Night of the Animals

A Christmas Eve Reading/Liturgy

(for 8 voices and congregation)

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VOICE 1

I am the black snake
coiled under the straw
in the corner of the stable.
I stay well hidden
for people despise me.
I don't have a pretty face.
I am afraid of the man
who is with the woman.
(She is tired
having had a long journey—
this the donkey tells me.)
Now, the man comes close
and drops his bundles in this corner.
I have no chance to slip away!
He sees me here
coiled in this corner.
I wait in fear for him
to strike me with his staff.
I have no chance to slip away.
But—he smiles and says,
“I see. This is your space, Friend.
I'll put my bundles over there.”

VOICE 2

I am the mouse
who lives in a
hollowed-out place
in the manger-hay.
People despise me.
I dart here and there
to keep out of their way.
I keep well hidden and quiet
so I will not frighten the woman.
She has come a long way
(so the donkey tells me).
But the man reaches deep
in the manger and picks up the hay
for the donkey. I barely escape
and fall back down.
I am afraid
for they know now I am here.
But—the woman says,
“Careful, Joseph.
Don't hurt that mouse.”

VOICE 3

I am the gray spider
who sees from my silver web
high in the corner of the stable
a man and a woman come to rest
after a long, long journey
(the donkey tells me this).
I keep well back in the shadows
for I don't have a pretty face.
But now! I step out
upon my quivering web
to see what the wonder is
for I hear the heavens singing
and the oceans, too, from far away,

and there, below me,
a small one opens His eyes.
He looks straight up at me.
I think—He smiles at me.

VOICE 4

I am the brown bat
that hangs from the rafters
of the stable. I sleep
in the shadows and fly in the night.
For people despise me.
I don't have a pretty face.
I come home to the solitude and safety
of my rafters—but I see them
in the stable—a man,
a woman, a babe, and a donkey.
I flutter in the doorway.
I don't know what to do.
I can't stay out here
for the day will come,
and if I stay out here
people will kill me with stones,
and I cannot go in
for I am afraid.
The woman looks up at me
fluttering in the doorway.
She says, "Come in, Little One.
This is your home. We are only visitors
and will not disturb you too much."

VOICES 1, 2, 3, 4 IN UNISON

We raise our heads
and creep out of the shadows,
for we hear the heavens ringing
and the oceans, too, from far away,
and we know.
And we gather at the feet
of the woman and the babe.
They do not drive us away
even though we are despised.
The woman says, "Joseph, look.
They've come to see.
Aren't they lovely?"

VOICE 1

Me! The snake.

VOICE 4

Me! The bat.

VOICE 3

Me! The spider

VOICE 2

Me! The mouse.

ALL VOICES 1-4 IN UNISON

Lovely!!

We gather to see the Babe, the Creator's Appointed One.

VOICE 5

The animals know when the storm will break

VOICE 6

The animals know when the earth will quake

VOICE 7

And the animals knew that He was coming,
the Creator's Appointed One.

VOICE 5

They didn't need the angels to tell them, they knew.

ALL VOICES 5, 6, 7

Because animals know such things.

LEADER: The camels needed no rein to tell them where
to go.

RESPONSE: (congregation) The Wise Men were not
so wise. They needed the star.

LEADER: The goats needed no gathering, the sheep no
herding. They were ready to come down from the hills.

RESPONSE: They would have come down from the
hills with or without the shepherds.

LEADER: And what of those who were not in
Bethlehem?

RESPONSE: Of course, they knew when the Babe was
born, the Creator's Appointed One.

LEADER: When the Babe was born, the Creator's
Appointed One

RESPONSE: the whales began to sing.

LEADER: From waters warm to waters cold

RESPONSE: the oceans rang with song beneath the
crystal sky.

LEADER: When the babe was born, the Creator's
Appointed One,
RESPONSE: the cats began to purr. A rumble spread
across the earth.

LEADER: Little cats in barns and window sills, jungle
cats, tree cats, mountain cats purred—
RESPONSE: purred until the earth vibrated with joy.

LEADER: The wolves threw back their heads and raised
voices to the sky.
RESPONSE: Some howled under a rising moon,

LEADER: Some into the sun, some to the star itself.
They sang for joy,
RESPONSE: for the birth of the Babe, the Creator's
Appointed One.

LEADER: Butterflies in many colors took flight
RESPONSE: and made fluttering rainbows across the
skies.

LEADER: The frogs drummed in the ponds;
RESPONSE: the crickets clicked from tall grasses,

LEADER: birds filled the treetops with sweet music,
RESPONSE: when the Babe was born, the Creator's
Appointed One.

ALL VOICES IN UNISON

The valleys, the mountains, the woods, the
grasslands, the seas, and the skies rang out, for the
animals knew of the birth of the Babe, the Creator's
Appointed One.

LEADER: Horses neighed and stamped in pride that
one of their own cousins had carried the Babe.
RESPONSE: and would carry Him again, as a man.

ALL: The animals knew.

LEADER: The gorillas poised silently
RESPONSE: under the green canopy of their mountain
home,

LEADER: for they knew and were quiet, with only the
beating of their great, gentle hearts to resonate joy
RESPONSE: at the birth of the Babe, the Creator's
Appointed One.

ALL VOICES:

The animals knew.

VOICE 8

And they knew why He came as a human and not
as one of them; for humans are a needy bunch and
what they need most is teaching.

VOICE 7

Humans need to be taught love
RESPONSE: For it does not come naturally to them as
to the wolf,

VOICE 6

Humans need to be taught justice
RESPONSE: for it does not come naturally to them as
to the elephant.

VOICE 5

Humans need to be taught wisdom
RESPONSE: for it does not come naturally to them as
to the bear.

VOICE 4

Humans need to be taught forgiveness
RESPONSE: for it does not come naturally to them as
to the cow.

VOICE 3

Humans need to be taught a way to find our own peace
RESPONSE: for it does not come naturally to us as to
the other animals.

VOICE 2

And so was born the Chosen One.

VOICE 1

the Anointed One,

ALL VOICES 1-7

The Son,

VOICE 8

to teach us all the things the animals know but
humans have forgotten.