



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

Christmas Eve, December 24th, 2010

This story is dedicated to my grand daughter Madelyn, who, I hope, will soon be able to read it to her brother Paxton and her cousin Alma

Once upon a time, long, long ago in the land of Persia there lived a little Alpaca named Alfonso. For those of you who don't know what an alpaca is, I had better explain that alpacas look like tiny camels but without the hump and they come from the Andes mountains in South America.

Sailors from Peru where alpacas usually live brought Alfonso to Persia. As such things happen, the sailors decided Persia was much too flat for their taste, so they sold little Alfonso to buy supplies for the voyage home and sailed away without bothering to tell anybody what he was or where he came from.

Alfonso's new owner was a wise man called Melchior. But even though Melchior was very, very wise, he couldn't figure out what sort of animal Alfonso was. But as the little alpaca's thick coat of wool made wonderfully warm soft cloth he concluded he was a cross between a sheep and a camel. "I shall call you a shamel," Melchoir told him. "

One day, after Alfonso had been living with Melchior for a couple of years, the wise man told him: "I and my friends Gaspar and Balthazar have been studying the skies and we've seen a new very special star that says the Son of God is going to be born in the land

of Judea. We are going to visit him. Do you want to come along?"

Alfonso loved adventuress so he quickly said, "Yes." And the next thing he knew he was trotting along with the three Wise Men and a bunch of ungainly camels, headed for the land of Judea. It was a long and exhausting journey. The wonderful star led them across field and fountain, moor and mountain until they reached the City of Jerusalem where King Herod of Judea had his palace.

"The Royal Palace is the place to find the Son of God," said Melchior, "After all, he wouldn't be born in an ordinary house, would he?" But King Herod swore he didn't know anything about the baby. So he called his own wise men together and asked what they thought. They said the baby would be born in the tiny town of Bethlehem where the great King David had been born 1,000 years before.

"Off you go to Bethlehem," said King Herod, a mean man, glad he didn't have to put the Persian Wise Men and their animals up for the night, "When you find the baby, let me know and I'll come along and pay him a visit too. Heh, heh, heh, heh!"

“An odd chap, Herod,” observed Melchior as they saddled up the camels. “I’ve got a feeling he wasn’t too pleased to hear about the birth of the Son of God.” The others agreed. “He had a nasty look in his eye,” said Alfonso. “True,” said Balthazar’s camel, “A palace camel told me Herod chops off the head of anybody he thinks is after his job. He’s bound to be jealous of that baby. We shouldn’t tell Herod when we find him.”

The wonderful star appeared from behind the clouds as they set off for Bethlehem. To their surprise, it led them through the city, passed all the big houses, to a modest inn. “God’s Son must have been born in a finer place than this,” thought Alfonso. He was even more surprised when the star finally came to rest over a cattle shed in the yard behind the inn. “My stable back home is much nicer than this,” he said to himself.

But in the light of the star, he saw a host angels hovering over the cattle shed. “Glory to God in the highest,” they sang, “Peace on earth. Goodwill to all men.” Then he noticed the shed was crowded with shepherds, sheep dogs and sheep. They were all staring at a newborn baby lying in the manger. He was a very beautiful baby and his mother Mary was obviously very proud of him.

“Make room for the newcomers,” her husband Joseph told the shepherds and they all shuffled aside so the Wise Men could wiggle their way through. Alfonso, being not very much bigger than a sheep, followed them.

“We’ve all brought the baby presents,” said Melchior. “I’ve brought a pot of frankincense,” exclaimed Gaspar. “I’ve got a casket of Myrrh,” announced Balthazar. “And I’ve brought a big bag of gold,” said Melchior.

“Oh, how thoughtful of you,” replied Mary, smiling, “I’m sure Jesus will find you gifts very useful when he grows up. But what he needs right now is nice soft, warm blanket to snuggle in. It’s freezing cold outside and the ground is covered in snow.”

“No problem!” exclaimed Melchior, “My little shamel has the softest, warmest wool in the whole world. I’m sure he’d give you enough to make a fine baby blanket.” “Are you sure you wouldn’t mind?” Mary asked Alfonso. “It would be a great honor,” he replied.

“What sort of animal did the Wise Man say you were?” Mary asked. “He’s a shamel, ma’am,” answered Melchior, “He’s a cross between a sheep and a camel.”

“Actually,” said Alfonso, shyly, “I’m a young alpaca from darkest Peru.” Mary smiled, “I thought so. But for people who have never seen an alpaca before, you do look a bit like a cross between a sheep and a camel,” Then, seeing Melchior looking rather cross, she quickly added, “How very clever of Melchior to think up the name shamel!”

Melchior was very pleased with himself. “Ma’am,” he said, “You’ll be needing warm baby clothes and things like that. Perhaps it would be a good idea to leave Alfonso with you. He could give you all the wool you need, and he’s really useful around the house. He’s very good at looking after sheep, for instance.”

“Would you like to stay with us, Alfonso?” “Oh, yes please!” exclaimed Alfonso, “Living with the Wise Men was a wonderful experience, But living with the Son of God and the Holy Family would be the best thing in the entire universe.”

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