

# And there were shepherds abiding

Gene Alexander is a Kings Mountain native in his second year as English and drama teacher at the senior high. The son of Mrs. Louise Alexander and the late Ross Alexander of Kings Mountain, he is a graduate of Western Carolina University. He is married to the former Kathy Wilson.

We had just finished our evening meal and as we sat about the fire a chilly breeze swept through our camp. We pulled our sheepskin coats tighter about our bodies and moved closer to the fire.

Indeed, the stars were brightly twinkling across the black expanse and the moon's brilliance illuminated the hills where our sheep stood grazing. Having been chosen to keep the first watch, I reluctantly left the warmth of the fire and walked amid the sheep. The frantic bleating of one of the flock disturbed the night and I rushed to the top of the hill. Immediately I perceived a bear attacking a young lamb. In a flurry I rushed down the rocky slope and in my haste I tripped and fell headlong. I came to an abrupt stop when my head crashed into a boulder.

After a few seconds I righted myself, leaning heavily against the boulder. A dull, throbbing pain shot through my head and I raised my hand to touch the wound. I had to withdraw the hand because the touch only made the pain more intense. I edged around the boulder, clinging to it to aid my balance. My vision was somewhat blurred; however, I soon realized my heroic effort to save the lamb was a failure. The mangled remains of the lamb lay on the bloody grass.

With a painful effort, I lumbered up the hill. As I reached the crest I saw a resplendent glow. I shook my head, which rolled the deep painful throb back and forth against the walls of my head. I managed to reach the crest of the hill and with wide eyes and mouth agape, I saw an Angel in our camp. The glow of his presence was like that of the sun. My comrades were frightened and I could see one had rolled into the fire. Flery teeth ate at his cloak and he beat at the flames savagely until the last spark was out.

In a deep, yet gentle voice, the Angel spoke, saying, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the City of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in clothes, and lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the whole sky was as light as a noon day. And there appeared a whole army of Angels. With one voice they sang and shouted praises to God. The singing was so loud it set my ears to ringing. Over and over they melodiously repeated, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." Then in the blink of an eye the Angels were gone, leaving only the fading image of their glory.

The ache was gone from my head. Running as fast as I could I headed for our camp. As I bolted into camp, once again my foot found a stone and I fell, knocking two of my comrades sprawling.

The eldest of the shepherds helped us to our feet. I dusted my cloak and engaged in conversation with my comrades about the Angel's appearance and what we should do. No one wished to stay with the sheep. All wished to go to the City of David, to Bethlehem. The conversation became a fuss and we almost came to blows. However, we agreed that if God felt it important enough to hear the message and see the babe, then he would take care of our sheep.

Bethlehem was a small town we rarely frequented. Shepherds were not welcomed by most people. We were loners, non-conformists. People often avoided with deliberateness our lot because of our crude character and rustic, odious dress. Hence, we only entered towns to sell sheep and purchase provisions and this we did quietly. However, tonight was different.

There were six of us, so we divided into pairs. I was paired with the eldest of the group for he had a special liking for me.

Bethlehem was composed of several small shops, two inns and petite houses in which the people resided. The small city was packed with people because of the census ordered by Caesar Augustus.

The Angel had said we would find the babe lying in a manger, so we broke into every barn in Bethlehem. The first barn I lunged into I felt a crushing blow to my stomach and heard, as I sailed through the door and thudded to the hard dirt street, the proverbial "hee-haw" of an irate donkey. From the house adjacent to the barn came a

light and the figure of a man of huge proportion. With great elocution he berated me, then clutched the collar of my cloak and flung me some distance from his dwelling.

Again, I felt the kindly hand of my elder friend on my shoulder. He laughed as he helped me to my feet and suggested I search for the child in a less boisterous manner.

No sooner had those words of wisdom left the elder's mouth, I found myself entering yet another barn, one which emitted the pungent odor of animal life. I winced at the smell, one distinctly that of a camel. I could

not see the camel in the darkness. Though domesticated, a camel should be handled with care. I have never trusted any camel since one bit my hand two years ago. Onward into the darkness I moved, my hands searching outward until I felt a course hide. I turned to leave, but too late. The camel clamped teeth into my hand, the same bitten two years before, and I felt a terrible pain jolt my entire body. I tried mightily to free myself. The camel clung to my hand and lashed out with a kick that struck a donkey in the next stall. The donkey brayed and kicked out, spilling the contents of a water trough on three unsuspecting goats.

The entire barn was in upheaval until the elder of my group somehow found me and freed me from the tenacity of the camel. By way of understatement everything and everyone in Bethlehem was either upset or awake. My fellow shepherds, all as uncouth as myself, had created havoc in barns and households all over the city.

The six of us met at the well. We were a discouraged lot as we sat down on the edge of the well. It was then the elder pointed out the stable adjacent to the inn directly across the street. The same idea struck each of us instantly and in a flurry to reach the stable I found myself being knocked into the well. Soaked to the skin, I climbed out and followed my comrades to the stable. Water dripped from the top of my head to my feet as I entered the stable. I found, as did my comrades, our way was barred by a man who had been alarmed by our unmannerly entrance.

We told this man of the Angel's visit and he graciously stepped aside, permitting us to approach the manger where the new-born babe lay. The mother, who had been shaken from her sleep upon the hay by our entrance, stood beside the manger. She smiled.

The babe lay sleeping, wrapped in warm linen, on the soft hay. When we approached the babe awoke and reached his small hand upward. I let my finger touch the hand and the tiny fingers grasped my own. A feeling of joy welled up inside me.

Forgotten was the painful experiences of the night and the soaked clothing I wore. For the first time in my life I felt important. For some unexplainable reason, this small child transmitted a sensation of security to me.

The Angel considered the birth of this babe as good news. In fact, the Angel had called this child Messiah. Could this small child possibly be our future king? I wondered what the Angel meant by Savior? Would this babe redeem us from the Roman Empire?

These questions continued to linger in my mind from the night I saw the babe. Yet, somehow, I knew that my future as a human being was in some way connected to him.



Page 4A Thursday, December 23, 1976



## Merry Christmas

### A stormy session on Christmas Eve



ED SMITH

The month of December has figured prominently in the affairs of this state's General Assembly.

The "stormiest session in the history of the legislature," up until that time, was held on Christmas Eve of 1834.

And as is so often the case, it was over a matter which scarcely concerned the average citizen of that day.

At issue was no fight over taxes, budgets, apportionment or annual sessions. Instead, it was largely an internal fight, concerning the legislators themselves.

Until 1913 (and the passage of an amendment to the U. S. Constitution) the General Assembly had the right to elect the state's U. S. Senators. And having elected them, the legislature felt it had the right to tell those Senators how to vote on important matters.

#### What's your opinion?

The Mirror-Herald welcomes letters from readers expressing your opinions on any subject you choose, or rebutting any editorial opinion we express.

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The burning issue in 1834 was an effort by Democrats in Congress to have a vote of censure against President Andrew Jackson removed from the records of the U. S. Senate. (Jackson had been censured by that body for his actions in trying to destroy the Bank of the United States). One of this state's two Senators, Willie P. Mangum, a Whig, had voted in favor of the motion, and it was well understood that he would resign his seat rather than reverse that vote. Consequently Whigs in the General Assembly fought bitterly to prevent his being "instructed" to do so.

For almost two months the legislature wrangled over the matter, accomplishing little less. On Christmas Eve (long past the normal time of adjournment) the battle continued, with repeated efforts to adjourn by the Whigs being voted down. Tempers frayed, and the language, it was said, became more rancorous than ever before or since in the legislative chambers.

Finally, the motion to instruct the state's two Senators to vote against censure passed, by a narrow margin, and North Carolina's leading figure in Washington, Willie P. Mangum was faced with a long ride home for his Christmas present.

Also in December 31, 1794, the legislature met for the first time in the state's new capitol city of Raleigh, badly overflowing the few available inns, taverns and private homes.

On December 31, 1860, a citizens group in Wilmington wired Governor John W. Ellis, asking for permission to seize the military installations, Forts Caswell and Johnston, which guarded the approaches to the Cape Fear River, and which were manned by the U. S. Army. These forts were "vital to their city's interests," the group said, and if the state refused to act, they would take matters onto their own hands.

On January 9, made impatient by this state's cautious approach to hostility with the U. S. government, the pro-secessionist forces acted, seizing the lightly-manned forts on their own. It was the first step taken in North Carolina down the road toward secession and war.

#### The Poet's Corner



##### THE EMPTY BOX

As Christmas time comes, and is drawing near,  
As wreaths are hung, to bring good cheer  
As we go about, our gifts to be bought,  
For each special person, our selection is sought.

A truck for the boys, a doll for the girls,  
With big blue eyes, and long shiny curls  
A apron for Mom, a tie for my Dad,  
One empty box I wrap with such dread.

For God has seen fit our circle to be broken  
He came and He saw and His word has He spoken  
For Dad's service on earth here was complete  
His body was frail and his mind was weak.

So God has taken him to his heavenly home,  
Where now this Christmas with angels he roams,  
He will spend Christmas this year, not with us,  
And our hearts are heavy, but in God we do trust.

To give us the strength to hold our heads up high  
Because tonight Daddy will spend Christmas with the  
Christ Child,

Why, my box isn't really empty anymore  
It's filled with love for one we adored.  
Merry Christmas, Daddy.

(Written by Betty Williams Phillips for the family of Mr. Cecil F. Williams)

##### 'FOOD FOR THOUGHT'

I climbed the highest mountain, To the utmost peak.  
For peace of mind and heart my soul did seek.  
Looking down into the valley, upon the people.  
Suddenly I saw a lonely little church yard.  
And above it's steeple, Rising higher and higher.  
Above the world above the people.

I could see a Cross, Much higher than the steeple.  
Rising higher and higher, upon it's flight.  
Giving to the world, which slowly had begun to close  
The curtains of night.

Still giving out it's wonderful light. And it was then.  
I felt the true meaning from within,  
That God had Sent His  
Only Begotten Son, Too, save man from his sin.  
And this was His wonderful way of inviting man in.

EVERETTE H. PEARSON

#### CHRISTMAS

This time of year is so beautiful  
If we stop to think of loved ones  
We celebrate the birth of Jesus  
Its a time to be together for fun.

We have friends far away  
And we have friends near  
Lets not forget the little Babe  
That we hold so dear.

We can share our things with  
Others who are not fortunate as we  
But don't forget the Christ Child  
As we put up our tree.

Our Saviour came as a tiny child  
To save us from our sin  
Soon He was preaching saying—  
You must be born again.

Today is the time of Salvation  
Its a time of sin and war  
If we live as we should  
We'll always be ready to go.  
MYRTLE GOFORTH

THE WONDER OF IT ALL  
Christmas is the time for believing in  
the extent of God's love for man.  
Even before He sent His gift  
Or before the world began.

Christmas is the time for glorifying in  
the things we do not understand,  
As faithful Joseph did of yore  
When he took fair Mary's hand.  
Christmas is the time for dwelling on  
Baby Jesus in a crib of hay,  
Allowing tender thoughts to rest there  
the true wonder of Christmas day.

Christmas is the time for giving  
light a candle that someone may see  
The endless love of Our Father who gave  
His gift to hang on a tree.  
VIVIAN STEWART BILTCLIFFE

THE CHRIST CHILD'S DEBUT  
The World Wrapped in Splendor  
The skies held their space,  
A glowing star shone on a baby's face  
In Bethlehem's stable on glorified hay  
God's Holy gift in swaddling clothes lay.

Glory shone 'round the stable aglow  
Placed an angel at His head, one at the toe  
The skies cried out, behold the view  
The heavens rejoicing enough to undo.

An angel with a heavenly sheet  
Wrapped the world in a song,  
A baby born to die to right a wrong  
The angels declared in rapturous delight  
Hallelujah the Saviour is Born tonight!  
Again the Messiah is caught up in page,  
"Come down, come down," weary people rage  
It's about that time again, but when  
the glory of His coming as of then.  
VIVIAN STEWART BILTCLIFFE

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