

Crib Service

Introduction

The story of Christmas is well known and well loved. This afternoon as we think again about Jesus' birth some 2,000 years ago, as we sing some familiar carols, as we place the figures on the altar, let us also see those familiar events through the eyes of five of the animals who may have been present at the birth of Jesus: a donkey, an ox, a lamb, a camel and a robin. But first let us pray.

Bidding prayer

May we this Christmas prepare to hear again in word and song the glad tidings of God's redeeming love made real to us in the birth of the Holy Child of Bethlehem and with the angelic host, let us give glory to God in the highest.

But first let us pray for the needs of the whole world: for peace and good will among all nations; for unity and brotherhood within the Christian Church especially here in Dinard and in the Diocese of Europe; for love and harmony in our community, our family and our home; and for blessing on everyone who is special to us, especially those we miss.

Let us remember people who find Christmas difficult: the poor and homeless; the hungry and sick; and those who mourn the loss of a loved one. Lastly, we remember with thanks those we loved who have died but now rejoice with us on another shore in the light of God's heavenly kingdom. These prayers we offer to God the Father in the power of God the Holy Spirit by saying the prayer which God the Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, has taught us (*The Lord's Prayer*)

Donkey

It could be worse being a donkey:
We're beasts of burden,
Used to carrying heavy loads
But my master's a good man
And though he works me hard,
Joseph never overloads me.
I carry wood for his work
And deliver some of the things he makes:
Doors, mangers, tables and chairs,
The simple things simple folk need.
He treats me well enough:
Gives me food to eat,
Clean water to drink,
Fresh straw to keep me warm
And a stall to shelter in at night.
Till he met Mary, he was a bachelor
Then all that changed:
She was pregnant.
They married quietly, without fuss
But then all the fuss of the census
And the need to travel to Bethlehem.
How silly humans are
To make the journey in Winter
With his wife heavily pregnant.
And they call a donkey an ass!
It was not an easy undertaking
So they took me for Mary to ride on.
I tried my best to be careful,
Tried not to jolt her overmuch,
Swaying gently at an even pace

Till at last we reached Bethlehem
Where our troubles really began:
There was no place to stay,
Not in any inn,
So I stood there in the cold night air
With Mary shivering on my back
Till an innkeeper took pity on us
And leads us round the back to his stable
Where it's quiet and warm
And Mary is safe at last.

23 10 04

Ox

Would you want to be an ox?

Would you like to work hard in the fields,
Dragging a plough to break up the ground?
Would you like to work hard in the yard,
Grinding the corn by turning a stone?
Would you like to work hard on the roads,
Pulling a cart weighed down with goods?
Well, would you? Would anyone?

But at least I get peace at night,
Safe in a stable at the back of an inn,
Water and food; a stall and some hay,
Safe in the warmth and the darkness of night.
But then one night, quite out of the blue,
My owner arrived with a man and his wife.
They cleared out a stall to make them at home,
Cleaned out a manger and put in fresh straw.
Then it went quiet till the next thing I heard was a cry:
We'd been joined by a new baby boy.
They cleaned up the child and wrapped him in cloth
And gently laid him in the manger to sleep.
On a dark night, light came to my stable;
On a dark night, light shone from his stall;
That dark night seemed to lighten my load.

24 10 04

Lamb

It's good to be a lamb:
The freedom of the hills,
The space to run and jump and play,
Milk from my mum
And grass enough to eat.
The shepherds are nice enough,
Especially Reuben, a boy,
Who sometimes picks me up,
Cradling me gently in his arms.
I feel safe in the warmth of his smell.
That night we were in the fold,
Sheltered from the wind by a low wall;
By the light of a fire, I could see Reuben
Talking with his friends
When a bright light appeared
And a voice spoke from the darkness.
I could feel their fear
And the flock stirred uneasily.
"Don't be afraid," said the voice,
"Tonight in Bethlehem, the Saviour has been born.
He's been wrapped in swaddling clothes
And laid in a manger for a bed".
Then the night sky turned to day
And a choir of angels sang,
'Glory to God in the highest
And peace to his people on earth.'
The darkness surged back
And Reuben scooped me up.
Then, as fast as they could,
They ran down to the sleeping town

Where all was as the angel had said.
Shyly, Reuben set me down on the floor
At the baby's mother's feet:
A lamb for the Lamb of God.

25 10 04

Camel

We camels are the ships of the desert,
Stately beasts of burden,
The heart of a caravan train.
We bear wealth across continents:
Spices and silks, perfume and ivory,
Precious metals, jewels fit for a king.
But I am not of the common herd:
My master is a celebrated Mage,
One who can read the mystery of stars;
In the heavens, interpret Man's fate.
So when news came of a new star
Which had risen in the East,
My master already knew;
He had discerned its rising,
Interpreted the sign as the coming Messiah,
The birth of the High King.
When the day was right, we set off,
A modest train of three mages
With soldiers and servants
Sufficient for our needs.
Following the rising star into the West,
We came at last to Jerusalem,
To the palace of Herod the Great
Who received us with the respect due
To my master's reputation as a Mage.
But the child was not here
So off we set again for Bethlehem
Where we found him, paid him his due
Bestowed our triple gifts:
Gold, frankincense and myrrh,

Then left.
We had followed his star
To find the new star,
The true light in the West.

27 10 04

Robin

I'm not afraid.
I'm not afraid of anything,
Or of anyone.
It's true I'm small,
In body but not in heart.
My heart's as big as the tallest tree
Up to which I fly;
My beak is sharp and pointed.
Robins have always been here.
Robin Redbreasts or Rouge Gorge
As the French name us.
We're the favourite Christmas card
Even for those who don't believe;
We're the image of the season
If not the reason for the birth.
But I was there
Though the Gospels never mention it
Nor tell you what I did.
Yes, they tell of an inn
And a stable he was born in
And the manger where he was laid.
And they mention it was night
But not how cold it was
And the fire which kept them warm.
It wasn't just the shepherds
Keeping watch that night –
I was there too.
I saw them fall asleep;
I saw a burning twig
Fall into the straw.

But before the flame could catch,
I caught it flaming in my beak
And dropped it in a water trough
Well out of harm's way.
But the harm was done to me:
The heat had scorched my breast
And those feathers were now red.
Thereafter, all robins have a red breast
As a badge and a mark of our service
To the Lord of Creation,
Then a sleeping child.

27 1 09

Prayers

Lord, help us to approach the Christmas story
with a fresh sense of wonder as we think of Jesus,
the Son of God yet born of Mary;
the incarnate word, yet a child without speech;
The Lord of Glory, yet a baby cradled in a manger,
Thank you Lord for your gift beyond words,
Amen.

Lord, we know the Christmas story so well.
Help us to understand it better.
Make it more real to us so that with Mary and Joseph,
we may journey in faith to Bethlehem; with the shepherds,
we may hear again the good tidings of a Saviour's birth; and
with the angels we may glorify your holy name.
Give us a new joy in our worship this Christmas
And fill our hearts with wonder, love and praise,
Amen

Loving Father,
as we thank you for the joy we feel this Christmas, let us not
forget those less fortunate: those who are worried or ill;
those without a job or without enough money to cope;
those who are on their own or those who are sad that someone
they love has died.
May they find strength and comfort in the fact of Christmas
that by your birth in Bethlehem you became poor
that we might possess true riches.
Amen.

Holy Child of Bethlehem,
born in a stable,
laid in a manger,
no place for you too low or mean
For you to enter in.
Come to us this Christmas,
dwell in our hearts and our homes
and fill them with your love,
with your peace, with yourself,
now and always,
Amen

Blessing

God our Father,
whose light was born a child in Bethlehem,
through our faith, may that light give light to our hearts
and shine through our deeds.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and those you love
now, at this Christmastide, and forever,
Amen.

The Crib Service
St Bartholomew's Dinard
24th December, 2009