

Animals of the Bible (2) The Camel



The camel, like the ox, often finds its way into pictures of the Nativity, especially on Christmas cards depicting the Wise Men. Also like the ox, it is nowhere mentioned in the Gospel stories of the birth of Jesus. It is quite likely, however, that wealthy travellers like the Magi would have ridden camels.

We saw last week how the ox became part of the traditional Nativity scene because of a text in the first chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. For a similar reason the camel found its place in depictions of the journey and arrival of the Wise Men. In Isaiah chapter 60, verse 6, we read "A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord." Because gold and frankincense are mentioned, this prophesy about the nations coming to worship the God of Israel became associated with the story of the Magi coming to bow down before the infant Messiah.

The Lord Jesus Himself referred to the camel after His meeting with the man who is often referred to as "The Rich Young Ruler". He declared, "It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" (Mark chapter 10, verse 25). Some commentators have suggested that He had in mind a small gate called "The Needle's Eye" in the city wall of Jerusalem. It could be opened to let someone in after the large main gates had been closed for the night. A camel was just able to pass

through it, but not if it was carrying a load. Understood this way, the parable tells us that money and possessions must not be allowed to dominate our lives. We have to put Jesus first and be ready to drop all the baggage that keeps us from walking in His Narrow Way. That was what the Rich Young Ruler was unwilling to do.

A prayer:

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold...take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store; take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee. AMEN

(From Singing the Faith 566, by Frances Ridley Havergal, 1836 – 1879)

- Rev John Barnett

Image: camels in the desert (photo by Pete Wildman)