

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: Chip the Wonder Dog Attends the First Christmas, Part I

Note: In the spirit of this writer's youth during the 1950s, when his hometown newspaper placed a bible verse prominently on the editorial page each day and ran a serialized Christmas story each season beginning the first week of December or so, this is a fictionalized version of what Christ's birth might have looked like to a proto-type Dachshund had he been one of the animals in the manger.

Chip the Wonder Dog, long-in-tooth—at least counting the ones he had left—mostly white-faced and white-pawed in contrast to his chocolate brown elongated body, gathered his family around him for a final visit. He knew his time was short. With labored breathing and great difficulty walking, Chip wanted to make sure his family knew about the most wonderful event ever witnessed by him.

Twenty-four great grandchildren, sixteen grandchildren, four sons and a daughter—the only ones living—huddled around in the small workshop located in the back of Yosef ben Yaakov's house, where the boy Yahshua lived. Chip and the boy had bonded, even though Chip was not an official member of the household. Strangely, the boy seemed to remember Chip from the first night and encouraged the dog's presence in later years as the boy learned the craft of building where some wood but much more stone existed. In return, Chip and his family kept the rats away.

"My time is short," Chip began, as only dogs can communicate with their kind. "It is time for the rest of you to know the full story of what has been revealed to me—not just by living with the boy, but by the three recurring dreams I have had in recent weeks."

Chip related how Yosef, the husband of Myriam, the boy's mother, had found Chip abandoned by a member of the Alemanni tribe serving in the Roman Army in Jerusalem after a Jewish Holy Day before the two married. Chip recounted how in Judah and Galilee dogs had a bad reputation. Yahshua's family showed great kindness by allowing Chip and his growing family to stay in the workshop.

"We're a different kind of dog," exclaimed Chip. "We earn our keep! No filthy rat has lasted more than one watch on this property since I've been with Yosef and his family, and you have been a big part of that."

Yosef had given Chip his full name. First, because Chip slept in woodchips and shavings in the shed; and second, because Yosef marveled at Chip's ability to rid the property of rats without actually killing them. His remarkable technique proved to be most persuasive in the *rattus* genus.

Chip then began the story to his family of how the boy, Yahshua, came into the world. He told them how it occurred during the wet season—when it was cold. He explained how Yosef and Myriam had not been married very long and had already exchanged some words over how soon she was with child. Yosef even contemplated divorcing Myriam. But for some reason unknown to Chip, decided not to go through with it. He recounted how at the worst time of the year, Yosef and Myriam began to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem when nobody should travel, least of all a woman about to have a child. Myriam took Chip along, he explained, to help keep her warm as she bounced along on the back of a donkey.

“I just knew,” Chip proclaimed, “that all that bouncing around would not help Myriam with giving birth to a first child, always a great danger for human mothers, as we know.”

Chip went on to relate how Yosef had to travel there because a Roman dictator said so, and how Myriam talked about her cousin Elizabeth with her new baby and about angels and prophecies.

“I'm not sure I fully understand everything, especially since I've had these dreams, but I can tell you with great certainty that Yahshua is a different kind of human—and the best friend I ever had, next to Grandma Sarah of blessed memory.”

Chip continued the tale, telling of no room available anywhere in Bethlehem because all the people from Yosef's clan had to register their families. But Yosef had a distant cousin who took pity on Myriam and allowed the family to stay in his shed reserved for cattle, sheep and goats when it got cold. At least the animals could help keep them warm, the relative reasoned.

Chip related how the animals seemed to sense that something remarkable was about to take place. After Myriam delivered the Child, surprisingly with little pain, they gathered around the newborn in swaddling clothes when Myriam placed the Child on a donkey blanket over the straw in a manger following his first feeding. Still, as Chip recounted, the Child seemed fussy. Chip thought he was cold. Chip then related how he left Myriam's side and carefully walked up the woolly side of a sleeping mother sheep, crawling into the manger with the Child. At first, Myriam balked at Chip's idea, but soon realized his presence in the manger had calmed the Child as Chip snuggled with him.

“It was then,” Chip explained, “I had a sense that this Child would do something that no other human had ever done, and that I belonged to him. Maybe it was the strange lights in the sky that I could see through the cracks in the shed’s ceiling or the singing I heard outside, like at a great feast. I knew then that I never wanted to leave that boy, but I only wanted to serve him. It is now time for you to do the same, but I must tell you first of my three dreams.”

To be continued during Christmastide the first week of January 2024. Merry Christmas!