny wisps of smoke together with the lights from the shelters signified to the shepherds that the evening meal they had earned in righteousness was now being prepared for them.

Joseph, standing in his distress on the edge of the town, looked forlornly on that peaceful scene spread there in the valley at his feet. His heart filled with blessing and compassion for these righteous shepherds who dwelt in this countryside. From all the valleys the shepherds approached now with their flocks, gathering them in and out of the snow. And Joseph thought in his heart, is not this a fit place



## CHAPTER IV

for the child to see the earth when he opens his eyes for the first time? And are not these people the right ones among whom righteousness should emerge? Perhaps it was God's will to lead me here that I should find a haven among these shepherds.

With delighted eye and a heart full of hope he approached the first shed, led there by a tiny stream of light from the oil lamp hanging in the doorway. Inside he found a shepherd with his family surrounded by their little flock of sheep and the faithful donkeys he had brought in from the cold of evening to warm themselves. On the hearth there cooked a poor meal of barley. When Joseph saw this poverty-stricken shepherd, his heart was full of pity for him, and he had not the heart to tell him of the need which brought him to the step of his shelter. So the shepherd came forth to greet Joseph.

"Peace be with you, stranger. Blessed be those who come in the name of God," said the shepherd, rising from his seat and bowing low to Joseph. "Come and sit with us and tell us what cause I may thank for your coming under our modest roof."

Joseph too bowed deeply from the step of the shed and answered them, "Good people, peace be with you. Surely God dwells in the homes of the righteous. Still I see that the need which brought me to your door cannot be relieved here. It is not for me to ask you to give shelter to the needy, for you have not even enough for yourselves."

"Our shelter is your shelter," replied the shepherd, "and our bread is your bread. Please do not shame the roof of my house as God has led you to my step. For all that belongs to us also belongs to you."

"It is not for myself that I ask it," answered Joseph. "I can find refuge under the roof of heaven. It is rather for my wife whom I brought with me from Nazareth in Galilee; she is big with child, and her time is drawing near. But I see that God has not guided me to the right place as you are short of space and it is not fitting for me to beg the last sheep from a poor man."

The Shepherd looked at his wife. With her child, she sat near the hearth where she was preparing the evening meal. His simple, peasant face with its firm jaw and strong white teeth was lit with a friendly smile as with his large brown eyes he besought her aid. It was not a long while before the man and his wife understood each other, and then it was not so much by words as by the compassion and sympathy which shone on their faces. The heart of one poor man is ever awakened to the needs of another.

At last the mother spoke, "We too endured the same anxiety when I reached the time of my delivery. We can remain over night with our neighbors," she said to her husband. "If you don't mind resting the head of your child among the beasts, then go and bring your wife to our modest home. And may it please God that your wife bear a son and that he shall be a help to Israel."

"The beasts are God's creatures," answered Joseph, "and we should not be ashamed of that which God has created. And for this deed may God reward you. I am not able to do so. The humblest deeds of the poor are greater than the least of the wealthy."

And Joseph went off.

It was high time. He found Mary in anxiety and hope waiting for her husband's return, for during the whole day she had lain with the little donkey in the yard of the camel drivers. Her time had approached and she felt that God wanted her to deliver her child. Surely God would provide her with a proper place. Still the day had passed and her husband had failed to return and the evening drew nigh and the snow fell, while her heart trembled between hope and anxiety. Thus she was in a quivering gladness when her husband arrived with the happy tidings.

"Come, my wife. God has provided for the delivery of your child, a right place among righteous people, according to your hopes and prayers."

With their modest means, the shepherd and his wife prepared a place for Mary's delivery. They moved their children to the homes of neighbors and prepared a manger in which they lay straw and many hides. When neighboring shepherds heard this tale of the strangers who had come to a town in Israel and searched for shelter among the great and mighty and had not found it, they became suddenly alert with sympathy. Their own stores, of which there was never quite enough, were given now with an understanding of the real needs of others. They helped to remove the flock leaving only so many beasts to keep the place warm from the chill of night.

And when Joseph arrived with his wife, Mary found her place prepared for her in cleanliness and security as if God Himself had prepared it with his own hands.

And it was when Mary delivered the child that the snow ceased falling and the clouds disappeared from the face of the earth. The skies were filled with stars whose number and brightness man had never known before. And it was like the Grace of God coming down to earth for the ground shone with a pale greenish light. All the hills and valleys were transformed into shining, green pastures. And the Grace of God like the wings of great eagles on pale blue skies, blended the heavens and the earth till they became one. And the Glory of God shone from heaven and the peace of God rested on the face of the earth.

When the shepherds saw from the thresholds of their doors the green pastures shining in the bright light of the stars, they said one to another, "Come and see how the earth has transformed itself. This fresh greenness we never would have thought to witness at this time of the year. It is nothing less than the Grace of God come to earth. Let us go out and graze our flocks, for the pastures are thick with rich herbs."

Before the shepherds had finished speaking, their flocks, which were gathered under the roof from the chill of the snow, began to peek out on the green fields; and astonishment lay in their animal eyes. Here and there the sheep went out after their leaders without waiting for the command. And it happened that when the shepherds came out after their sheep, they found other shepherds grazing their flocks in the green meadows of the valleys and up on the hillocks. It was as though the whole hillside had been transformed into a peculiar time that was neither day nor night. The strange brightness descending from the radiant stars was a light neither like the sun nor like the moon; it was as if the heavens were covered with a shimmering gleam of pearl. The bright stars wandered on the milky roads of the heavens like strangers coming from a distant universe. And there were among them stars whose shapes had never been seen before by human eyes. These came from a mysterious place where God kept hidden the light which was to shine when the Messiah came to the earth.

A quietness came over the world. It was as if the days of the lost paradise had been renewed. Soundlessly the sheep moved unto the hills. Many, many flocks from all the surrounding meadow ascended until they covered the whole hillside with their woolly, thick white coats, which gleamed under the bright light of the stars.

So the shepherds too gathered together. Among them were those who came from distant places and had not seen each other for a long, long time. When they recognized one another an outstanding gladness fell over them, and they greeted each other with kisses and embracing.

"Dear brothers, blessed be your coming among our pastures! How is it you travel such distance with your flocks and what is the purpose of your coming?"

"We were guided by the stars which shone over your hills, for never have we seen such a shining light in the heavens before. A very great thing must be happening here in your pastures, and we have come to learn what it is."

When they had said this, a great joy overcame them for this thing which had surely happened, and at the same time a great trembling in expectation of something strange and ethereal which the stars had summoned them to witness. While they remained quivering in anticipation of what might happen any moment, they saw an angel of God shoot out from the stars and descend toward them. He was in the form of a man of giant-like appearance with strong, heavenly wings. In a flash he was standing before them; and the shepherds with shaking bodies fell on their faces, to the earth, for they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, "fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

When the angel spoke to the shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host burst from the heavens and filled the air with a song which was heard from one end of the world to the other. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward man!"

A serenity filled the air as if creation had fulfilled the mission to which God had assigned it on the first day. A harmonious fulfillment of the day of Paradise had renewed itself on the earth.











As the angels were going away from them into the heavens, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass which the Lord has made known unto us." And they went under the guidance of the stars.

And they came unto the door of the dwelling into which Joseph had brought Mary and they found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. His young mother was lying near him on the sheepskins which the shepherds had provided for her. The wife of the shepherd was sitting near her and comforting the Mother and child with milk and honey to strengthen them. The beasts, brought in from the chill of the night, were still with them about the manger. And they licked the mother and child with their warm, moist tongues as they would do to their own new-born. Joseph with the shepherd host was attending them and preparing all necessary things.

And it happened that when the shepherd visitors came in and saw the babe in the manger, with the Spirit of God shining from His face, they said one to another, "No one except the Saviour which is Christ the Lord was born here today to the House of Israel in Bethlehem, in the city of David even as the prophets have prophesied. Blessed be God Almighty in Heaven, for He has fulfilled the promise which He gave unto our fathers—the promise of a Redeemer for Israel, a Saviour for Mankind and a Messiah for the world." And they fell on their knees before the manger and spread out their arms to the child and cried, "Blessed be the fulfillment!"

When the inhabitants of the dwelling heard of the proclamation of the shepherds, they also fell before the cradle and called, "Blessed be the fulfillment!"

Only the young mother of the child bathed her face with her own tears out of pure joy and pondered all these things in her heart.

And a gladness and a joy befell all those who were with the child, and they repeated the words of the angel in song, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward men."

The shepherds left them and went toward Bethlehem, the city, to bring to the people the good tidings concerning these things that had happened to them in the pastures and to proclaim to them the glory of God, which they had seen in the child who lay in the manger.

With the rising sun the shepherds came to Bethlehem, the city of David. They went to the market place where the merchants were gathered around their booths of wine and honey. In the market place were a great multitude of countrymen to sell their produce to the many rich people who had crowded into Bethlehem. The shepherds told the merchants and the countrymen what had happened to them and what they had seen. With faces aglow, they spoke with joyful voices.

"Be of good spirit, brothers. A King was born last night in Israel. And we shepherds were the chosen ones in whose midst the king was born just as was David of Old."

"A king?" the people cried in astonishment.

"Not a king, but the king of the Jews, the Saviour—the Messiah which was promised us by the prophets of old—is here."

"How do you know, you unlearned ones, that this is the Saviour-Messiah? Who told you so?"

"How do we know it? Who told us?" they laughed, flashing their white teeth. "An angel of heaven told us, and didn't we see the Spirit of God shining from the Babe's face as He lay in the Manger? With our own eyes we saw him. Our ears heard too the song of the angels proclaiming Him from one end of the earth to the other."

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward men."

When these tidings spread throughout the city and reached the ears of the mighty claiming descent from the House of David, they asked one another in astonishment, "The King of the Jews? From whose loins should come the King of the Jews if not from ours? Has any child been born this night among our womenfolk? Has any heard of such a thing?"

When they learned that no women in their own midst had borne a child in this same night, they laughed and said, "Why should we listen to babblings from people of the soil? Do we not know that these people are without knowledge and full of sin? Let us not pay any attention to them."

And they let the matter rest and went back to the lavish entertainment which they gave one another because they considered themselves

full of worthiness and importance.

In a few days the matter was nearly forgotten and the good tidings were cast away by their mockery. Then one bright morning three heralds entered through the three gates of the city. Each herald entered through a separate gate and approached the over-crowded market place blaring on his silver trumpet. After the heralds came a great throng arrayed in strange, rich garments bearing urns on their shoulders, and the sweet odor of frankincense preceded them. Others bore gold and silver baskets on which were piled strange fruits never seen before by the citizens of Bethlehem. There were grapes as large as pomegranates and pomegranates as large as melons. Still others carried mysterious chests which contained the choicest treasures of Arabia. After these attendants there came three kings garbed in robes of woven silver with crowns of gold sitting on their gleaming, oily hair while in their hands they carried the sceptors of their kingdoms. They were surrounded by their ministers and high dignitaries bearing the standards of their countries; and these were followed by scribes wearing long white beards and wrapped in somber black robes. Their sharp, little eyes peered out from overhanging eyebrows. Over their ears they carried their quills and in their hands were gigantic and important scrolls bearing testimony to their own learning and to the wisdom of their masters.

On the wings of the wind the rumor spread that three wise kings of the East were come to the town of Bethlehem with a great array of attendants, the one through the gate of Jerusalem, another through the gate of Jericho, and the third through the gate of Hebron. And with all their great companies they had come together in the market place.

In great haste the magistrate donned his garb of office with all his bronze emblems hanging on his breast to tell of his many functions. All the mighty who had come to Bethlehem as descendants of the House of David also put on their finest. With their many attendants bearing the banners of their family, they approached the market place in a procession of dignity and great display.

Like the other nobles of the town, the rich man thought, who did these powerful kings come to see if not me? Surely they have heard of my vessels which bear my wealth to all ports of the world. They have heard too of my many vineyards, my vast granaries, my cattle and sheep, and surely they are aware of the countless bags of shekels that lie in my treasury. It must be that they have suffered a famine in their land and they have come to me to keep their populace until the harvest.

"I will await them here at my palace. If they need me, they should come here to see me. Still, they are kings," pondered the rich man, "and it is in their right that I should greet them and bid them welcome to my home, as it is proper to do to important visitors." Impatiently he called to his servants to clothe him in his most expensive robe of Sydonian linen, to adorn his fingers with all his rings and decorate his person with golden chains and precious stones and festoon his turban with uncounted pearls. Spread thus with riches all over his huge body, he went forth with many attendants to welcome the kings.

"It is for no other purpose except to pay homage to my piety that the three kings have come to Bethlehem," breathed the benefactor to himself in seeming humility. "They have heard of my charity which, like the odor of fine oil, God has caused to be known o'er all the world. And they have heard how modest and devout I am. According to my standards, I must sit here and wait until they come to pay their respects. But I will be modest again and overlook my importance and, as is fit for a man of piety, I will go and invite them to my home." The benefactor put on his long, black robe of state and assumed his mask of reverence by lowering his eyes to the earth. Thus meek in appearance yet proud in heart, he went to the market place to welcome the strange kings.

"It is to me and to me only that these kings have come from such a distance to pay homage," spoke the learned man to his numerous disciples. "They have heard of my great wisdom which shines forth like the rays of a bright lamp. These are wise kings, they tell me, and they have brought with them scribes with many quills and many rolls of parchment. Why did they bring such things if not to record my teachings for the generations to come? I should sit here and await their coming. But the law commands us to pay respect to the king. To fulfill the commandment I will go with all my disciples to welcome the kings, for it is written 'Many multitudes glorify the king.' Placing numerous manuscripts in his bosom and jamming his pockets with them too, he



also went with his disciples to the market place to welcome the three strange kings.

"Surely I am the one whom your majesties are seeking." The rich man addressed the king who came through the Jerusalem gate and who was more richly adorned than the others. With dignity he sat on his high camel as though it were a throne. So many precious stones glistened on his royal crown that the rich man was sure he must be the chief of all the kings. "I am Cephas, the rich man, and I come to offer you my wealth," said he, and bowed low to the king.

"No, good man," said the king, moving his long, horse-like face from side to side and showing his large bright teeth, "It is not riches that we are seeking," and he lay his heavily beringed hands on the shoulders of the rich man. "My country is blest with wealth, as you can see from my attendants. It is for something else that I have travelled so far to pay homage."

"I am I," addressed the benefactor to the second king who came from the gate of Jericho. This king was of the Negro people and of short stature and his round shoulders slumped very low on the back of his donkey. His beard was sparse and of poor appearance and so was his raiment.

"How pious his eyes and how modest his garments," thought the benefactor. "Surely this one must be the chief of them all just as I, in my humble demeanor, am the most important man of my place."

"Who is, I?" asked the modest king with a righteous smile on his round, black face. And he lowered his eyes.

"I am a humble man and it is to my humility that I presume the kings are come to pay homage," said the benefactor.

"It is not humility we seek, for we are humble men ourselves. My countrymen are rich in humility as you can see by the color of our faces. No it is not for this merit in itself that we have come from distant places travelling over desert and mountain. It is for something else that we have come to bow our heads."

"Welcome I say to a colleague in wisdom, for from the wrinkles on your forehead and from your white beard and bushy eyebrows I see I have a wise man before me." So did the learned man address the third king, who had entered through the gate of Hebron.

"And who are you?" asked the king of the wise men from his proud sedan, surrounded by his many ministers and scribes with quills on their ears and scrolls in their hands.

"I am the man to whom the sealed books have been opened. Married to Wisdom, the daughter of heaven, she has borne me these many disciples whom you see all about me. To whom else should the king of wisdom pay homage, if not to me who is wisdom himself?" And the learned man pointed to his own breast.

"My dear man, it is not wisdom we seek. God has hidden many things from the wise man and the stone of wisdom is tossed to the simple. Wise and learned are we ourselves. Each and every child of my land is born a sage. He starts to speak wisdom at his mother's breast as you can see from the numerous scribes who attend me.

"Of wisdom we have no need. It is an unknown star, unforeseen by my astrologists which has led me from my distant land to this place in order that I might bow my head before the feet of him whom we go to pay homage.

"Who is this more worthy than us to whom you mighty kings come from distant lands to pay homage?" asked the three men in astonishment.

"It is the King of the Jews who was born in this town, for we have seen His star in the East and we have come to worship Him."

"The King of the Jews!" whispered voices from among the beards of the mighty would-be descendants of King David. "To whom should be born the King of the Jews if not to one of us? Was your wife with child? Was there a son born to you? They asked each other. "No, mighty kings, we know of no child born from our loins in this town of Bethlehem."

"You may not know of Him" replied the kings, "but the stars of heaven know, for they have led us to this town of David."

"And we too know of Him," spoke up one of the shepherds who had been kept back by the magistrate in order not to crowd too close to the great lords.

"Who are you, good men, and from whom have you heard these tidings?" asked the kings of the shepherd.

"We are the shepherds of Bethlehem and we have heard the tidings

from the angel of God. Like you, we saw the star in the heavens and it lighted us to the stall where the Child lay in the manger."

"Come, good man, lead us to the King of the Jews," said the eldest of the kings, the wise man.

And the whole multitude who were gathered in the market place went after the procession of the kings; and so went too the mighty families who pretended to be the descendants of King David. And there followed also the rich man, the benefactor, and the learned man because of their wondering about this king of the Jews who was born in a stable any lying in a manger.

When the kings entered the door of the stable, the stall was filled with a radiant light from the strange star which guided them and which rested over the open roof of the stable.

When the kings saw the Child lying in the manger with the Spirit of God shining from His face, they took their crowns from their heads and laid them with their sceptors at the foot of the manger. They bowed deeply before the Child and said, "Blessed be the fulfillment!"

They laid down their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh and went to Mary, His mother, and knelt before her saying, "Blessed be you, happy among women."

And great joy came over them and great fraternity was among them and they embraced and kissed one another; and they did the same with the shepherds and all who were with them. And the shepherds sang the song of the angels, and all the people united with them, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill toward men!"

When the mighty men of the town, the pretended descendants of King David, the magistrate, the rich man, the benefactor and the learned man saw the Child with the Grace of God on His face, the star in the heaven over His head, and the great fraternity and joy which possessed the people, and the homage of the kings from strange lands, a great trembling befell them and they said in their hearts, "Woe unto us that we denied refuge for the birth of the Hope of Israel."

And the pretended descendants of David came over to Joseph who stood in a corner of the stall looking with moist eyes at the homage to the Child and to the young mother who sat near the manger. And they said to him, "A kinsman of ours are you and we have refused you refuge in our fine houses. Forgive us for we did not know of these things to come. Kindly do us the honor now of coming to our homes."

The magistrate in his official garb, with his many signs of office on his breast, put on his face an official, friendly smile which magistrates have always in readiness when they have business with the mighty. He bowed to Joseph and Mary and said in an apologetic tone,

"Magistrates too can sometimes make mistakes. But we are always eager to correct our shortcomings, for we are servants of the people. As magistrate of this town, I cannot see that it is fitting for a King of Israel to be born in a stable. We will acquire the finest place in town to bring the mother and child to great estate."

The rich man approached Mary and Joseph and said, "Where else should a King of the Jews be brought if not to the home of the wealthiest man? My attendants are numerous enough for the household of a newborn prince. Surely I have made a mistake, and I beg your forgiveness."

I have learned a lot," spoke the benefactor. "My humility has brought me to pride. May God forgive my blindness; My home is also open to you, if you would so honor me!" And he bowed deeply before the child and His mother and before Joseph.

"From all my teachers I gathered learning" said the learned man, "But my greatest lesson I learned today from the simple shepherds. Their kind hearts taught me more wisdom than many wise books. I envy you shepherds, for through your compassion you saw the light that was hidden from my knowledge. Still if you would bless me by coming to my home, you would permit me to correct my shortcomings."

Mary answered them all: "Be of good spirit, good men! Your shortcomings came not from you but from the hand of God in order that the sayings of the prophets might be fulfilled. 'The people who walk in darkness shall see the light.' For your good wishes may God reward you, but the dwelling of my child must be among the poor and lowly. He has come to bring comfort to the sorrow stricken."

And when they heard these words of Mary's they embraced each other and they all gave praise to God. And they sang the song of the angles, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill toward men."



