



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Tale of Roger the Rumpled Rhinoceros

Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24th 2017

Once upon a time, long, long ago in the hills near the little town of Bethlehem a Rhinoceros called Roger. He was big and gray, and had two horns on top of his nose – a large one in front and a smaller one behind. His skin was very thick and wrinkly. And even worse, it looked two sizes too large.

Roger was, as far as he knew, the only rhinoceros in the whole of the Holy Land. He had worked for a travelling circus and one day when Roger was hiking in the hills the circus moved on, leaving him quite alone in the world.

It's really hard being the odd person out. And, as he looked so different from the other animals in the neighborhood, it's not surprising that Roger was very shy with folks he did not know very well.

Sad to say, Roger was so worried about his looks he had only one friend in the world – a little bird who lived on his back called Olly the Oxpecker. Olly used to sing him to sleep every night and peck up all the bugs and ticks that made Roger feel itchy and uncomfortable by setting up house in his wrinkly gray skin.

Roger was terribly sensitive about his saggy skin. "I've tried everything to make it look better," he told Olly, "I've tried ironing it, but all it did was scorch me like

I'd been out too long in the sun. I've tried to shrink it by soaking myself in water for hours. But, hot or cold, it didn't make the slightest difference. I've tried skin cream, but it just made it looser. Can you suggest something?"

Olly had been pecking bugs and when he tried to reply it came out like "argh, mumble, gargle, grunt, munch." Roger was upset. "Don't speak with your beak full. It's rude," he snapped.

Olly swallowed noisily and burped. "What I said was: 'You're really not that wrinkly for a rhino that is. But if you really want to get rid of them, why not pray for God to grant you a miracle.'"

Roger took Olly's advice and every night he knelt by his bed and prayed: "Dear God, please make my skin better fitting and less wrinkly." Every morning, as soon as he awoke, he dashed to the mirror to see if God had heard his prayer. But every morning his skin looked just as loose and wrinkly as ever."

Then one chilly winter's night, Roger awoke to the sound of very loud singing. "I wish they'd shut up," he mumbled grumpily, "They're keeping me awake." But Olly thought the music quite glorious. "I'll fly out and see what's going on," he said.

He was back in a trice. “Wake up! Wake up,” he shouted at Roger, “It’s a huge angel choir singing ‘Peace on earth; Goodwill to all men (and animals, too).’ I asked a bunch of shepherds what all the fuss was about and they said that the Savior of the World had been born in Bethlehem.

“Get up, Roger” Olly went on, “If anyone can give you a better fitting skin, it’s the Savior of the World. After all, he created us. He’s come to us as little baby lying in a manger, but he can still perform miracles.”

Roger leapt out of bed. With Olly clinging for dear life on to his wrinkly back, he lumbered as fast as he could to Bethlehem. There at an small inn on the outskirts of town, he found a stable surrounded by a crowd of shepherds and townsfolk. They were all gazing worshipfully at a beautiful baby boy lying in the manger, guarded by his mother and father.

Being the biggest creature in the place – bigger by far than the ox and donkey who were also gazing at the baby – Roger had no trouble pushing his way to the front of the crowd.

“Oh look, Joseph,” said Mary with a smile, “I didn’t expect to see a rhinoceros here, especially not so handsome as this chap. Look at those beautifully polished horns and such lovely rumpled skin!”

Roger was taken aback. Nobody had ever praised his looks before. He’d never heard his skin described as rumpled. It sounded far better than wrinkly.

“Thank very much ma’am,” said Roger, “But I came here to ask the Savior of the World make my skin fit better. It’s not just wrinkly. It’s saggy all over. I’ve prayed and prayed for a miracle, but he didn’t answer my prayers.”

“Actually,” said Mary, severely, “Jesus did answer your prayers. Sometimes his answer has to be ‘no.’ He created you and he knows better what’s good for you that you do.”

“You look exactly the way he thinks rhinos ought to look,” said Mary gently. “You should be proud of the you look. Don’t complain your skin doesn’t fit. If it were tighter you’d be terribly uncomfortable in the hot sun.

“Besides have you ever thought about what would happen to Olly if you weren’t rumpled? There’d be nowhere for bugs and ticks to hide. Then there’d be nothing for Olly to eat. You need to start thinking about others for a change. Jesus wants us all to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.”

Roger hung his head in shame. “Please forgive me,” he said, “I’m truly sorry I’ve been so selfish and ungrateful,” he said, “I promise to be a very much nicer rhinoceros in future.”

“All’s well that ends well,” said Mary, comfortingly, “You’ve just given Jesus the best birthday present he could ever have.”

“What do you mean?” said Roger, “I’ve been selfish and ungrateful. I haven’t loved my neighbor, Olly, who has been so kind to me. And I certainly haven’t given Jesus a birthday present.”

“Of course you have,” said Mary, “You’ve said you are sorry. You’ve begged forgiveness and promised to turn over a new leaf. That’s something that makes Jesus very, very happy.”

The End