



## From the Pulpit: December 26, 2021

First Sunday after Christmas; A Service for Blessing the Animals; In honor of St. Frances of Assisi

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

Luke 2:1–4; Matthew 2:13–15

### *Certain Semi-Sacred Symbols of the Season, VI: Donkey*

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.*

*Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph<sup>al</sup> got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."*

"The Bible doesn't mention a donkey in the Christmas story."

Then after Jesus was born, Joseph is warned in a dream that Herod wants to eliminate the baby Jesus, so the Holy Family has to flee to Egypt for safety, and that's a lot more than 100 miles, and that would have taken them at least a week if they had to walk.

Then after living there for a couple of years, they would have had to return to their hometown of Nazareth, and that's well more than 200 miles, so it would have taken them at least 2 weeks if they had to walk.

The Bible doesn't mention a donkey in the Christmas story. The only donkey in Jesus' story comes into the picture on Palm Sunday, about 30 years later.

But Mary and the Baby Jesus might have ridden on the back of a donkey for all their long trips. Who knows?

**W**e want to continue our sermon series for Advent and Christmastide called *Certain Semi-Sacred Symbols of the Season*. It's Donkey today. Well, as you heard in our scripture lessons, Mother Mary and Carpenter Joseph needed a lot of transportation right before and right after the birth of their son Jesus.

First they had to get from their hometown of Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from, to register in the census. That's about 100 miles. It would have taken them about a week to walk that far.

In any case, since the Bible was written, it has been irresistible to tell the Christmas story with a donkey. Mary might have ridden one, and their might have been at least one in the stable where Jesus was born, as you heard in the \*poem I read as the Call to Worship.

Here's a couple of fun facts about donkeys. A boy donkey is called Jack, and girl donkey is called Jenny, and a baby donkey is called a foal.

They can live more than 30 years.

They are extremely social animals and like to be together. They are also very loyal to each other and to their human friends.

And here's a nice thing to know, donkeys are way smarter than we give them credit for. They might be as smart as horses.

Reese Witherspoon has a donkey.  
So does Arnold Schwarzenegger.  
So does Brigitte Bardot.

A couple of weeks ago there was an article in *The Washington Post* about a guy named Ron King, who was a Vice-President at Time, Incorporated.<sup>1</sup> He ran magazines like *InStyle* & *Southern Living*, but then he heard that many, many donkeys were being killed for their hides, which are used for medicine in China, so he dropped his magazine career and started a donkey sanctuary in California called Oscar's Place. He called it Oscar's Place, because Oscar was Mr. King's favorite cat.

Now Mr. King travels all over The United States rescuing donkeys who are in danger and bringing them to his 75-acre sanctuary in northern California. So far he's rescued 77 donkeys, and 50 more are due to arrive in January.

The donkeys are often in rough shape when they come to Oscar's Place, because nobody has been taking care of them for a long time.

Mr. King and his volunteers nurse them back to health and find homes for them on farms all over the country. It's sort of like an Animal Shelter for Donkeys instead of for Dogs.

I thought that was a really nice way to spend your life. It sounds a lot better than publishing magazines.

The Bible doesn't mention any donkeys in the Christmas story, but it was irresistible not to include them, because it's hard to think about a pregnant momma walking 100 miles just before her baby is born.

So that's why a donkey, for some people, is a Semi-Sacred Symbol of the Season.

We probably don't have many donkeys to bless here this morning, but it looks like we've got a lot of dogs, so please bring your pets to Christine and me so that we can bless them.

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Paige, “Why a Media Executive Left His Career to Help Maligned Donkeys and Save Them from Slaughter,” *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2021.

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP**

No room in the inn, of course,  
And not that much in the stable,  
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,  
Joseph, the heavenly host—  
Not to mention the baby  
Using our manger as a cot.  
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in  
For love or money.

Still, in spite of the overcrowding,  
I did my best to make him feel wanted.  
I could see the baby and I  
Would be going places together.

“What the Donkey Saw” by U.A. Fanthorpe, in *Oxford Book of Christmas Poems*, edited by Harrison and Stuart-Clark, p. 59.



**Blessing of the Animals—The Blessing:**

*May God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost bless you and protect you. May you have a full and happy life with your family, and may you share in the redemption of all creation. Amen.*