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SERMON TITLE: If That Donkey Could Talk
SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-7
DATE: December 24, 2021 CHRISTMAS EVE
 Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Isaiah 11:6-7, 12:1-6. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

We are here tonight because of one Bible verse. You are very familiar with it. It pertains wholly to tonight. Let's say it together:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The word I want to examine is world. The Greek word is actually "cosmos" (κόσμος). The Greek is even pronounced "cosmos." (Greek is not that hard!) For God so loved the *cosmos*. It means the whole earth: the universe, the world, the planet on which we live. Further, it includes everything in it.

For example, God takes a whole day just to create animals. Then the Lord rejoices and says, "That's good!" Think of all the things you cherish—your family, your home, your animals, your friends and neighborhood, your work, your vacations. **That's your cosmos.**

Then, our verse says: "for God so loved." The word is ἀγαπάω. It is a verb. We need to examine this word too. Greek defines "love" with many words:

- Cherish,
- have affection for,
- long for,
- Value,
- hold in high esteem,
- show the greatest solicitude for (kindness, concern, attentiveness)

You and I benefit from this love. Are you thankful for what you have to love? Do you appreciate your *cosmos*?

Tonight we bring here our hopes; but also our fears. There's a Christmas carol that has these words:

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

Our lives and activities are filled with hopes but also with fears.

God has hopes. God's hope is that life never ends. So God set a plan. We looked at God's plan through Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz; Elizabeth and Zechariah; and Mary and Joseph as they journey to Bethlehem.

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This journey involved exactly that: travel. Joseph had to get a very pregnant Mary from Nazareth where they lived to Bethlehem—eighty miles. The mode of transportation in that day was by donkey. It took four to five days, depending on how slow the donkey was. ☺

Imagine life without trains, planes, or automobiles!

Donkeys were key players in several Bible stories.

When Abraham took Isaac to the mountaintop to offer him to the Lord, it was him, Isaac, and a donkey. He was the beast of burden. Isaac, who embodied everything Abraham loved, was to be the sacrifice. But God stepped in and HE provided the sacrifice—if that donkey could talk!

Later, a donkey *did talk!* It happened like this. King Balak of Moab saw the nation of Israel advance into Canaan and he was terrified. So he summoned a pagan prophet to curse Israel. Balaam the Prophet rode a donkey.

On the way, God's angel met Balaam, but only Balaam's donkey could see the angel. The donkey stopped. Balaam whipped that stubborn donkey. This happened three times until the Lord opened the donkey's mouth and she said, "Am I not your faithful donkey? Have I ever done this to you before? Then listen to the angel!"

It's not so unusual, considering the nature of the donkey. They have excellent hearing and vision. They are loyal to their owners and when with livestock, will confront dogs or coyotes and chase them away, even rising on their hind legs and striking with their hooves.

So through the donkey, God opened Balaam's eyes, and he could see the angel and received instructions to **Bless God's People**, not curse them.

Are your eyes open to God's willingness to bless you? Are you watching and listening for the voice of God?

At God's instruction, each time Balaam was ordered by Balak to curse God's people, instead he blessed them. Here are three parts:

1. "How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?" (Numbers 23:8);
2. "God is not a man, that he should lie . . . or change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it." (Numbers 23:19-20);

3. "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17)

That prophecy was fulfilled this night. Mary would ride into Bethlehem on a faithful donkey; a beast of burden carrying a precious gift to the world, a gift from God, a blessing to end all blessings, so that we know we are not cursed when we embrace this gift.

Each blessing begins to unfold:

In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all.

Every nativity includes a lamb, calf, donkey, and angel.

Guided by a star. Surrounded by the animals. Born in a humble stable. It all came true just as planned.

We do not go up to seek God; God came down to us, joining us in life just as it is on planet earth.

A baby whose heart beats; who cuddles; who cries, eats, learns to walk, said his first word. A man who liked food, cooked for hungry people; who worked, got his hands dirty, built things, stood up to the heartless, cried with his friends, and taught us the secret to life.

Then one day he would mount a donkey again—a humble, loyal donkey and ride it into a town, his town, Jerusalem, surrounded by cheering crowds of people shouting: *Please, Lord, DO SAVE!*

That is our hope tonight. We, too, shout that, don't we?

The prophet Zechariah says:

"Rejoice . . . shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey" (9:9)

We need it. It is only through him that the curse of our brokenness is *turned into blessing*; the hope of loss is *turned into a new and glorious day!*

Tonight, the greatest gift has been given. Do you have eyes to see it? Will you receive it?

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17)

AMEN