

I'll Stay with the Sheep

By Sheralee Bills Hardy

A few years ago in December, I took my four young sons to watch the dress rehearsal for our stake's production of *Savior of the World: His Birth*. The evening's performance culminated three intense months for our family: my husband was portraying Joseph, and during the past several weeks of rehearsals, we had missed him.

Many times during those weeks of preparation, I had envied my husband's role. A starring role seemed so much more exciting and important than a behind-the-scenes babysitter. I wasn't proud of my feelings. I wanted to support my husband serenely, to bear with cheerfulness and patience the demands on his time. I knew many others who bore heavier burdens routinely—not for a matter of months, but for years. I prayed often to overcome my self-pity and my aspiration for a more visible function.

Heavenly Father answered my prayers more abundantly than I expected. Perhaps His sweetest answer of all came that night at the dress rehearsal. At the conclusion of one scene, the shepherds hasten to meet the Messiah. These shepherds have waited their entire lives for their Savior's arrival, and now they anticipate the unspeakable honor of greeting Him at His

birth. But amid the scurry to embark on this journey of a lifetime, one shepherd remains still. His grandson calls out to him, "Grandfather, aren't you coming?"

His answer teaches a great lesson: "I'll stay with the sheep."

As I listened to these words at the dress rehearsal, in that moment I felt the love of the Savior encircle me. My supporting role, which had once seemed menial, took on a greater significance. I knew my Heavenly Father wanted me to devote myself to the spirits He had entrusted to my keeping, just like that shepherd who stayed back so others could go see the Babe of Bethlehem. My children needed me at home more than I needed to be the one in a starring role on stage.

I put my sons to bed that night without the applause of an audience, but my heart held all the serenity, cheer, and patience for which I'd prayed. Though vain ambition might whisper, "Sheralee, aren't you coming?" the Savior of the world had given me the peace to reply, "I'll stay with the sheep." ■

