

**"Has Anybody Seen Christmas?"**  
(An Eyewitness Account of the Nativity)  
(a first-person dramatic monologue based on Luke 2 & Matthew 1-2)

by

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I love Christmas! ***I love it, I love it, I love it!*** Not because of the reindeer and Santa Claus or even the decorated Christmas tree. No, I love it because *it's Jesus' birthday!* But when it happened for real, more than 2000 years ago, it was only Mary & Joseph, and the shepherds (I guess), who *really knew* who Jesus was. Well, today I've come to you from way back then to help you see how it was. ***Has anybody seen Christmas?*** I did... because I was there.

My name is Sebastia, **Sebastia Bar-Shiloh**. I'm a medicinal merchant from Alexandria, in **Samaria**. Those who buy from me call me a pharmacist; those who don't, call me a pusher. No matter.

For most of my life I've lived half-way up the mountain that faces the Jordan River. Following the river about 25 miles south lies Jericho, surrounded by the lush groves of BALSAM, the well-known 'Balm of Gilead.' That balsam grove has been my business; you see, it's used as much in this ancient world as **aspirin** is to you.

About 25 years ago, King Herod (Herod the Great) bought those balsam groves with part of his vast personal fortune, and thereby has a corner on the aspirin market to Egypt and the Roman Empire. As you can see from my fine robe, it is a profitable business, and I buy directly from the king!

From Jericho, it's a rough 20 miles up and across the Western Highlands into Jerusalem, where he has his palace. I don't like to go there. You see, it's **Judea** (the kingdom of Judah), and it's full of fanatics, both religious and political:

First, there's **the Herodians** -- that's a group of Herod's henchmen and kinfolk mostly -- Idumean **Arabs** from the South, who hold political and military power. ***They aren't even Jewish!*** Herod the Great has been their leader for 40 years now!

Then, there are **the Hasmoneans** -- the Jewish followers of Judas Maccabeaus, the family that is remembered every year with the Hannukah candles. They ***used to rule*** Jerusalem before Herod's family took over. They have plotted against the king several times, and are constantly appealing their case to Rome. To appease them, do you know what Herod did? That's right: he married **Mariamne, the last princess** of the house of Hasmon. Things cooled off for awhile, until Herod had their two sons killed in Rome for plotting against their father. Now it's hot trouble again!

Third, there is **the Parthian Party** -- a mystical bunch, who get off on the Chaldean **Kings of the East**, who have periodically conquered Palestine throughout the past generation. *The kings to the East are considered enemies of state.* They come from places you now call **Iran** and **Iraq**, which we called "Parthia." These *Parthian* enemies, just could not be beaten by Rome! It was amazing! They would wipe out every Roman legion that crossed their borders; even great generals like Gabinius, and the ruler Crassus, were destroyed.

In fact, it was Herod, with some of Marc Antony's seasoned troops, that has been the only person who has managed to hold the Parthians back out of the Roman Empire. I suppose that's why Rome supports him so much: **he makes a good buffer zone.** Still, the Parthian Party in Jerusalem would like to see them back in power, with their harems, their astrology, their sex cults and sorcery...

A fourth group of fanatics are **the Zealots**. They are common people -- fishermen and shepherds -- who want to see Israel a separate, free-state! They want to overthrow the Romans, can you imagine?! They carry weapons under their cloaks, and they constantly break the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) with guerrilla warfare in the streets. There is no reasoning with them! As terrorists, they work their destruction in secret. These *Zealot-liberators* are giving Palestine a bad name.

And finally there are all those **religious people** in Jerusalem: the priests, the scribes, the teachers of the Law; the Sanhedrin; the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, ascetics; and the many devout (but superstitious) lay-people. *These religious fanatics cannot even get along with each other, let alone someone like me, from the outside!* Still, Herod tried to please them, by building a fantastic Temple Sanctuary (cedar of Lebanon; instruments made of gold; *treasuries* and *sacrifices* played out in bombastic fashion... *I mean it's UNREAL!*). But instead of bringing the people together in a renewed sense of truth and joy, Herod's *Temple cult* has fanned the flames of their power-lust, their exclusiveness, and their religious legalism.

Frankly, if you ask me, Jerusalem is just **a game** played by those who want to be noticed, and taken somehow seriously by the world. To me, *it's just a show.* I know that our forefathers were commanded in the Book of Deuteronomy to look for blessing from Mount Gerizim, not from Mt. Zion. My people (**the Samaritans**) have not wanted to be part of that whole Jewish monarchy-megolomania for centuries. The stories of the Patriarchs and the Laws of Moses are enough for us, thank you very much!

Mount Gerizim lies directly to the west of my home, in the middle of **Samaria**, between **Shechem** and the coast of **Sharon**. I've gone there at least a dozen times in my younger years, looking for a *personal relationship* with the Lord Yahweh, without prescribed rituals or pretense. But you know, just between you and me, and don't let it get out, *I couldn't find the spirit of Truth there either.* So, I settled for business, and (like I said) I am an aspirin merchant from Alexandria.

My job keeps me moving: from Capernaum in the north, on the Sea of Galilee, to Masada in the south, on the briny rim of the Dead Sea. And I've seen people: sorry people and super people. People on the road with me, hurrying from place to place; not knowing what they're looking for, and not finding it. And others, who, without moving from their place of birth, understand more of themselves and the world than I could ever hope to dream.

*I have come today to share with you the most extraordinary day in all the years of my travels.* A day which changed my life...

I had picked up a supply of balsam in Jericho and was to see it safely across the Western Highlands to Jerusalem, and from there to head south sixty miles to a delivery point in BeerSheba. It would be a tremendously long journey, so **I began this particular day early...** Not too early, though, because the desert caves between Qumran and Jerusalem are filled with homeless people: some are ascetic hermits, others are bandits; and, as a merchant, I carried considerable goods and money.

The multitude of people on the road was staggering! It was as though all the men of Israel were upon it. In fact, perhaps they were! You see, **Caesar Augustus** had issued a decree that all the world should be registered with Rome. To our culture, that meant returning to the city of our ancestral tribe: Judeans returning to Samaria, Galileans on the road to Judah... **Enormous crowds at every juncture, and from every walk of life:** judges, priests, carpenters, fishermen... all alike in the eyes of the Roman Census!

I was about an hour's ride out from Jericho, observing the great men coming toward me (down from Jerusalem) -- impressive to see the jewelry of the **priests**, and the long, flowing robes of the **judges** -- when my eye fell upon **a man slumped against a stone** on the far side of the road... Apparently he had been traveling alone and at night. He had been beaten and robbed; and all the great men I had seen, had passed him by!

The God I serve would not be so aloof, and I (a Samaritan) could not be so insensitive! I dismounted, and bathed his wounds in balsam and oil, gave him some wine and set him on my beast. I returned him to the Jericho Inn, and made provision to pay the bill when I returned from BeerSheba...

It was now nearing **midday**, and I was still just leaving Jericho! I could waste no more time, for my afternoon appointment with King Herod must be kept! If none of you have ever climbed a desert mountain at midday, I am not surprised. You have shown good sense! For midday heat in a dry land such as ours is, at best, intolerable, and, at worst, fatal!

As I rode toward Jerusalem, the heat, the dust, the crowds, added to my impatience. Not only had I been **delayed**, and used up some of my balsam to **tend** a stricken man, but now I was running up a **debt** back at the Jericho Inn on behalf of what would certainly turn out to be **a Judean**. When he learns that I am **a Samaritan**, I'm sure he will curse me (for being a foreigner) and disappear without a word of thanks.

To this day, I believe my thoughts would have continued along that negative line had not the intense heat driven me to **seek shade**.

I dismounted in the shadow of **a scrub tree**, where the drop in temperature revived a better spirit within me. I had been there only a short time when **a young couple** broke from the crowded road and approached the tree. Apparently they had not seen me, for the man was busy with **his wife**, who was heavy with child. When they finally saw me, already seated in the small patch of shade, their faces fell.

I called out: "*Shaolm! Come! Take the shade upon my right hand. There is room enough for for three, and I can see that your need is great!*" (The woman was clearly in pain, and struggling with the heat!) I tell you, it must certainly have been a sight: the three of us gathered tightly about a scrub tree. It was I who spoke first to the man:

"By your leave, sir. May I offer you some healing balm for your wife? I am a balsam merchant, and I have some here in my pouch. ..."

"That's right, I am a Samaritan. And I know you Jews have no dealings with us. But if you knew that this balsam grew in Jericho of Judea, would you not accept IT then, regardless of the hand which extends it? Our need for fellowship along this road is greater than our differences. And your wife is in great need...

"Nor did I ask you to pay. If this Balm of Gilead were necessary to save your wife's life, what could you possibly give me that would be *worth it* in value? ... Nothing! It is priceless. **Exactly.** Therefore I ask nothing from you in return. It's yours; for you have the greater need of it....

"You have traveled from Nazareth, in Galilee? Good heavens, that is already 80 miles that you have traveled! It's a MIRACLE that you haven't lost the child or your wife already...

"Yes, they all say that the Lord is with them. And I hope for your wife's sake that God *is* with her. She is in no condition to ride! How much farther do you have to go?... **Bethlehem?** That's about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. If things go well, you could be there by tonight. ... So, you're from the City of David!? ... Is that so?! From the *lineage* of David. Quite a heritage! Didn't the prophet Micah write something about Bethlehem? ...

"Yes, that's it: '**A ruler who will govern my people Israel!**' Bethlehem is a shepherd village. I can't imagine any rulers coming from there! Of course, they say that about YOUR home town, too, don't they: '**What good thing ever came from Nazareth?!**' I'll bet you folks get tired of hearing it...

"Oh, look. Your wife has gone to sleep... **NOT your wife?** Oh, pardon me -- then why are you traveling with someone ELSE's wife?... **Betrothed!** Well, congratulations! I suppose under the circumstances, you didn't have much choice...

"No, no. I didn't mean that at all! **Of course** you love her; **I can SEE that you loved her!** ... Well, what else COULD I think? ... A virgin? I see.... The Holy Spirit?... Excuse me, but did **SHE** tell you all this?... Oh, a dream! ...Uh-huh, an angel?...

"Oh, look! The sun has passed it's zenith. It will be a bit cooler now. I really have to stop by Jerusalem yet today; I dare not keep King Herod wait-ing! Best wishes to the both of you, and the little one... Oh, **a boy.** You know already? That's wonderful... Jesus? **Deliverer?** Nice name. Good bye!"

It's been a hot day! They've had a long trip. Anxious, too, I suppose. I won't make a case against my fellow-travelers. After all, they ARE *Galile-ans*; not as well *educated* as the folks in Jerusalem. And with all those rules of religion and culture to observe, they probably don't have time to under-stand the real world. Furthermore, I AM a *Samaritan*. They probably thought I'd believe all that foolishness! These Jews...

It was late afternoon when I entered the gates of Jerusalem. There I saw a most unusual sight for a fortress city: **Parthians!** Not captives or peasants, but actual Parthian NOBILITY astride camels! They were apparently traveling without soldiers -- which told me they were either **peaceful and clever**, or **exceedingly foolish!**

Of course the people of Judea wouldn't speak to them... ally themselves *in public* with Parthians? That would be dangerous! The **Zealots** were too radical to do so. The **priests** were too holy. The **Herodians** were too sus-picious; and the **Romans**, too powerful to care.

They were asking to see the King of the Jews! Now, I had been to the palace many times in my business; and I had scheduled at that very hour an audience with King Herod. So, *Samaritan* that I am, I led them.

Herod had already heard through his signal corps outposts that they were in town; and having disposed quickly of my business, he questioned them:

*"What brings you to Jerusalem of Judea?"*

*"We wish to pay homage to the **King of the Jews**. We have seen his **star** in the East and have followed it. Just as **his star shines brightest** in the heavens, so must **he** certainly shine brightest among men."*

Herod was eating it up! **Julius Ceasar** had never had a star. **Mark Anthony** had been brilliant as Herod's cavalry commander, but he had no star. **Cleopatra** had been bright and cunning, but she was *gone* now, without a star. Even **Octavius**, the great Ceasar Augustus, who had himself pro-claimed *Herod* King of the Jews: he had no star!

*"Herod. Perhaps you can tell us where the **new-born king** is to be found?"*  
**I left at that point!**

For *forty years* -- ever since he was 25 -- Herod had *fought* the Parth-ians, fought Cleopatra, fought the Hasmoneans... in order to, time and again, be proclaimed the lawful king of the Jews. And now these three Parthian star-gazers come *looking* for the King of the Jews, and, Herod, you're *NOT* IT?!

I'm sure it'll be "a hot time in the old town" tonight!

As for me, the last orange rays were just lighting the ridge of the Western Highlands as I arrived in Bethlehem. I make it a point never to travel after dark. (I leave that to the poorer folks and the robbers.)

After the many delays along my journey, I have one bit of good news to share: *I got a room in the Bethlehem Inn*. It was lucky, too, for the innkeeper said it was the *very last one* he had. I guess the Lord was really *with me!* It was in the rear, just above the stables; but I've never been one to complain about inconveniencies.

I was so tired that I went directly to bed, oblivious to what was happen-ing even then to the *shepherds* keeping night watch over their flocks in the foothills only a short distance away...

**Angels, I hear tell.** A whole choir of them, singing in some Roman/Latin language: *"Gloria in excelsis deo!"* and saying that the Messiah-child was being born *just then* in Bethlehem!

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: *"Let's go, now, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which the Lord has made known to*

*us!"* Not wanting to leave their flocks unattended in the wilderness, they drove them *en masse* to the outskirts of Bethlehem, where they began to search for the child.

And, as I slept, from the **North** came another unusual group... Those three Parthian kings had actually, unbelievably, been *released* by King Herod, and were even now asking directions to the Inn!

Quite a commotion their presence caused! But to aid them, they had papers from the king authorizing them to search out and locate a new-born child!

Below my window, in a dirty stall in an overly-crowded stable, Mary brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because **there was no room** for *them* in the Inn...

It was about this time that the shepherds arrived in great haste from the hills; and they were *not* about to keep a respectful *silence* about what they had heard and seen concerning this child!

*"Hey! Hey, is anybody listening? We've got Good News!  
Good News! The Messiah, the Christ, is born tonight!"*

Well, in the middle of all *that*, I *finally* woke up! My mind awhirl with images of angels, and kings, and camels... resounding with babies' cries, wounded men, and the song of the shepherds. I thought of the journey and of my fellow-travelers, the heat, and the crowds that had passed us by (and were even now in passing).

As I lay silently in that warm and comfortable bed, there was light like the lustre of midday streaming through my window from the sky above the stable. I arose, and looked out...

Why does that *star* shine there so bright? What's all this talk of *angel voices*? It's said that one is born **tonight** (right here?), and all the world rejoices. I entered the dark street of that Bethlehem night... and saw a little baby hailed by kings and surrounded by animals...

To this day, I cannot grasp the amazing grace that moved me. There, in the radiance of that holy, heavenly light, I found *a peace* that no mountain in Samaria, no Temple, no business deal, no king could have commanded.

I *knelt* in the dirt and matted straw of that roadway, me, a *merchant*, a Samaritan in the personal employ of King Herod...

I knelt beside Parthians, Parthian *royalty*, while inside that stable, un-lettered, unlearned, *unwashed shepherds* silently moved past a manger -- a feed-trough -- in which lay a new-born child...

Yes, unto us a child *was born*. Unto us a son was given.  
His name would be called: "Wonderful Counselor",  
"Mighty God", "Everlasting Father", "Prince of Peace!"  
Of the increase of his government, and of peace,  
there will be no end!

Friends, I wish I could end my story at this point, for it is a moment etched in eternity. But I cannot, for the days that followed (as I again set out on my journey) brought **news of terror** and **tragedy!**

No matter how **wise** those Parthian kings may have been, they had been **seduced** by the powerful trappings of royalty. They really intended to return to Jerusalem, to King Herod, and **tell him** where the child could be found. But they had not seen him close at hand, as had I. They didn't know his **implacable jealousy, his power-lust**. They believed his religious-sounding words to be sincere; and I tell you, it took a greater persuader than me to cause them to return to Parthia over Masada by way of Herodium. But that's what they did!

And Herod, the great King Herod, when he realized that he had been **tricked**, and that the wise men were **gone** without a trace... he flew into a furious rage, and he sent **soldiers**, palace guards, to **kill** all the male children in Bethlehem; all the children two years and under... And to be sure, he killed all the children in the whole region!

Oh, God! I hear it still: **a voice** throughout Ramah, **wailing**, and loud, loud lamenting. It's Rachel weeping for her children. Weeping, and refusing to be consoled, because they are no more.

I hurried back to the stall, but already from afar I knew it was strangely silent. No shepherds, no kings. **No**, not while the city resounds with wailing and armored soldiers race on horseback through bloodied streets. **No! Empty!** Empty. Abandoned. The manger knocked to the side...

Oh, but this was not the disarray of violence and destruction; but, rather, that of hasty departure.

They fled! **Yes!**

With the **gold** from the Parthian kings, they could reach Egypt and begin a new life! With **frankincense** and **myrrh**, they can make the holy oil, and they can burn their own shewbread offerings, and **keep themselves pure**.

Yes! I **know** that my Redeemer liveth... and because **he** lives, I too, I too, shall live!

Well, you know the story from there. Although it was not part of God's plan for my life that I live to hear his sermons, or to watch his miracles, or to witness his sacrifice on the cross... through my **encounter with Jesus**, I found a **personal relationship with God** that transformed my life.

And now, from the glorious vantage point of eternity, I can only praise and praise and **praise the Lord with thanksgiving** for receiving the humblest, and yet the greatest, gift ever offered to any person: **Jesus, the Christ**. He's the real reason for the season.