Once upon a time, many, many years ago there was a boy called Jonathan. He was a goat herder, and looked after a flock of goats. Jonathan worked hard. He had to feed the goats, and carry water from the well for them to drink. He also had to milk the goats, and help the farmer’s wife to make cheese. Jonathan had a little place in the barn where he slept.

Each year new goats were born, and one year seven goats were born, but one of them was very little, and wasn’t expected to live. He even had a crooked ear, and everyone on the farm said that he wouldn’t live. But Jonathan fed it with a cloth dipped in milk, and wrapped him in an old blanket, and kept him with him most of the day, and even at night, he took the goat into bed with him.

So they kept each other warm. The little goat grew bigger, and became Jonathan’s special pet, and Jonathan called him Marcella. He was able to do something very strange – he could yodel… Now no farmyard animals where Jonathan lived could make that sound – the people didn’t know that Marcella’s great, great grandmother was from the mountains in what is now Switzerland, and of course everyone yodels in Switzerland. The yodeling goat with the crooked ear followed him around, as he was doing his chores, and everyone laughed at him but Jonathan didn’t care, because he loved him.

Most days were the same as the day before – Jonathan had his routine, and it didn’t really change from day to day. He thought that it might be nice if something exciting happened, but nothing really did. Except that one day in the late afternoon, the shepherds came into the farm from the hills where they had been looking after their sheep. They were very excited, and they told a very strange story.

The night before, they had been resting after cooking their supper over an open fire out on the hills. They said that suddenly there was a very bright light in the sky, and
they heard a voice seeming to come out of nowhere saying, “Do not be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy. There is a baby being born in Bethlehem, and he is Christ the Lord.” And the sky was filled with a beautiful choir singing, and you can imagine what the shepherds thought – first of all they couldn’t believe what had happened, and then after talking about it, they decided to go to Bethlehem and see the baby.

After hearing the shepherd’s story, Jonathan wanted to go with them. But they laughed at him – “I suppose you’ll want to take your silly goat with you too. No you can’t come with us, it’s too far, and you and your goat would just be a nuisance, especially when he makes that funny yodel sound.” YODEL So the shepherds left, and Jonathan was alone as usual.

He sat down on his blanket, and Marcella came to him, and put his head down on his lap. Jonathan rubbed his crooked ear, just as he liked it, and said – “If it really is Christ the King, I think we should go and see for ourselves. We’ll follow the shepherds, and not bother them, but make our way to Bethlehem” And so Jonathan scooped Marcella up in his arms, filled their water bottle, and wrapped some bread up in a blanket, and off they went.

It was a long walk – there were no cars, or buses, or trains – only donkeys or horses to ride. Of course Jonathan didn’t have a horse or a donkey, so he and Marcella walked all the way to Bethlehem.

The shepherds had asked at all the inns in the village, but no one could tell them where the baby was being born.

Jonathan wanted to find a place for him and Marcella to bed down for the night. They were very tired, hot and dusty, and after looking for a while they found a small barn, and went inside.

They asked a boy working there if they could have some water, and perhaps a place to lie down in the straw. The boy said to go ahead and help themselves, and so Marcella had a lovely cool drink of water, and Jonathan washed his face and hand and poured some water on his hot dusty feet. Then he looked around in the barn. It was very strange, because in one of the stalls there seemed to be a bright light.
Now you know that barns don’t have very much light – and at night there were only a few lanterns hanging on the walls that didn’t shine very brightly.

Jonathan and Marcella crept quietly over to the stall, and looked through a crack in the wall.

And what do you think they saw?

They saw a woman, and a man bending over a manger, and all of a sudden they heard a baby cry. Jonathan was surprised that a baby would be in a barn, but then one by one he saw the shepherds coming into the stall. They were carrying presents, and put them down very quietly and fell on their knees around the manger.

Jonathan was speechless; surely this wasn’t the King that everyone was so excited about – a baby in a box in a barn. Kings were supposed to have golden robes, and crowns made out of precious jewels – and then Jonathan looked again, and sitting on either side of the manger were two angels, looking at the baby, and it almost seemed that they were guarding him.

Then the woman looked up and saw Jonathan and Marcella and asked them if they would like to come and join them. Jonathan was a little shy, and also he realized that he didn’t have gift for the baby. But he suddenly remembered that it was time for Marcella to be milked, so he milked his funny little goat, found a clean bowl to put the milk in, and brought it to the woman.

She was very pleased, and Jonathan and Marcella were able to look closely at the baby. It was the most beautiful baby that Jonathan had ever seen.

When Marcella looked into the manger, the baby stretched out his little hand to touch the goat’s soft hair, and guess what happened?

The baby touched the ear that was crooked, and when Marcella rubbed his head against Jonathan his ear wasn’t crooked any more.

They hugged each other, and Jonathan was very happy for Marcella.

The stall was getting quite crowded, as more and more people came to see the special baby. No one wanted to leave, because there was a most wonderful feeling in the
barn. Love seemed to be shining all around, and the angels began to sing their lovely songs.

“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill to all people!”

So Jonathan and Marcella found their King.

And that’s the end of the story.

Would you like to hear Marcella yodel once more?