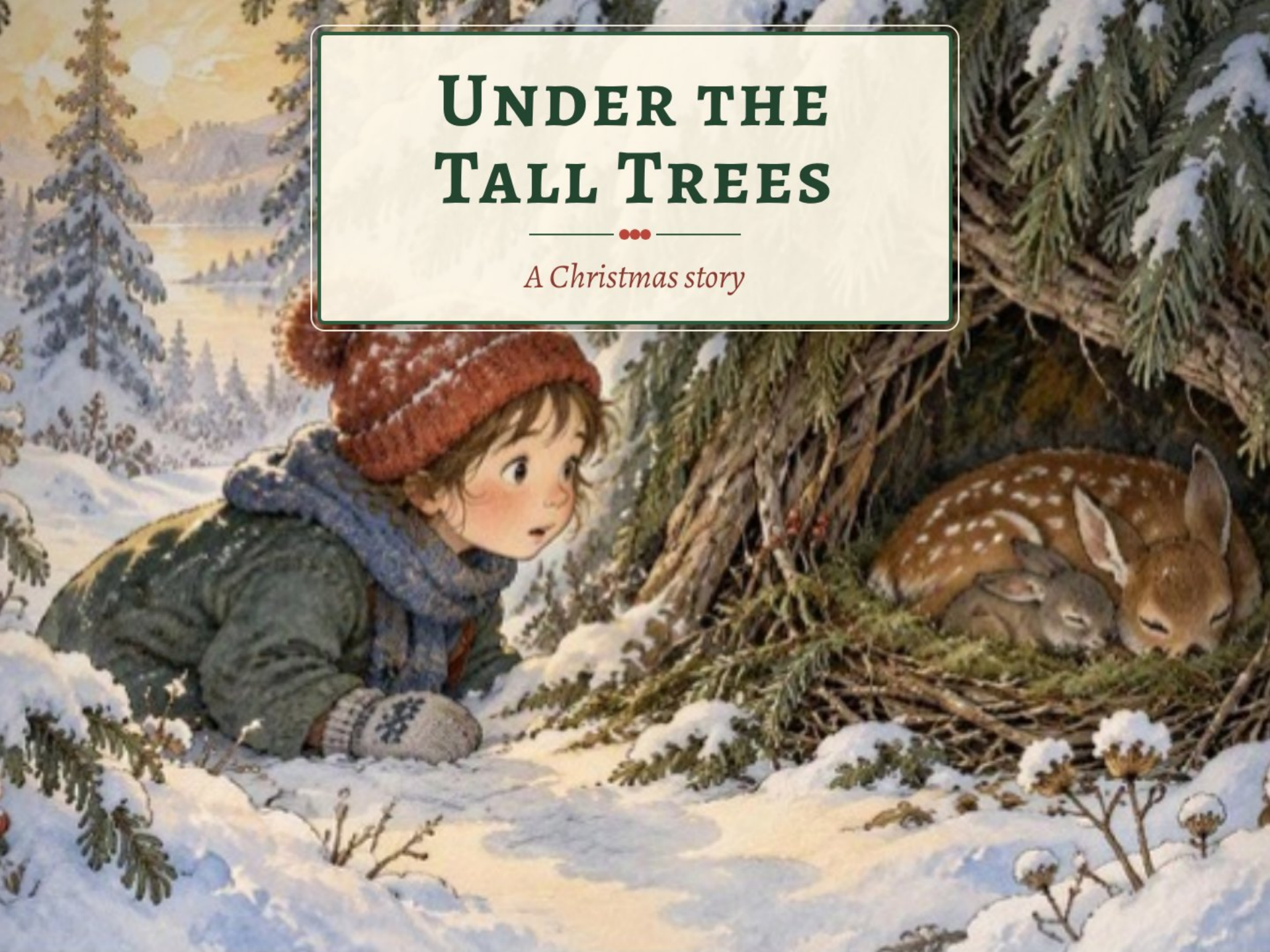

Under the
Tall Trees
A Christmas story

Under the Tall Trees



It's warmer here, under the dense canopy
Of the conifer forest.
Out on the path, the snow is deep
Yet, under this giant spruce, no snow has reached
The dark mat of needled duff beneath the tree.



I rest, my parka tight, hood up, my boots wet from the hike.
My gloves are off as
I eat the cheese and bread saved for this moment.
My thermos full of coffee,
My heart full of joy.



The forest silent, with only
A brushing of boughs laden with snow
An owl hoots in the distance
And nearby, the sound of water dripping.



Winter's deep with advent coming
A child's eyes grow wide in wonder
But no gift as precious as
A quiet nest in forest deep.



But no gift as precious as
a quiet nest in forest deep.

Under the Tall Trees



An Unexpected Christmas

A Christmas story



An Unexpected Christmas

Joey turned one at the end of November. Last Christmas he had been only a tiny baby. There had been a tree and gifts, but he was aware of little except the warmth of his mother's embrace.

Now, as Julie sat with him on the couch beside the tree, she imagined that he was watching the lights twinkle.



Julie remembered their first Christmas with joy. Their little family now included Joey, and even in the rush of John's travel and caring for a new baby, they had found moments of peace.

Sitting together near the tree, Julie and John imagined all the Christmas days still to come with their son.

Julie had returned to work in May, after six months of maternity leave. The other nurses were glad to have her back and loved hearing stories about Joey.

Still, being a young mother with a husband who traveled was hard—and the demanding schedule of an emergency-room nurse added to the strain.

She loved helping others and knew nursing was her calling. But she longed for more time with Joey and hoped she and John could soon find a way for her to work part time.



Joey's second Christmas was only weeks away. Decorations were up, presents waited beneath the tree, and every morning Diego, their Labrador mix, and Sasha, their white cat, settled close while Julie held Joey and dreamed of Christmas memories not yet made.

John had a few days off and was due home on Christmas Eve. Julie's mother would be away in Milwaukee with Julie's sister, Margie, and her family.

So, this Christmas would belong to just Julie, John, and Joey—a quiet holiday together at home.



Miriam, an elderly widow, lived across the hall. She was kind and always had a smile for everyone. Although she lived alone, visitors often came to her door.

Her gentle spirit made Julie feel comfortable, almost as if Miriam were an aunt. Miriam had watched Joey whenever Julie needed to run an errand or when her mother could not care for him.

At Joey's first Christmas, Miriam had arrived with a baby calendar for him and a plate of cookies for Julie and John.

"I'm Jewish," she told them. "I don't celebrate Christmas as you do, but I know this time brings joy to you—especially with a new baby in the house.

I wish you all well, and many blessings to you."



On Christmas Eve John called. Denver's airport had closed in a major snowstorm. He did not know when he would make it home.

Cars could not get out of the hotel parking lot, the snow kept falling, and forecasts warned that as much as thirty inches might fall before the storm ended.

Right after John's call, Bernice, the nurse leader for the emergency department, phoned.

"Julie, we need you. Too many people are out on leave, and there's been a major accident on the highway.

Is there any way you can come in for a shift—at least through dinner?"

Julie was sad that John might miss Christmas. More than anything, she wanted to spend the next two days at home with Joey.

But the emergency department needed help. She told Bernice she would check on childcare and call right back.



Carrying Joey into the hall, Julie knocked on Miriam's door.

"I know it's short notice, but could you stay with Joey until about six?" she asked, then explained what had happened.

"Of course, dear. Let me get a few things, and I'll come right over."



Minutes later, Miriam was with Joey and Julie was on her way to the hospital.

The emergency room was overwhelmed. Patients waited on gurneys and more seemed to arrive every minute.

Before Julie knew it, six o'clock had come and gone—with no sign of the rush easing.

Miriam assured Julie that she and Joey were fine. She would stay until Julie came home, no matter how late.

That night, Miriam got Joey to sleep, then made a bed for herself on the couch.

On Christmas morning, Julie was finally able to leave the hospital. She had been on duty for nearly eighteen hours, with only a couple of breaks.

It had been a hard night, but the nurses and physicians had done everything they could for the injured.



When Julie opened the apartment door, Miriam was sitting on the floor before the Christmas tree, holding Joey asleep in her arms. Diego and Sasha rested quietly beside them.

Exhausted, Julie felt a wave of relief: all was safe and well at home.

"Merry Christmas, Julie," Miriam said.

Julie gazed at the scene in wonder: Miriam holding the sleeping child, the animals resting peacefully nearby, and the tree glowing softly behind them.

It reminded her of the first Christmas.

All is calm,
all is bright.

Julie's Christmas had not unfolded as she had imagined. John was away, she had worked through the night, and the day began in exhaustion.

Yet as she looked at Miriam and Joey, she understood that this unexpected Christmas held a gift more precious than anything beneath the tree.

Miriam's love for her family was the best Christmas gift of all.

The End



All is calm,
all is bright.

An Unexpected Christmas



Shirley's Christmas Turkey

A Christmas story

Shirley's Christmas Turkey



Winter brought snow, ice skating, and decorated trees to the village. A holiday market was going on in the nearby towns. Shirley went to the butcher shop on the square to select her Christmas turkey. Tomorrow, she would host her Christmas party.



Since Frederick had died years ago and Leonard had moved to the capitol to work as a lawyer, Shirley lived alone. Well, not quite alone, Leonard brought a little kitten home to his mother last Christmas. Shirley loved the little tiger cat, that she named Tiny. Her annual party was a highlight for Shirley, she invited Leonard, of course, plus the widow Emma Gowan, Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt, her neighbors from downstairs, and Father Mel, the Catholic priest from Cashton.

“Tiny, now we have everything we need for our Christmas dinner”, Shirley told the cat, as she came in the door from her shopping trip. Tiny was Shirley’s constant companion, sitting with her while she crocheted in the evening and sitting under her feet at the table for breakfast while Shirley lingered over coffee. And though the little cat did not really understand what Shirley talked about, she seemed to respond well to her owner’s voice. Shirley loved having Tiny to talk to in the house.

The next morning, as Shirley continued with her dinner preparations, she realized she needed butter for her gravy. She carried Tiny out of the kitchen, closed the turkey and the fixings, closed the door, and the shutters between the kitchen and dining room counters and left the apartment to get the butter. At the market, she got the butter, some chocolate for her guests, and a small treat for Tiny.

Up the steps she went, and after unlocking the door she stepped into the apartment. At the corner leading to the dining room, an uneasy feeling came over her. The shutters stood open, and looking down at the carpet, she spotted scraps of turkey scattered across it.



“Tiny!” she called out, setting her package down on the dining room table, and walking through the doorway into the kitchen. There on the floor was the turkey, pulled out of the pan, and with obvious chunks torn out of the raw carcass. Fuming at the cat, Shirley picked up the turkey, put it in the sink, washed it off and put it back in the roasting pan. She turned on the oven and while waiting for it to heat up, picked up the pieces off the floor, cleaned up the counter, put her butter and chocolate away, laid the treat aside and went to find Tiny.

As she suspected, Tiny was hiding behind Shirley's table in the living room. "You are a bad cat", she told her, "But we are not going to tell anyone about this, so shhh".

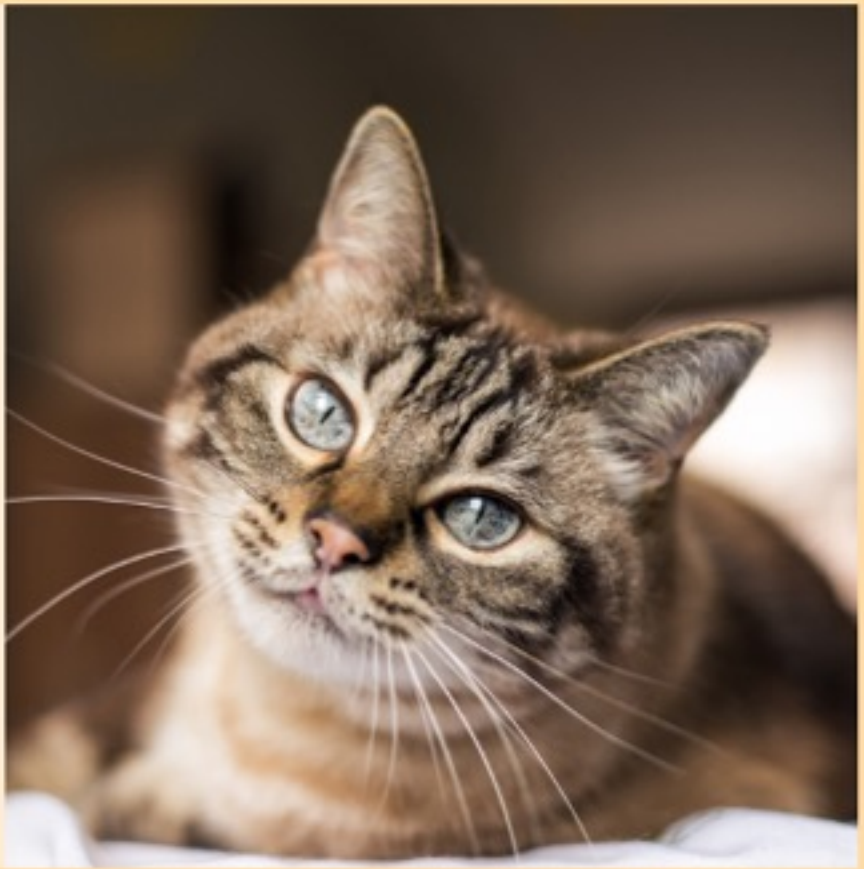
Hours later, the food was ready, the guests were at the table. Shirley did an admirable job of cleaning up Tiny's mess, and getting all the food cooked and out on time for her guests.

“I tried something new this year and carved the turkey ahead of time. I thought it would be easier for you all. Enjoy.” Father Mel blessed the meal and when they all said “Amen”, there was Tiny, sitting on the floor at Shirley’s feet.

Mr. Schmidt took his first bite of turkey and declared, “Delicious!”.

Emma Gowan, who was sitting next to Shirley, looked down and saw Tiny. “What a polite cat”, she said, “sitting there so pretty”.

“Oh yes”, said Shirley, “she is such a good cat”.





“Oh yes”, said Shirley,
“she is such a good cat”.

Shirley’s Christmas Turkey



At the Unity Arms

A Christmas story



At the Unity Arms



On East Colfax, down by the Zanzibar. An old man was wandering, lost in the autumn dusk.

He was there too, the kid from the sticks. Looking for some good music and a drink.

He just wanted to stave off the boredom of that long, dry stretch of the plains.



With harvest in, and cows gone to slaughter, he drove the old Pontiac into town.

Bright lights, flashing neon, and girls in red shorts and fishnets up to here.



And they saw each other,
outside of some two-bit
dive, the old man and the
kid on Colfax.

Cop cars were there and
an officer with a woman,
over by the wall,

Telling her to move along.



“Help me son, I’m lost”, the oldster asked him.

And the lad, a bit scared and out of his element,

turned to look at Leroy Rattley.

Sad, alone, lost indeed.



The older man had stubble on his face

and drooping slacks, his tee shirt read Denver Bears, with a smiling bear beneath.

“I’ll ask that cop, just a second”,

He told the man.



"I'm busy now", the cop told the kid,

"Handle it yourself"

And so, he turned back to Leroy and said,

"I'm Matt, what do you need?"



"Well, Matt, I can't find my way home, and

I'm cold and hungry"

Matt asked him, "Where do you live",

All he got back was a vacant stare

But he held up his hand and there on his wrist,

A bracelet, inscribed as follows:



Leroy Rattley,
Unity Arms, 1410 E. 13th
Denver, CO.

"Well, hello Mr. Rattley

Let's get you home, my car's over there."

Leroy smiled, and said, "I'm a bit cold".

"Yeah, it is a bit chilly tonight".



Matt took off his sweater,
his dad's sweater,

the one with the black
and white print he wore

As a remembrance of that
old farmer, gone for years.

"Here, you need this more
than me", Matt told him.



And they drove to the Unity Arms.

“Yes!”, Leroy exclaimed as he remembered the door.

On the steps, he told Matt,

“Thanks, Junior, it’s just like Christmas!”

In they went, and a woman in white met them,



"Oh Mr. Rattley, you're home."

She turned to Matt and thanked him and

He told her the tale, and then he left

Leroy Rattley and his sweater at the Unity Arms.



“Here, you need this more than me”, Matt told him.

At the Unity Arms



The Santa Claus League

A Christmas story

The Santa Claus League



Once the interdimensional portal was discovered, scientists, journalists and conspiracy theorists all had to rethink some of their assumptions about reality and the facts of the material universe.

Strange phenomena such as crop circles, alien encounters, the yeti, and disappearances were all seen in a new light once people had proof that there was a bridge between our world and another dimension.



In fact, one of the more curious but entertaining theories that was advanced now that mankind knew that there was other intelligent life in the universe and that those beings had visited our world, and were still visiting our world, was the Santa Claus story.



"Yes, Freddy, Santa knows when you are naughty and when you are nice."

Freddy gave his mother a knowing smile.

"Sure, Mom. Santa and his helpers are from the Other World, and they can spy on me and all the other kids. And I thought I had the Santa story all figured out, you and Dad trying to get us to behave and then having gifts come from 'Santa'."

There was more truth to Freddy's cynical speculations than he realized.



The Other World people on Earth's parallel planet were benevolent and generous, and their economy was based on a natural balance between people and the natural world, sharing of resources, and creative investments in art, music, invention, and community.

When these folks began visiting Earth, they lamented the sad conditions of mankind and vowed to help improve things, in unnoticed ways.

One activity they adopted, which was noticeable, was The Santa Claus League. This was a group of Other Worldlers whose mission was to bring joy to children and enliven the Christmas season around the world.



As years went by, more and more folks joined the league and they worked hard to honor kids' requests for Christmas gifts, and to gather them up and deliver them in a large operation on Christmas Eve.



The reindeer and sleigh were just
a cover story.

By interdimensional communication and transport, the Santa Claus League could cover the entire world in one night, delivering gifts to every home where children and adults held onto their belief in Santa Claus.

Now you know!



Now you know!

The Santa Claus League



Baby's First Christmas

A Christmas story

Baby's First Christmas



“Get out of the way, get out of the way, Centurion Marcus Valerius will pass here!” The two Roman soldiers stood at the edge of the crowd, uniformed and armed, reflecting all the might and authority of the Empire. Behind them, the centurion sat upon his warhorse, patiently waiting for the crowd to disperse. And like the surf retreating from the shore, the crowds opened, and the soldiers and their commander slowly made their way through.



“Felix, Primus, move them back, I’ve got to get to the Governor’s palace by midday.”

The Romans made their way through the streets, passing throngs of Jewish bystanders, some sitting, some standing by the side of the way, many engaged in commerce at the edges of the crowd. It was more crowded than usual in Jerusalem that day, due to the upcoming Jewish festival of Passover. People from all over the region were arriving to celebrate this special time of commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt many years before.

On the other side of the crowd, Yehudah and Shimon, two shepherds from out of town, stood conversing. Having recently delivered their flock to the Temple authorities for use in the Passover rituals, the men needed to find a place to stay until the conclusion of the festival. And with so many people in the city, that would be a challenging task.

“Those guys have all the power now”, Shimon remarked, “But someday, Israel will be free again”.

“We can only hope”, Yehudah replied. And in that moment, he remembered back many years ago, when he was a lad, working with his father and the other men to bring the sheep in from the cold. And they all saw it, those lights in the sky, and seemingly other-worldly voices directing them to a small house on the outskirts of the village of Bethlehem.



His father told him that what they saw and heard were messengers from God himself. Yehudah remembered a chorus of voices stating, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to all men'.

How could peace come with these
Romans occupying their land?

As he dug deeper into his memory, he remembered arriving at that place where a mother lay in the straw surrounded by some family's domestic animals. The father sat near, keeping a small fire going for warmth. There was no room for them elsewhere, he was told.

This little family had come to pay their taxes and now, a baby, it seemed to Yehudah, just born, was brought into the world on the very night that he and the others heard those angelic voices. The father greeted them. "This is Miriam, and our son Yeshua..."

There was something strange and awesome about that cold night, and Yehudah was moved to give the mother a small lamb that he had carved out of olive wood, made while he was on the night watch in the fields. “I know he is too young now for this”, he told Miriam, “but when your baby grows up a bit, he can play with this!”



“Yehudah! You are lost in your thoughts again”, Shimon told him. And Yehudah came back to the present moment, still holding his memories close. Shimon continued, “You hear the people, they are calling Hosanna, calling for our king, our deliverer”.



At that moment, the crowd opened again and a man riding a donkey came slowly up the street. The people surrounding him were cheering and calling, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the way of the Lord’.

What a commotion, and what an odd scene, a humble man on a donkey as king? It couldn’t be.

The two shepherds waded into the crowd to get a closer look as people were throwing cloaks and branches down on the road. Yehudah stood next to an older woman, she called out, “God be with you my son”.

Her voice sounded oddly familiar and he looked at her face, and although this woman was much older than the young girl with the baby he saw on that curious night some thirty years ago, she looked like Miriam and so he asked, “Miriam?”

She turned to look at him. “Yes”, she told him, “do I know you?”

Her eyes revealed the truth, this was the young mother from that place near Bethlehem. His heart leaped and he responded to her. “Many years ago, when your son was born amidst the animals, I was there, I was a boy. I gave you my wooden lamb for Yeshua”.

She smiled and cried out, “It’s you, really!” and then she reached into the folds of her robe and pulled out the lamb.

“You see, he kept it all these years, he learned to craft wood himself and gave the lamb back to me when he left our village to begin his teaching and speaking across the north.”



“And now he is here, there.” She pointed to the man on the donkey.

Yehudah was stunned. This man, riding into Jerusalem was the baby in that stable. This man they were calling king.

And at the beginning, he had given the baby his prized possession and now, here they were close once more.

Miriam told him. “You see, he really is a king, but not as we imagined. He has helped many in his life with love, with words of truth, and with healing. He has come to point us all back to finding God in our hearts and living a life focused on the wellbeing of us all.”

“The baby you shared your lamb with is even called by some, the lamb of God and we may soon know the deeper meaning of this name.”





"The baby you shared your lamb with
is even called by some, the lamb of God"

Baby's First Christmas