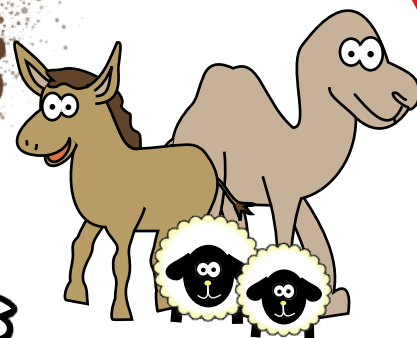


Bible animals

Christmas
creatures

Teachers
Story notes



Essential Teachers notes:

Often Christmas can be fraught with special events, multiple retellings of 'the Christmas story', and sometimes it feels like the tinsel and the cute costumes obscure the biblical account. If so, this is the story for you, one that pulls the kids into the history of the event and dose away with the over-reading of the text. Adding in a few animals sounds in just for fun!

Main Passage : Luke 1+2, Matthew 1+2

Today we are going to look at the animals that may have been around when Jesus was born. I wonder if you can help me name them. (get out a picture of the sheep, the donkey and the camel & have the kids make noises - a camel makes a noise like loud belching)

We start with Mary and Joseph. Mary find out she's going to have a baby because an angel tells her, Joseph is a bit unsure but the angel visits him too, in a dream, and so he takes Mary to be his wife. The Romans decide they want to count everyone and so Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and take his pregnant wife, Mary, with him.

Wait wait wait... somebody is travelling here and one of our animal friends could be a travelling companion. What kind of animal may Joseph have taken to help him on the journey? **A donkey, a noisy donkey! (go ahead and let the kids make noise!)**

A donkey would have made the journey easier, perhaps Mary could have rode some of the way. Donkeys can eat along the way so you don't need to bring food for them, while oxen are slower, and horses expensive. For Mary and Joseph, two young people, a donkey is more likely if there was any animal.

Back to the story. Mary and Joseph arrive at Joseph's home town, Bethlehem. Sadly, there is no guest room for them so Mary and Joseph have to sleep in the part of the building that usually shelters the animals during the night. When Mary needs to put Jesus down she uses the soft straw in the manger, the pile of soft straw that the animals would usually eat. It sounds like a strange bed to me.

It was not unusual for family members to sleep in with the animals. I wonder what animals usually sheltered in the building? Perhaps donkeys (noise) or cows for milk, perhaps the household kept pets, like dogs. Sleeping with the animals may seem odd today but when people travelled with animals they would often sleep with them... like the shepherds who would travel across the hills around Bethlehem.

Wait wait wait... somebody is travelling here and one of our animal friends could be a travelling companion. What kind of animal may the shepherds be looking after? **Sheep, a flock of noisy sheep! (go ahead and let the kids make noise!)**

Sheep and goats would travel with the shepherd. They needed to travel to find fresh grass for the animals to eat. Often they would stay camped out in the fields overnight. The bible tells us the shepherds were scared when they saw the angels, imagine how the sheep may have reacted? When the shepherds followed the angles instruction to go find baby Jesus I wonder if they needed to take a frightened sheep with them?

But there are one last group of visitors who came to see Jesus when he was very young, the Magi. The people who gazed at the stars. The bible tells us they came from the East, but we don't know where. On maps you can see that east of the holy land is dry desert.

Wait wait wait... somebody is travelling here and one of our animal friends could be a travelling companion. What kind of animal may the Magi have used? **Camels, some very noisy camels! (go ahead and let the kids make noise!)**

The magi may have used lots of different animals in their travels dependant on where they came from, but if they tried to cross the hot dry desert camels would have been the best solution. Just like Mary's donkey, or the sheep that the shepherds carried into Bethlehem, we don't know if they were really there. It's nice to think the animals were companions of their journeys though, even if the bible doesn't tell us so. What we do know is that Jesus was born, a special baby, God's son, and he's our companion, on all our journeys, everyday.

Today's heroes are the Christmas Animals because they shows us the gift of companionship