

Reflection for Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020 based on homily for children's masses on Christmas animals

At the first Christmas we hear about how Mary and Joseph made a very long and hard journey through the desert to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This was a journey of about 90 miles. Even on a good road it would take about 2 hours by car. But of course, Mary and Joseph didn't have a car, they hadn't been invented, and there were no roads, just dusty tracks which were very bumpy.

So, the only way to get anywhere was to use a donkey pulling a cart. But Mary and Joseph didn't have much money and couldn't afford a cart, they only had a donkey. This meant that only one of them could ride while the other one had to walk. Mary was expecting the baby Jesus to be born and was finding it difficult to walk anyway so naturally she rode on the donkey. Joseph was happy to walk as he loved Mary very much and wanted the journey to be as easy as possible for her and, as her husband, it was his job to protect his wife.

The donkey was the normal animal to use if you were travelling in those days and the donkey is a strong animal and so it could carry the luggage as well, but it is also a slow animal and the journey might have taken them about 4 days. Did you know that every donkey has a cross on its back in a different colour to the rest of its coat? This reminds us of the time Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem the week before he died on the cross.

When Jesus was born in the stable in Bethlehem there were shepherds nearby on the hillside looking after their sheep while angels were singing, praising the birth of Jesus. The angels told the shepherds that Jesus had been born so they walked into the town to see the baby Jesus and they took a gift with them to give him.

The shepherds were very poor and had nothing to give him really but do you remember what it was? It was all they had to offer, it was a newly born lamb, a very special present because it had a deep

meaning for Jesus. When Jesus grew up and met his cousin John the Baptist, he would call Jesus the Lamb of God. We also call him the Lamb of God in the prayer we say during the Mass, 'Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us and grant us peace'.

Finally, the biggest animals of all are the next to arrive, it's the camels carrying the three Kings through the desert. Because the three Kings were very rich, they brought Jesus some really expensive gifts, they gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold because he was a King, frankincense because he was the Son of God and myrrh because as a man he was going to die on the cross. So, even though they were kings themselves they bowed down and worshipped Jesus in the humble stable in Bethlehem. They recognised him as the King of Kings.

Everything we read about in the holy scriptures has a meaning, the gifts given to Jesus by the shepherds and the three kings and the animals who take part in the Christmas story are all important. Although we receive presents at Christmas it's mainly a time for giving to others, especially those who don't have very much. It is always much better to give than to receive. Giving always makes you a happy person. Can you think about what you can give to those who cannot afford presents this year?

Finally, we give thanks to God for our mothers and to help us to show them our love by doing everything we can to help them especially at Christmas time when there is so much to do in the home. Jesus, Mary and Joseph were a very special family, we call them the Holy Family because they are a perfect example of a family who love each other and we pray that we will grow to be like them in every way.

Deacon Kevin