



The Animals' Story



Ya'akov the temple mouse spends most of his days in the temple, but he takes time to visit his family who live in a stable down the road. He is a smart mouse and loves to

hear scripture being read in the temple. He especially likes it when the reading is from the prophet Isaiah. Through Isaiah's words, he learns that there is talk of a messiah coming. Ya'akov likes this idea; the people need hope, and Herod has been so hard on them.

They need some good news!

When Ya'akov visits his family at the stable, he shares with them all that he hears in the temple. One night, while he is visiting, there is a lot of commotion. Then midwives come in and spread fresh hay on the floor. They drag out a manger, empty it, and place mounds of new hay in it. The animals are shooed into the courtyard—that is, all but one little goat plus Ya'akov and his family who are hiding in the corner.

A woman looking very uncomfortable is carried in and laid on the hay. The animals respect her privacy and don't look while she gives birth to a beautiful baby boy. The mother wraps the baby in clean cloth and places him in the manger while she rests.

A few sheep wander back in from the courtyard and cuddle up to the mother, keeping her warm. The father milks the goat and offers the warm milk to the weary mother. The baby stirs and begins to cry, but a few mourning doves who are perched in the rafters come nearer and coo a lullaby to the crying baby.

Ya'akov has watched all that has taken place. He remembers the readings from Isaiah and wonders whether this could be the person Isaiah talked about. Ya'akov can't wait to get back to the temple to hear more from the scriptures. He believes the words they offer tell the people and mice so much about what God is doing!

He may be just a small mouse, but looking at the baby he knows great things can come from even the smallest creature.

Unwrapping the Animals' Story

Often the smallest are overlooked in our world. The animals in our story point to others who are on the margins of our society. There are many people and causes that don't make the headlines, yet they are important and make a difference in our world, e.g., "The Unsung Hero" (<https://youtu.be/uaWA2GbcnJU>).

To learn more about the animals, manger, and stable check out "The Birth of Jesus" (www.whychristmas.com/story/birth.shtml).

ACTIVITY 1: Storytime

Ages

All

Supplies

Read *The True Meaning of Crumbfest* (Acorn Press, 1999) by David Weale, the story of a curious mouse who sets off to discover the truth about Crumbfest, an abundant time of year when bounteous crumbs miraculously appear in the old Prince Edward Island farmhouse in which he lives. It's a heartwarming tale of the magic that happens when the "outside" and the "inside" come together.

Discuss

- What new perspectives on the Christmas story emerge from this re-telling?

ACTIVITY 2: Biblical Accuracy

Ages

12+

Supplies

The story "No Innkeeper, No Donkey—10 Things We Get Wrong about the Christmas Story" (www.christiantoday.com/article/no.innkeeper.no.donkey.10.things.we.get.wrong.about.the.christmas.story/44454.htm)

Discuss

- How accurate do you think this account of the Christmas story might be?
- Does it change your view of the Christmas story?

ACTIVITY 3: The Starfish Story**Ages**

All

Supplies

"The Starfish Story" (at right); art supplies

Discuss and Activity

- Was there a particular thought or feeling that rose up for you as you read "The Starfish Story"?
- Can you express it through art? (e.g., singing, painting, drawing, dancing)

The Starfish Story (author unknown)

A young man is walking near the ocean and sees a beach on which thousands and thousands of starfish have washed ashore.

Farther along, he sees an old man walking slowly and stooping often, picking up one starfish after another and tossing each one gently into the ocean.

"Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" the young man asks.

"Because the sun is up and the tide is going out and if I don't throw them farther in, they will die."

"But, old man, don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it! You can't possibly save them all; you can't save even one tenth of them. In fact, even if you work all day, your efforts won't make any difference at all."

The old man listens calmly and then bends down to pick up another starfish and throws it into the sea. "It made a difference to that one."

ACTIVITY 4: Pick Your Favourite**Ages:**

All

Supplies

Watch: "The Christmas Story"

(<https://youtu.be/kWq60oyrHVQ>)

and

"An Unexpected Christmas"

(<https://youtu.be/TM1XusYVqNY>).

Activity

- Vote on which retelling of the Christmas story you like the best.
- Or make your own retelling and share it on social media with hashtags #UCCan #AdventUnwrapped.

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