

# Dec 2. With the Oxen Standing By

One of the tasks I love at Christmas is the decorating of the Christmas tree but the task I love more, is the setting up of the nativity scene.

While on holiday in Switzerland several years ago we saw in the window of a carpenter's shop, a hand carved wooden stable, figures and animals, which we purchased and brought home. Among the animals is a grey donkey and a brown cow. They are usually placed outside the stable entrance after the baby Jesus is laid in the manger.

The cow looks very peaceful as it lies in front of the crib, and as I look on the scene, I wonder if the animals knew what was taking place in their stable. This is not such a random thought, as we read in Isaiah Chapter 1, these verses.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;  
for the Lord has spoken:  
"Children have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.  
The ox knows its owner,  
and the donkey its master's crib,  
but Israel does not know,  
my people do not understand."

God is speaking of how the people of Israel have rebelled and have lost their knowledge of God and His provision for them. The situation is so dire that it is contrasted to the farm animals that recognise where their provision comes from.

As I consider this scene, I wonder if the cow and donkey were aware that near to them was their Creator?

We should take the words of the prophet Isaiah to heart for ourselves. Yes, we have rebelled against God and are estranged from Him. Yet, He has come to us in the person of Jesus, born in a manger, whose birth we celebrate at this season. This is the great mystery of the Incarnation; the eternal Son of God humbles himself to take on a true and human nature.

Martin Luther, the Reformer, said these words –

"He has brought Himself down into our flesh and blood, and for this alone, that He might pour out the measureless wealth of His goodness and rescue us from sin, death, Satan, hell, and every evil."

Jesus did this through his birth, life, death on the cross and resurrection.

This Advent season, our prayer is, unlike those mentioned who did not understand or recognise God's provision, that we hear the voice of God and respond to His gracious gift.