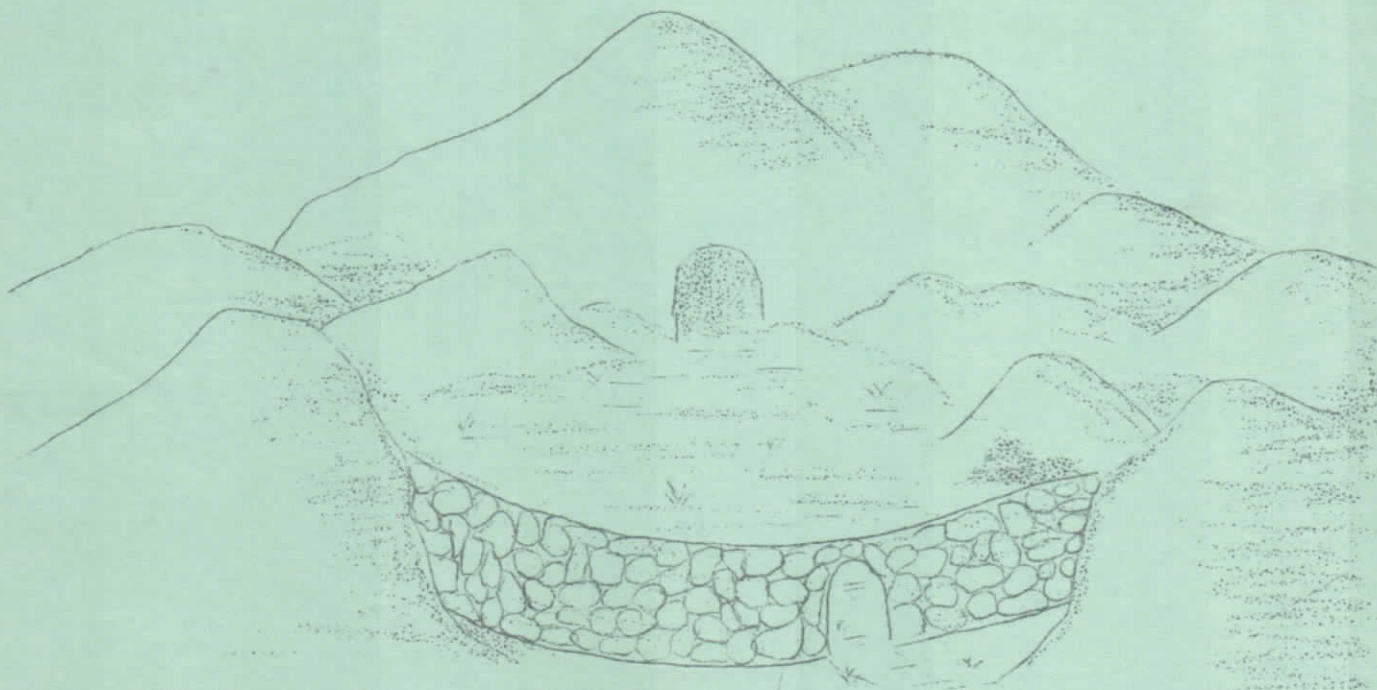


The sheep could not be left alone all day and night. Sheep had to be protected from wild animals. They had to be kept safe from robbers.

When the grass close to his home was scarce, someone in the family took the sheep farther away. Very often he went with other men from his village. All day the sheep ate grass on the hillsides. But at night, the shepherd would lead the sheep back to the sheepfold. Other shepherds would bring their sheep here too.

The shepherd had to find or build this sheepfold. Often he and his friends used the same one year after year. They were not always alike. But they were something like this -



If the shepherd could find a cave, he would use this. The sheep could go into the cave for shelter from the rain, or wind, or cold. The shepherds built a wall of rocks around this cave. This wall needed to be as high as a

TURN CARD OVER

fall man. The sheep could not jump over it. Very often thorns grew on this wall. These thorns discouraged robbers from trying to climb over the wall.

When the wall was completed, the sheep could choose to be inside the cave or outside in the yard enclosed by the wall. As long as a sheep was in the sheepfold he was protected.

There was only one doorway through the wall. Sheep came through this gate at night. The shepherd stood there. As the sheep crowded past him the shepherd counted them. He wanted to be sure that all his sheep were safe for the night. The shepherd kept guard at this door all night. Sometimes, he would even lie down and sleep right in the doorway. Other times he sat on the wall to guard the sheep.

Again, the next day, the shepherd led the sheep out to the grass on the hills. If a storm came up, the shepherd quickly led his sheep back to the sheepfold.

If the shepherds could not find a cave, then they had to build a larger wall. They put a roof over one end of the walled space. This was the part where the sheep could be protected from the cold and rain and wind. This was used instead of the cave.

Sometimes the sheep did not have a sheepfold. In the warm months, the sheep could stay outside all night. Several shepherds usually brought their flocks together. The shepherds built a fire and sat around it. They took turns resting and watching all the sheep.

On the night Jesus was born, there were shepherds watching their flocks on the hills around Bethlehem. Read about it in Luke 2:8-11.