**Stories From The Stable - Christmas Eve 2021 (on line)**

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

So our first scripture today tells us how Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem, and how they couldn’t find anywhere to stay except a humble stable. And that’s where Mary gave birth to Jesus, and she laid him in the animal feeding trough.

When we think about the Christmas nativity scene, we usually remember Mary and Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and sometimes even the wise men.

I know that the Children in Sunday school have been adding these characters to their Nativity Scene each week.

But, we don’t often think about the animals in the stable.

What would they teach us if they could talk?

So tonight, we are going to hear some of the stories from the animals in the stable, because they played a big part in the story too.

Let’s listen to this hymn before we hear our first story.

Sing along to the words on the screen.

(Hymn - LITTLE DONKEY )

(unwrap donkey)

I used to have such a horrible master. He never fed me, and my water pail was almost always empty. One day he wanted me to go up a steep hill, but my load was too heavy, so I stood still. He started to whip me until I nearly fell. But then a kind man and his wife came by – she was very pregnant, and she told her husband that they needed a donkey – so the man paid my master some money and took me. They were very kind to me. They gave me food , a warm dry stable, and soon I grew strong again. Which was just as well, since a week later the man, Joseph, started to prepare to go on a long journey. He packed my saddle bags with food and cloths, and then we left. I carried his wife, Mary, on my back most of the way because her baby was soon to be born. I walked very carefully so that she was not bumped too much. We left very early, but it was a long journey, and when we got to Bethlehem every inn in town was full. Joseph was very worried, but finally an inn keeper let us sleep in this old stable – and Mary had her baby right here on the hay. At first the stable was warm. They wrapped the baby in the cloth from my saddlebag, and they made him a bed in the manger. Soon, lots of visitors came. I could see that Mary was very tired and just wanted to rest, and when the visitors left she finally fell asleep. Joseph meant to keep watch, but he was tired too, and he fell asleep. But while he slept, I stayed awake. At dawn a very bitter wind came up. I could see that the baby was shivering with cold, so I blew my warm breath on him and covered him with more hay. At last the cold woke Joseph and he hurried to the manager, when he saw what I had done for the baby, he smiled at me and said to me:

“You kept him warm my friend. You have saved the life of our king.”

That’s my story (put donkey into Manger scene)

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2: 8-18

(unwrap lamb)

Well I was still very young on the night that the angels came. My masters were all gathered around the fire to keep warm. Bethlehem hills can be very cold you know. It was very dark out – but then, suddenly the sky turned white - it was really bright. And then there seemed to be some singing coming from the sky, getting louder and louder.

My masters, the shepherds were all so afraid at first, and they all covered their eyes. But then the angels spoke. They said to go to the stable and that we would find a baby lying in a stable in a feeding trough.

I thought it a bit strange that we find a baby in a feeding trough. But this wasn’t just any baby – the angels said that the baby would be a saviour to all the world – and that includes sheep you know!

Well, the shepherds all got very excited, and they began to run to the stable. My little legs were too short for running, so my shepherd boy picked me up and carried me, and he ran after the others. He ran all the way here.

When we got here, I knew straight away that this baby was special – there was just something about him. My masters knew that too – they even bowed down to the baby.

I could tell that they felt bad that they didn’t have any gifts to give this special baby – but then my shepherd boy stepped forward and said that “a ewe lamb is as fine as gold” and he gave me to the baby.

He said that my wool could make a blanket for the baby, and that I could be friend for the baby.

I felt a bit sad at first, because I really like the shepherd boy – but I think having this Jesus as a friend is going to be really special too. He smiles and giggles when he sees me.And when the shepherd boy gave me to Mary and Joseph, he whispered in my ear – “Sometimes we have to make tough choices and do what we know in our heart is right.”

I think it’s right for me to have Jesus as a friend. I think this little baby is always going to love me no matter what happens. And that’s my story.

(put lamb into manger scene)

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

(unwrap camel)

Well my home is far to the east. Melchior my master is very rich. He lives in a great palace. He and his two friends are incredibly wise. They study the stars. One night, I heard him shout

“*I see a new star. It is so big and so bright. I have never seen such a star before.”*

And then his friends rushed in. They shouted too:

*“We must go where the star leads us. It must mean the birth of a great king.”*

So, they all got ready for the journey. They packed food and tents. And then they packed the saddle bags with rich gifts to give to this new king. I carried the gold myself!

We set out in a great caravan to find the new king. It took weeks.

We followed the star, so we would travel by night. It shone like a great white fire in the night sky.

I thought the star would lead us to a palace in a big city, but when we stopped at the palace, the ruler there had not heard of a new king. He said that he was the only King… but I got a bad feeling about that man – he seemed very jealous and angry.

So,we journeyed on until we came to this place.

I must admit that I was so shocked when we stopped at this humble little stable. I thought that my master and his wise friends must have made a mistake. Even wise men make mistakes you know.

But Melchior and his friends were filled with joy, and they bowed down low and gave their gifts to this child.

I still do not understand why.

How could a king be born here?

This is no royal birthplace. These people are not rich people.

And yet they do seem very special.

I find that even I, a royal beast, am very humbled by this little baby.

He makes me want to give him everything I have – including my love and loyalty.

Perhaps this child could be a king?

(put Camel in Nativity Scene)

Hymn: What Child Is This – v1 only

And what about the baby Jesus? I wonder what he was thinking when he looked up from where he lay? He saw the donkey, and the lamb, and the camel. He saw all the people around him all staring down at him. You would think that a baby might cry – and probably he did at times. But I also think that he smiled back at all those gathered in the stable - the way that babies do sometimes.

And I think that his smile was so special and so gentle, that everyone around him could tell that he was special too. They could sense the presence of God in this little baby.

And still today, when we think of the baby Jesus born in a stable, it is a story that makes us smile. It doesn’t matter it you are young, or old, or if you are a donkey, a lamb, or a camel. The story of the very First Christmas of the baby in the manger in the stable – is your story to tell.

So, I encourage you to keep telling others this amazing story – not just at Christmas, but throughout the year and always.

Amen.