

**Don Brown
St. Mary the Virgin, SF
Family Service 5 PM
Christmas 2016**

I so enjoy many of Christmas songs I hear on the radio but there are some that just make me cringe with their inane lyrics and tacky sentiment. The worst of all of them is “Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer.”

Grandma got run over by a reindeer

Walking home from our house Christmas eve

She'd been drinking too much eggnog

And we begged her not to go

But she forgot her medication

And she staggered out the door into the snow

When we found her Christmas morning

At the scene of the attack

She had hoof-prints on her forehead

And incriminating Claus marks on her back.

Personally, I much prefer the music we are singing here tonight and one of my favorites is “The Friendly Beasts” sung a few minutes ago by our Children’s Choir. It picks up on themes that are wholesome and faithful to the spirit of the birth of Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem that surely must have had some animals in attendance at that holy birth.

Each of the animals mentioned in the song gives a gift to the baby Jesus. These were not gifts they went out and bought at Macy's or Gumps because of course, animals don't have any money. All of the animals simply gave Jesus the best of who they were. They gave freely and happily just because they loved this special baby that was God's gift to the world.

On Christmas Night, and on every night, these animals that we imagine were at the manger remind us, as does all creation, of how we have been blessed and loved by God's Son.

The heart of the Christmas message is that God loves this world and each of us in it. The voices of the Angels declare it in the starry night, the carols we sing, the beauty of creation, the glow of the candles, the joy we find even in the midst of sorrows, fears and troubles, behind it all is the mystery of God's great love which reaches out to embrace you and me.

Love which heals, love which makes possible new beginnings, love which transforms, love which brings joy to the very heart of your life, this is the gift of Christmas, the gift of Jesus to you. Receive this most precious of Christmas gifts from God on this Holy Night and do with it what Jesus did, give it away to others all year long. Amen

