

## CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

## Bringing in the sheep

By Janaan Manternach  
NC News Service

Ezra sat in the shade of a twisted tree. He was tired.

For four hours Ezra had been leading his small flock of sheep over the hot, rocky hills. It was so good to sit down in a shady spot near the walls of the great city of Jerusalem.

Ezra watched his sheep lap up the cool well water. He sipped the refreshing water from his water bag.

"This has been a tough day," he thought to himself. "Nobody knows what it's like to be a shepherd!"

The tired shepherd thought of how he had spent an hour searching all over the hills for one of his sheep. It was a sheep that had wandered away from the flock.

Ezra's body tightened as he recalled the wild animal that attacked the flock a couple of hours later. He could still see and hear what happened as the animal growled and flashed its teeth.

"I could have been hurt," he thought. "Why do I take that kind of risk?"

"I guess I'm attached to my sheep," Ezra said to himself. "I like it when they look up at me when I call their names. They really know me."

"I know that I'm the only one that keeps them together as a flock. I protect them. I find them water and grass. I'd search all night for one that gets lost."

Just then Ezra noticed a group of people coming near. They were walking toward the Jerusalem gate.

The people stopped for a moment not far from him and his

flock. He was curious.

"I am the good shepherd," he heard one man say. "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

This was obviously a teacher, a rabbi. In fact, it was Jesus of Nazareth.

"What he says is true," Ezra said to himself. "I risked my life today for my sheep."

Jesus continued. Ezra was fascinated with Jesus' words. He knew Jesus was really talking about people, not sheep.

"My sheep know my voice," Jesus was telling the group. "I call them by name, and they follow me anywhere I go. They will not follow a stranger, because they recognize my voice."

Ezra smiled proudly. "I know exactly what Jesus means."

"I am the good shepherd,"

Jesus went on. "I know my sheep and my sheep know me. For these sheep I will give my life."

Ezra glanced over at his thirsty sheep. He counted each one and silently said the name of each.

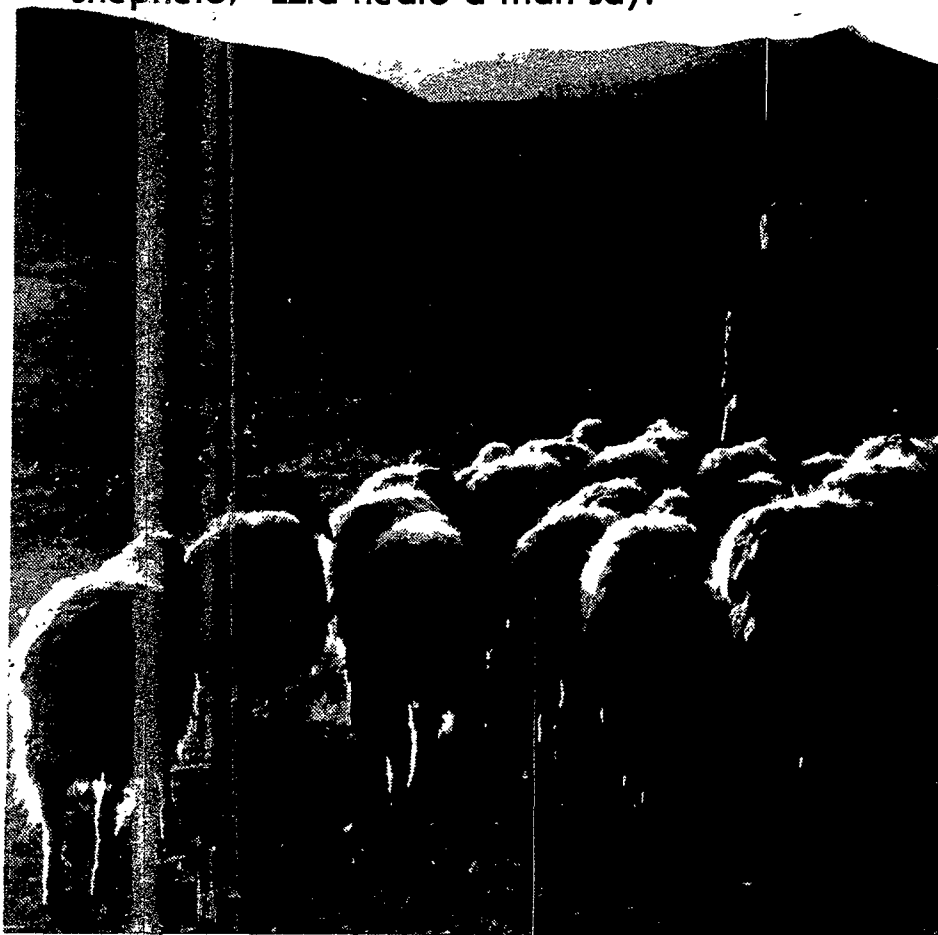
"But I have other sheep," Jesus continued. "They do not belong to this sheepfold yet. I must lead them too. They shall hear my voice and follow me. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd."

Ezra wasn't sure what Jesus meant by that. But he liked the idea of everyone being united in peace like his sheep were.

*Story Hour biblical quotes — this week from John 10:1-18 — are paraphrased.*

*(Ms. Manternach is the author of numerous catechetical books and articles for children.)*

Ezra spent a long day watching over his sheep. He was good at his work and enjoyed taking care of the flock. Then a crowd approached. "I am the good shepherd," Ezra heard a man say.



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## HOW ABOUT YOU?

- Think of a pet that you love in a special way. How much would you do if your pet was in trouble?
- What do you think Jesus means when he says, "I am the good shepherd?"

## Children's Reading Corner

"Stepka and the Magic Fire," by Dorothy Van Woerkom. This Russian legend tells a powerful story about Stepka, a very poor father with three small daughters. One Easter, out of the love he feels for his daughters, Stepka goes out to beg so they will have some joy on the feast day. But the neighbors rebuff him. Dizzy and cold, he is returning home when he notices a row of fires. Frightened at first, he decides to go where the fires are and ask for help again. He is welcomed by strangers and mysteriously given riches beyond his dreams and imagination. Stepka is like the good shepherd, who is willing to do anything for his family. It is a story in which the one who cares for others is cared for himself. (Concordia Publishers, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118. Hardback, \$3.95.)



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