

Stinky feet for Christmas: A true, 10-toed tale including clanging bells



Your Turn
Lori Williams
Guest columnist

Several pairs of wiggly feet showed me the way to Christmas last year. It happened in a preschool music classroom when the children and I were learning the African American spiritual "Rise Up Shepherd and Follow."

It's a century-old song text, which pretty much fit how I was feeling about the approaching Christmas season: I was old, a little musty and in need of serious invigoration. As I anticipated a lonely holiday, I prayed, "God, please show me the Christmas story with fresh eyes."

Our feet, I thought, could be part of the festivities as the preschoolers and I learned a new carol. We could walk around the room, or even march in place, as we sang "Rise Up Shepherd and Follow." But I wanted something more to underscore the action of the song. What about bells? Christmas bells, no less. And what if we clasped the bells around our ankles? They were really wrist bells, but this would be fun and different and it would put us in a joyful mood.

The kids were all in ... so much so

that they rolled up their pant legs and yanked off their shoes and socks. There was a whole lot of jingling ... and giggling ... going on.

"Listen kids," I said, raising my voice over the bell ringing, "We're going to learn a Christmas carol that teaches us what the shepherds did after the angels told them Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The story is right here in my Bible, in Luke 2:15:16, "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger ..." (ESV).

Right then, Zane pointed to Sam and said, "Your feet stink!"

"Yours smell worser," Sam yelled back.

Everybody laughed. (*I think the adults laughed the hardest.*)

"Sometimes our feet sweat when we wear socks all day long," I said. "Why don't we air them out while we march around the room?"

So with fragrant feet and clanging bells, we marched and sang the carol:

There's a star in the East on Christmas morn;

Rise up, shepherd, and follow;

It will lead to the place where the Christ was born;

Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow, follow;

Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow the Star of Bethlehem;

Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

The following week I had stinky feet on my mind. It made me chuckle, which was a welcome joy booster. I kept thinking about the shepherds' feet. After all, they worked out in the fields. They lived among animals. They didn't have indoor plumbing. Were their feet stinky, too?

The next week as the preschoolers gathered around me for music class, I asked them, "Where did the shepherds work?" ("In the fields," they said.) Do you think their feet ever got dirty? ("Yes," they said. Zane piped up and said, "I bet they even stepped in sheep poop!")

Everyone laughed. It was so much fun to laugh together.

"You're probably right, kids," I said. "But do you think they would have stopped to wash before they went to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus?"

"NO WAY!" said Zowie, stomping her foot for emphasis. "They wouldn't want to be late!"

Lori Williams is a mom and church pianist who also loves to write stories (and they're even true) about cantaloupe moons, big hosannas and pink flamingo sunsets. Readers can reach her at lawordwright@gmail.com.

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