

Buddha's birthday guests

A Buddhist story

Key ideas: celebrations, the naming of years after animals

The Buddha was looking forward to his birthday. He wanted to make it a very special occasion, so he decided to have a party. For such a special party he wanted to invite very special guests. So he decided to ask all the animals to help him celebrate his birthday.

The preparations were made, and the guests began to arrive. First came the little rat who was quickly followed by the big buffalo. Behind the buffalo came the striped tiger, then up hopped a furry rabbit. A dragon came breathing fire just before the snake slithered in. There was a loud neigh, and the horse announced his arrival. Almost hidden behind was the ram with his curly horns and even curlier coat. The monkey swung down from the trees, and the cockerel strutted around proudly. Next, wagging his tail, came the dog and last of all the pig joined the company of animals.

The Buddha was delighted that all these guests had come to celebrate his party. He was so pleased that he decided all the animals who came to his party should be remembered in turn each year. Even today, in China, every year has the name of the animals that came to the party.