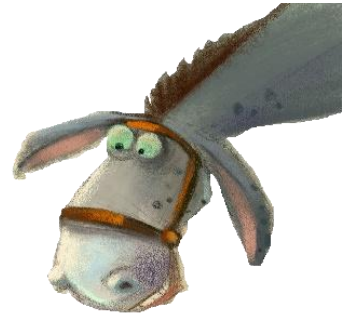


## ***Bethlehem Barn Activity Guide*** **For Parents and Caregivers**



### **Conversation starters:**

- Talk about the animals' personalities and traits. Do you know people who are playful like Donkey or nervous like Chicken? Do you know people who get grumpy when they're hungry, like Cow, or who just want peace and quiet like Sheep?
- Bird was trying very hard to get the animals' attention to share some important news. Ask the child to talk about a time when he/she has felt frustrated because people weren't listening. Share a time that happened to you. What was going on? What did you do to gain their attention? How did Bird try to manage the frustration? Could Bird have tried something other than hollering? Are there times when it is ok to yell?
- Donkey is surprised when he realized that he carried Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem without playing or faltering. Tell about a time when you surprised others, or maybe yourself, by doing something exceptionally well. How did it feel? Can you think of a time when you were surprised when someone else did an exceptional job or a good deed?
- When Donkey was traveling to Bethlehem, he didn't realize until later just how important his job was. Talk about why it's important to do our best. How can we do our best, even when we'd rather be playing or doing something else? You may wish to talk about Colossians 3:23-24, its meaning, and how you practice this in your life and/or ways you could work on this. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."
- All of the animals contribute something different towards making the baby Jesus warm and comfortable. What did each contribute? How did their gifts work together? What if something had been missing? For example, what if Bird hadn't sang a song? Or what if Sheep hadn't contributed wool? What can we learn from how the gifts worked together?
- Tell about an act of kindness or caring that you've done. What other acts of kindness could you do?
- Discuss the hustle and bustle surrounding this time of year. Talk about ways to focus on the true meaning of Christmas and not become distracted by the busyness of the holiday season. Some possibilities are below.
  - Make time for reading and reflecting on the Bible. There are many advent devotionals available for children as well as adults.

- Bake a birthday cake for Jesus on Christmas Eve or Christmas, or make Him a birthday card. Be sure to include a note about all the things for which you are thankful.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or ring the bells for the Salvation Army.
- Visit someone in a nursing home.
- Send cards to people in nursing homes and/or to veterans' organizations.
- Find quiet time each day, even if it's just a few minutes admiring the stars at night or turning out the lights at home and enjoying the glow of the Christmas tree.
- Make a list of things for which you're grateful.
- Read books and watch movies that are about the true meaning of Christmas.
- Visit a live nativity scene.

### **Activities:**

- Print the free downloadable outlines of the *Bethlehem Barn* characters from [www.debrawestgatesilva.com](http://www.debrawestgatesilva.com). Have the children color the pictures, cut them out, and glue sticks onto the back. Use the puppets to act out the story.
- Together brainstorm a list of good deeds or acts of kindness, including some the child could do independently and some with the family. Set a goal to do one per day or per week.
- Make a good deed garland to decorate for Christmas. After doing a good deed, help the child to write or draw their deed on clip art stars or other shapes and string them together. See how long the garland can get leading up to Christmas (and beyond!).
- The animals worked together to keep the baby Jesus warm and safe through the cold night. Brainstorm ways to remember the animals this Christmas. A quick search on Google and/or Pinterest will provide lots of ideas for making homemade bird feeders or treats. Here are a few:
  - Make a popcorn garland for a tree outside. You could add dried fruit as well.
  - Collect pinecones and tie a piece of string or yarn to the top of each with a loop (so you'll be able to hang it later). Gently smear the pinecone with peanut or nut butter and then roll in bird seed. Hang your all-natural birdfeeder onto a branch for the birds to enjoy.

- Use an empty toilet paper roll to make a bird feeder. Run a string or piece of yarn through it and tie the ends together, leaving room so you can hang it from a branch. Gently smear the outside of the tube with peanut or nut butter and roll in birdseed. Hang your feeder onto a branch for the birds to enjoy.



- Visit a petting zoo or a live nativity scene. Are all of the *Bethlehem Barn* animals there? Are there others? Do these animals seem to have personalities?
- Many cultures believe animals were witness to the birth of Jesus, but the actual animals present vary based on culture and location across the globe. For example, Native American Christmas stories often depict a buffalo at the nativity. Have children research nativity scenes from around the world to see how they differ.
- If you're able, visit the Festival of Lights at LaSalette in Attleboro, Massachusetts, and see their nativity scenes around the globe exhibit. Or research other exhibits closer to you.
- Research other legends about animals at the nativity. *Menagerie at the Manger* by Linda Allen is a great source of information for older children or for the adult to select passages to share. Have children write stories or create skits or puppet shows based on some of these other legends.
  - For example, the robin was once believed to be a brown bird. On Christmas Eve a fire warming the baby Jesus was fading; the robin fluttered its wings to fan the flames back to life, and a spark singed its feathers. According to legend, this is how the robin got its red breast.
  - Some legends say bees were present at the nativity and their buzz lulled the baby Jesus to sleep.



If you've created other discussion questions or activities for *Bethlehem Barn*, please share them at [www.debrawestgatesilva.com](http://www.debrawestgatesilva.com).