

*First Lutheran Church*  
Plainville, Kansas

*Peace Lutheran Church*  
Natoma, Kansas

December, 2014

Drive past any number of houses this month, perhaps even your own, and you are going to see more than a few Nativity scenes lit up in the front yard.

Who do you see? Every Nativity scene is going to have Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. Most will also have at least one shepherd, and some will even have three wise men.

But if the owner has the full and complete set, you will also see at least one each of a sheep, a donkey, a cow and a camel.

Why are these animals there? Do they bear any significance to the Christmas story? Scripture does not mention any specific animals being present on that first Christmas night, so why are these animals so common in Nativity scenes?

To be perfectly honest, they are there so that stores can make a few extra dollars; and due to the popularity of many Christmas hymns, such as *Away in a Manger*, with the line *The cattle are lowing*, we just naturally assume that these animals were present, and some may have been, though which ones, and how close they got to the newborn baby Jesus, we do not know.

And yet, when we see these Nativity scenes, we should not simply marvel that someone paid a few dollars more for a full set. Rather we should take the time to note that these animals, whether present or not, point us to Jesus in their own unique way,

When you see that brown cow, do you only see a cow, or do you see the golden calf that Israel made while Moses was receiving the Law in Exodus 32?

When you see that donkey, do you only see a donkey, or do you see the donkey that confessed the presence of the Lord to Balaam in Numbers 22?

When you see camels, do you only see camels, or do you see that the camels brought the Gentiles to see the Christ child, the one who came to abolish the Law and make all people children of Abraham?

When you see the lamb, do you only see a lamb, or do you see the lamb who points us to the one who is the very Lamb of God?

Those animals in that Nativity scene don't just shine bright on a cold winter night, intentionally placed or not, they are there to point us to Jesus, both the one that lights up in the manger, and the one who is the Light of the World, the one who came to save us from our sins.

This year, we will gather each Wednesday at 10AM at First Lutheran, Plainville and at 7PM at Peace Lutheran, Natoma, and look at each of these animals who shared their manger box with Jesus some 2000 years ago, and who now gather around the mangers in our own homes and front yards, so that they may point us to Jesus.

It is our prayer that the next time you drive past a house and see that Nativity scene out front, or when you look at the Nativity scene on your mantle, that you would look at it with a new appreciation, knowing that those animals that seem oddly placed and just collect extra dust, play a role in telling the story of the coming of the Christ child. So the next time you see a Nativity scene, you would not just wonder at the number of pieces it contains and how high the electric bill is going to be come January; but that you would know that each piece tells a part of the story of the coming of Jesus.

Also available once again this year are Advent devotionals from *Lutheran Hour Ministries*. Please make use of these special opportunities for prayer and meditation on the coming of our Savior.

*God Bless you during this time of Advent!*

*Pastor Schmidt*