



Advent 4: An Angel Visits the Shepherds

Luke 2:8-16

Matey pulled hard on the rigging and then looked at the ends of the ropes attached to the sails. He went from one sail's rigging to the next, checking to make sure each was safe and secure. "Secure rigging, check!" Then he checked the gangplank and the life preserver. "Secure gangplank, check! Secure life preserver ring..." Matey picked up a round green ring and looked closely at it. "Wait a tick, this isn't a proper life preserver. This will never hold me afloat. We'll just toss this overboard," he muttered as he prepared to throw the green ring into the sea.

Cody walked past at that moment and saw Matey ready to throw the ring as if it were a Frisbee. "Wait! Dude! What are you doing?" he yelled.

Matey stopped and turned to Cody. "I'm the 'Safety Officer of the Day' and I'm getting rid of this unsafe life preserver," he announced proudly.

Cody reached for the ring and carefully laid it back on the table.

"Dude! That's not a life preserver. That's the Advent Wreath," he explained as he put the purple candles back in their spots around the outside of the ring and the white candle in the middle.

Matey looked very confused. "The what?" he asked, wondering how he could check this new piece of equipment off his safety list.

"The Advent Wreath, dude. We use it to celebrate Advent. You know...Advent? That special time of year? You do know what Advent means, don't you?" Cody asked.

"Nope, never heard of it," Matey replied.

"Advent is an awesome time of the year. It's the season when we look forward to the coming of Jesus and we get our hearts ready to celebrate Christmas," Cody explained.

"I was away in port until yesterday and I've missed your Christmas preparations on board," Matey said. Then he grinned. "But, oh, I do love Christmas! With all the decoration and the presents and the delicious flounder flavored cookies."

Cody's face scrunched up in disgust. "Flounder flavored cookies?" he asked.

"Oh yes, my Mommy makes the best flounder flavored cookies you've ever tasted," Matey said, excitedly.

"Sounds gross!" Cody exclaimed. "But, you're right about the decorations, they all have special meanings. Like, Uncle Captain Billy told me that the evergreen is the only tree that stays green all year round. That's why we use it for Christmas because it reminds us that Jesus came to give us eternal life and He is with us all year 'round."

"Oh, I do like that! And the presents remind us that Jesus was God's gift to the world!" Matey added.

"Cool!" Cody said and then pointed at the wreath. "And the Advent Wreath is round, it has no end, just like God's love for us has no end."

Now that Matey knew what the green ring really was, he studied it more closely. "What does this big white candle mean?"

"Uncle Captain Billy says it's the Christ Candle. We're gonna light that on Christmas Eve to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world."

"Can we light one today?" Matey asked.

"Sure! It's about that time to light the fourth candle. But we gotta get all the crew together and Uncle Captain Billy's treasure map so we can read the Bible Story together!" Cody went to get the Bible from the treasure chest while Matey gathered the crew.

A few minutes later, everyone had gathered and Cody read from Luke 2 in the Bible. "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."

"Why were the shepherds terrified?" Matey interrupted.

"Angels kind of have that effect on people in the Bible," Cody explained.

"I guess I'd be shocked if I met an angel!" Matey said. Most of the crew nodded their heads in agreement.

Yes," Cody added, "And this night there was a whole host of angels and they were all saying 'Glory to God in the highest!'"

"Wow!" Matey exclaimed. "Now, I can understand why the shepherds were shocked!" he paused, then asked, "Cody, can we light the candle now?!"

"Sure. We can light all four!" Cody reached for the matches in his pocket and handed them to Matey. Matey struck a match and lit the four purple candles.

"As you watch the candles flicker, listen to these words from the book of Matthew," Cody instructed, then read, "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."

"That's more than good news, sir, that's a miracle!!" Matey cheered. The ship's crew cheered in agreement.

"You're right, dude!" Cody said as he high-fived with Matey. "And it was a miracle that all of those angels showed up. But you know what my favorite Christmas miracle is? That God loved us so much that He sent a Savior for the world."

"Aye," Matey agreed. "The angels did say it was for ALL people. That means young, old, rich or poor, friends and enemies."

"Jesus came to save ALL who believe," Cody added. "No wonder we look forward to His coming."

Cody smiled as he walked towards the crew cabin. "Dude, that's something that we can ALL look forward to."