

Christmas 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

We have just heard Luke's account of the Christmas story, perhaps the most beautiful story of all time. There are so many other accounts of this story. Matthew's gospel tells a little different story, seen more from the perspective of Joseph than of Mary. There have been many other fictionalized accounts of this story. There is one of the 4th Wise Man, the one who never made it to Bethlehem, and finally reached Jesus when he was on his way to Calvary. There is one telling the story through the eyes of a shepherd, another through the eyes of the inn keeper. This year someone gave me the story entitled The Donkey's Gift, telling the story through the eyes of the donkey who carried Mary to Bethlehem.

I found it to be a humorous and delightful story. The donkey's name was Asimus. He was the biggest and strongest donkey, but he also had an attitude. He thought he was not treated well by human beings, and he wasn't, and because of that he was often beaten, and sold by his owners. He was a rebel rouser, he tried to get his fellow donkey's to revolt. In the story the donkeys could communicate with each other, and they could understand what humans said, which was proof that they were smarter than humans.

In the beginning of the story a carpenter by the name of Joseph sees Animus, is impressed by his size and beautiful, and buys

the animal despite the warnings about his personality. Joseph treats the animal kindly, and Asimus is suspicious that he has an angle. He plans to once again try to escape and be free. He meets Mary and is impressed by her beauty and gentleness.

Their journey to Bethlehem begins, and it is amusing to read how Asimus repeatedly outwits the three thugs who travel with them and hope to rob them, the pick-pocket artist in Shechem, and others along the way. Asimus continued to plan his escape, but is repeatedly prevented because of the kindness of Joseph and Mary. They finally arrive at Bethlehem, the donkey leads them to several inns, but there is no room in them, so he leads them to a stable on the outskirts of the town. It is there that Mary gives birth to Jesus. It is a beautiful description of the scene in the book, Joseph overwhelmed with joy and crying out to God, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." He then calls Asimus to look at their child, and the donkey, who had always hated human beings because of the way they treated him, was overcome with feelings he never experienced before. He loved this family and this child, and in the last line of the story he says "when he's old enough, I'll teach him to ride."

There could be a great sequel to this story. I don't know how old donkeys live to be, but a story could have him being the donkey that Jesus rides into Jerusalem 33 years later, just before his crucifixion. Isn't it true that even in this beautiful

scene, the cross is always in the background, as it is here in our church.

There are many different accounts of the first Christmas, seeing the same event through different eyes. How do we see the events of that first Christmas? Do we believe that it is really the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world? If we really believe that, it should have a more profound impact on our lives than it had on the donkey Asimus in the story *The Donkey's Gift*. Do we truly believe?