



The Christmas Story You've Never Heard

Radio Dramatization Expected to Boost Sales of Christmas Novel

Santa Claus. Beautifully wrapped gifts. Eating lots of good food with family and friends. For many, that's what Christmas is all about. But the author of a new book is determined to put the emphasis back where it belongs: on the birth of Jesus and how the Lord reinvigorates the lives of those who follow Him. His book, *The Shepherds' Prayer: A Christmas Novel*, does just that, and will be playing as an "audio drama" on an estimated 1,500 Christian radio outlets in the U.S. this Christmas season.

Author and publisher Richard Barry based his fictional tale on the real lives of a group of men we've all heard about but typically overlook — the shepherds to whom the angel announced the birth of Jesus. Outside of our kid's school play, most of us have never given these important Biblical characters a second thought. Yet they were the first to hear the Good News. So what happened to them after that blessed first Christmas? Barry's novel seeks to answer that thought-provoking question, and in a way that makes all of us appreciate the importance of Christ's Incarnation and how the seemingly insignificant birth of one baby in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire changed the world forever.

In fact, Barry places the entire Christmas story into historical context in a way that few modern novels on the subject have done. He reminds us that there is a tragic component of the story, too — the Slaughter of the Innocents. This was when the jealous King Herod ordered the murder of all the male babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the Messiah, whom he saw as a rival. In *The Shepherds' Prayer*, a young man who had been orphaned in this tragic massacre returns to Bethlehem thirty years later on a quest to discover his name and heritage. Having been raised in a culture where bloodlines mean everything, he seems forever condemned to live as an outsider on the fringes of society until he discovers his true identity. His only clue is a cryptic message on a lambskin blanket about a child born in a stable in Bethlehem. Who is this mysterious child? And what could such a child have to do with his own birth and destiny? Through a providential encounter with a small band of shepherds, the young man comes to realize that his quest has little to do with his genes — and everything to do with his soul.

According to the author, who lives with his family in Centennial, Colorado, the idea for *The Shepherds' Prayer* came to him back in the Christmas season of 1997. Barry and his wife had just returned from church and were discussing the story of Christ's birth and what it meant to the world then and now. The subject turned to the Slaughter of the Innocents, and he began to wonder how that traumatic event must have impacted the people of Bethlehem and their attitudes toward the poor Galilean child who was the target of Herod's wrath. His research into that subject led him to write this book, which he believes will, in turn, lead the reader on his or her own journey to discover Christ and what it truly means to be a Christian.

Those who have read *The Shepherds' Prayer* have already felt its impact on their own lives. One pastor said, "I have never read anything like this. You have taken Biblical stories and prophecies and woven them into a most remarkable and fascinating book."

Christian commentator, Chuck Colson, based his Christmas Day *BreakPoint* broadcast on Barry's

book, saying “This imaginative Christmas novel tells the story of an adopted son with a mysterious connection to the Messiah, who seeks the truth about his birth thirty years later. *The Shepherds’ Prayer* is a story that reminds us of two things. First, we remember that the humble will be lifted up and confound the wisdom of the wise. Secondly, Barry’s novel reminds us of perhaps how we often react to the difficult and painful circumstances in our lives.”

Another reader said that the book helped to put our often facile understanding of the Christmas story into a sharper and more meaningful perspective. “Every Christmas we put out our nativity. We see these sweet shepherds there to adore Jesus, and then we move on in our thoughts. This story helps me to understand that God always asks for suffering to bring about the greatest things in His kingdom. Knowing that the shepherds suffered gives the nativity a passion that I couldn’t see before.”

The book is available as a hardcover book and as a three-CD audiobook. The audio version of the book is narrated by the “golden voice” of John McDonough, an accomplished actor, singer and narrator who has appeared on Broadway, in television and in movies. Mr. McDonough’s superb narration provides an opportunity to listen to *The Shepherds’ Prayer* while wrapping gifts, on the way to shopping or on family trips to visit relatives.

This is a book that has the potential to become a Christmas classic because it is one of those rare novels that the entire family can enjoy. It focuses our attention on the life-changing power of faith during this special time of the year. Yes, decorating our Christmas trees and waiting for Santa to make his annual sleigh ride are fun traditions. But these things pale in comparison with the profound inspiration drawn from the remarkable story of the humble shepherds who first taught us what Christmas is really all about.

Finally, Mr. Barry has taken this unique marketing approach because he truly believes that this is a story that needs to be told. “The main purpose for writing this book is to expose as many people to the story as possible,” he explains. “It’s a never-before told story about a group of men who, I believe, may be some of the greatest unsung heroes of the Bible. I’d like to raise awareness about what might have happened to them, so turning the book into a radio drama was an easy decision to make. Based on the response we’ve had from Christian radio stations, it’s clear that the story has the effect of bringing one’s thoughts back to Christ and Bethlehem. It looks like the audio drama will be playing on some 1,500 radio outlets this Christmas. My hope is that it will become an annual Christmas event.”

The Shepherds’ Prayer was dramatized for radio by Dave Arnold, executive producer of *Adventures in Odyssey*, and produced by Todd Busteed, producer and director of the *Left Behind* dramatic audio series.

Of course, Barry’s hoping that those who hear *The Shepherds’ Prayer* radio drama will like the story well enough to want to buy copies of the book as Christmas gifts. The book is available in participating Christian bookstores and may be purchased online at ChristmasBook.com or Amazon.com.

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