

## The Dinosaur in the Manger



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So that's how the manger, on the day of the play, became surrounded by toys that the children loved. There was Sonya's big blue teddy bear, Andrew's stuffed giraffe, Beverly's baby doll that went "Mama!" when you tipped her over, Rachel's toy monkey that played the cymbals when you wound him up, Michael's big gorilla and all sorts of others. And, of course, the most important toy of all as far as Axel was concerned was T Rex, who behaved himself impeccably as Axel knew he would.

Afterwards great aunt Effie hugged him and said was a wonderful play it was, as how special the different ending was. "It brought tears to my eyes." she said, which embarrassed Axel no end.

Miss Kennedy was also close to tears. She didn't know whether anybody would like the change in the play, but she needn't have worried. Everybody there loved it. She made a mental note to pay more attention to what the children could teach *her* in future.

That night Axel hugged T Rex tight as he lay in bed, and dreamed of all sorts of prehistoric beasts gathering around the manger to love and worship Jesus. And T Rex smiled his toothy smile and dreamed the same dream, except that he was *in* the manger with Jesus, being hugged just like Axel hugged him.

Axel, who was four years old, had lots of toys, especially dinosaurs. He knew all their proper names and when they lived, what they ate and all sorts of other important facts because he was a very clever boy. But of all his dinosaurs, he loved his T Rex the most. T Rex was green and fierce looking, with big teeth and claws, but Axel felt quite safe with him. T Rex was with Axel wherever he was - at the breakfast table, at kindie, when he went to bed, and lately, when he went to Sunday School.

You see, Axel had only just started Sunday School a few months before, so together he and T Rex learned about stories in the bible, especially the ones about Jesus. Axel liked those stories, and was very excited when his teacher, Miss Kennedy, told them that they would be celebrating Jesus' birthday by putting on what was called a nativity play. She read the Christmas story to her class and said that everyone was welcome to come to the manger and worship Jesus - rough shepherds and important kings, and all sorts of animals, like sheep and cows and donkeys. Axel was thrilled! He could hardly wait to tell his parents about this new story.

The next Sunday the children were all given parts to play in the story. Axel was to be one of the shepherds. He came forward, clutching T Rex, to be told what he had to do. But Miss Kennedy said, "I'm afraid you can't bring T Rex into the play, Axel. He doesn't fit the story."

"But you told us that everybody was allowed to come to the manger." he wailed.

No amount of explaining on the part of Miss Kennedy would dry his tears. In the end she let him carry T Rex. "But," she said, "he can't be here on the day."

Axel took his tears to his mum and dad, and told them that Miss Kennedy had told him that he couldn't take T Rex with him any more. His parents looked at each other and said, "What if we had a little chat with her. Would that be all right?" Axel nodded.

Then they said, "This might cheer you up. Great aunt Effie will be here for Christmas, and she'll be coming to the play." That *did* cheer Axel up. He remembered great aunt Effie with affection. She was very old, and smelled of lavender, and would scoop him up in her arms when she came in the door and give him a big kiss. He liked her very much.

At Sunday School a week later rehearsals for the nativity were about to begin. Axel clutched T Rex hoping that Miss Kennedy wouldn't see him, but it didn't work.

"Now Axel," She said, "you know that your T Rex can't be in the play. Dinosaurs lived a long, long, time ago. They are too old to be in the story of the stable."

Axel thought about his great aunt Effie. She was very old, *and* she did strange things like take her teeth out, something that T Rex would *never* do in the play. He said, "My aunt Effie wants to come to the play, and she's *very* old. Does this mean she can't come?" Miss Kennedy knew she was beaten. She simply said, "Of course aunt Effie can come, but we'll have to see about T Rex. We'll talk about him later."

Axel told his parents, "Miss Kennedy says that T Rex is too old for the play and / said that Aunt Effie is old and if she can come to the play why can't T Rex besides aunt Effie takes out her teeth and T Rex would *never* do that because he's a good and clever dinosaur. ..." It took some time before he ran out of breath.

It was clear that his parents had not talked to Miss Kennedy.

During the week Axel thought and thought about T Rex and the nativity play. Then he remembered that the name 'Rex' meant 'king'. He also knew that there were three kings in the play, so why couldn't T Rex be another king? He put this to Miss Kennedy the following Sunday.

She sighed heavily. "Axel," she said, "I know that 'Rex' means 'king' but we already have three kings. We don't need another. Besides which, T Rex is a toy, he's not real. The animals in the stable were real, and there were no dinosaurs around in those days." Axel tearfully clung to T Rex, and watched as the props were brought out for them to rehearse the play. There was (of course) the manger and the doll that was to be the baby Jesus. There was some hay (that was real - it came from the farm where one of the other children lived), and the crowns for the kings and their gifts. And then, from the back of the Sunday School cupboard, Miss Kennedy brought out two rather moth eaten cardboard lambs. "But *they're* not real!" wailed Axel. "Why can't T Rex be in the play likethem!"

Miss Kennedy gave up. She promised herself that she would talk to Axel's parents.

There was only one more rehearsal to go before the big day, but before that, Miss Kennedy paid a visit to Axel's house. He played with his toys on the lounge room floor while the gown ups talked in the kitchen. They talked for a really long time, but when Miss Kennedy left, she seemed to be happy. Axel wondered what would happen next Sunday.

Axel carried T Rex defiantly into Sunday School, ready to do battle with Miss Kennedy. But instead she had something very important to say.

"Children, I've decided to change the play a little. Axel has reminded me that all creatures are welcome at the manger. It doesn't matter how old they are or when they lived or whether they are real or toys. So I think this is what we will do. I want everybody to bring along a special toy with them to offer to the new born king. Pick one that you really love, one that will show your love for the baby Jesus. After all, that's what the shepherds and kings did when they came to the stable."