



December 2014 - *Learning from the Christmas Animals*

The image of the Nativity scene with baby Jesus lying in a manger, surrounded by the animals in the stable, is one that has captured the imagination of many children and adults alike. One legend tells how the animals received the gift of speech for a few hours on Christmas Eve so they could sing praises to the son of Mary. In the story of *The Little Drummer Boy*, the animals dance in rhythm to the boy's drumming to honor the Christ Child. The French carol *The Friendly Beasts* gives the animals human characteristics as they share their unique gifts with the newborn King of Kings.

C.S. Lewis in his poem, *The Nativity*, focuses on the animals of the crèche, but instead of giving them human qualities, he reflects on both the negative and positive character traits of each animal and how those traits are manifested in his own life. Here is Lewis's poem.

## THE NATIVITY

*Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)  
see a glory in the stable grow  
Which, with the ox's dullness might at length  
Give me an ox's strength.*

*Among the asses (stubborn I as they)  
I see my Saviour where I looked for hay;  
So may my beastlike folly learn at least  
The patience of a beast.*

*Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)  
I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;  
Oh that my baa-ing nature would win thence  
Some woolly innocence!<sup>1</sup>*



As we contemplate the miracle of Christ's birth this Christmas season, let us like C.S. Lewis, in humility, seek after the strength, patience and innocence symbolized in the animals of the Christmas story that can only come when we confess our sins, receive forgiveness from the Lord and allow Him to give us the most important gifts of Christmas.

*"The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox...  
In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations  
will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious."  
ISAIAH 11:7, 10 (NIV)*

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Poems*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1992), p. 122.