



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Tale of George the Giraffe's Christmas *A Children's Christmas Story,* *Christmas Eve, December 24th, 2014*

Once upon a time, long, long ago a travelling circus made camp near the little town of Bethlehem in the land of Judea. The circus performers planned to entertain all the people from far and wide who had been ordered by the government to come to Bethlehem to be counted. There were clowns, tightrope walkers and trapeze artists, of course, but it was the animals that had pride of place – Leo the Lion, Jumbo the Elephant, Chico the Chimpanzee and, most exotic of all, a very young giraffe who had just arrived all the way from Africa called Georgius – or George for short.

All the animals, but George had been with the circus for a very long time. Most of them were used to the climate in Judea – long, hot summers, and short, sometimes freezing cold, winters. Poor George, however, was used to the African sun and really felt the cold – especially as he was too tall to fit properly into a cozy tent.

Actually, George had such a long neck, he could only get his body into the tent and this meant he had to sleep with his neck sticking out of the flap like a flagpole. The arrangement wasn't too bad in the summer, but in the winter it was quite another matter. Poor George was so cold he sniffed, snuffled all night making it very hard for the other animals to get a wink of sleep.

The circus folk were a kindly bunch, and they tried there very best to help George get comfortable. They brought him a drink of hot milk before he went to bed, and Coco the Clown knitted him a woolly nightcap and long striped muffler. But the nightcap only warmed up George's ears and the top of his head. His long nose was still out in the

cold, and soon he developed a cold and started sneezing.

Even worse, while the long striped muffler went around Coco the Clown's neck four or five times it didn't so much as cover a quarter of poor George's neck. If he was warm up by his Adam's apple, he was freezing down by his shoulders. But if he was warm down by his shoulders his Adam's apple was so cold it was difficult to make it swallow. Soon George started to cough.

What with the coughing and sneezing, nobody in the circus was getting a decent night's sleep – except Jumbo the Elephant, that is, who'd thoughtfully used his trunk to pick up cotton wool balls and put them in his ears. Trouble was Jumbo's ears were so big that by the time he'd plugged them up there were no cotton wool balls left over for the others to use.

"Hey, Jumbo," they shouted, "Fair's fair! Let us have some of that cotton wool."

"Sorry," replied Jumbo complacently, "I can't hear what you're saying. I've got cotton wool in my ears."

As if that wasn't bad enough, after a few nights of coughing and sneezing, George developed a sore throat. Now I don't know if any of you have had a sore throat, but if you had you'd know that it really hurts. Now if sore throats are really painful for human beings with their very short necks, think how awful it must be for a giraffe whose neck is more than seven foot long.

Not surprisingly, things went from bad to worse. In addition to his coughing and sneezing, the sore throat made poor George wheeze and moan. The circus folk tried every way they could to help him.

They bought him throat lozenges and made him lemon drinks. But nothing seemed to help. The wheezing, sneezing, coughing and moaning kept everybody awake all night – everybody that is except Jumbo.

As it happened, being awake all night turned out to be not such a bad thing. It was Coco the Clown who first noticed some thing strange was going on in the sky. The moon was there as usual as usual, and so were the stars, but something else was going on up there as well.

It looked like a great big crowd of people with wings sprouting from their backs. They seemed to be singing a song to a bunch of shepherds on the hills. It must have been a really good song because the shepherds and their sheep were listening very closely. It didn't take long to figure out it was a choir of angels.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will toward men.” The angels sang. Then one of the angels spoke to the shepherds: “Fear not,” he said, “For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be toward all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David [that's another way of saying Bethlehem] a saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

“Come on, you guys,” shouted Coco, “We've gotta go and see this! Wake up, Jumbo, wake up! We're going to see a newborn king!”

The animals came pouring out of their tents: “What's going on?” they asked. “Look,” shouted Coco pointing to the angel choir, “Let's follow those shepherds.”

“You go ahead without me,” sniffed George, “I've got such a terrible cold.”

“Oh, no, you don't, George,” said Coco, “You've got to come with us. It's the chance of a life time!” So George set off with the other animals and soon they saw a bright star shining over a very humble

stable surrounded by a whole host of people – towns folk, farmers and the shepherds who had come down from the hills. Coco wiggled his way to the front of the crowd and peeped through the door. Inside were Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, who had been put to bed not in a cradle, but the manger where the cattle ate their food. The baby saw the clown and laughed.

“Don't move,” said Coco to the baby, “There's somebody you've just got to meet.” He wiggled his way back through the crowd to poor George, who was sniffing and sneezing, wheezing and coughing. “Come on, George,” he said, “Come and see the newborn king.”

“I can't get in there,” said George, pointing to the stable, “I'm much too tall.”

“Okay,” said Coco, “You can put your head through the window.”

So George stretched out his long neck and put his head through the widow of the stable and looked down at the baby Jesus. But just as he did so, he gave a very loud wheeze and followed it up with a snorting sort of sniff. He was very embarrassed and went quite red.

“Look, Joseph,” said Mary, “I think a giraffe has come to visit Jesus. I've never seen one before, but I do believe the poor animal has got a bad cold and a very sore throat.”

When the baby Jesus saw George standing there he smiled happily and stretched out his hands towards. George smiled back, and all of a sudden he didn't feel like sniffing and sneezing, coughing and wheezing any more. Then he noticed his sore throat had completely gone away.

“Thank you for making me better, Baby Jesus” he said, “I do hope your parents will bring you to our circus when you've grown bigger.”

The baby looked up him and smiled. So did his mother Mary. “We live in a little town called Nazareth,” she said, “We'll see you the next time the circus pays us a visit.”

The End