

Donkey Talk

By Dana Buck

So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2: 4-7(NIV)

“Oh Mommy, just one more time, please?”

“Just one more simple telling”

These words have echoed more than once

Within this humble dwelling

“Surely you can’t want to hear”

“That story once again?”

“Besides, you know it back-to-front”

“From opening to end”

“The repeating doesn’t bother me”

His eyes began to glisten

“If you’ll just do your part and talk”

“I’ll do my part and listen”

Rolling eyebrows lift her face

But, truthfully? She teased

For, though appearing bothered

In her spirit, she was pleased

“Alright then” she surrendered
Brought her voice down even more
“Make sure no one can hear us”
“Through a window or the door”

Grinning, he then trotted
To each opening exposed
Ensuring all were unattended
And securely closed

And, when he had confirmed
That all was quiet and just so
She cleared her throat and softly spoke
“It happened long ago...”

Now wait, before we launch this tale
Of fanciful invention
There are some facts I feel that I
Should bring to your attention

Like, that of our main characters
You may begin detecting
That they possess identities
You might not be expecting

For, though they speak as you and I
In sentences and phrasing
It's this unique, surprising fact
That makes them both amazing

So, lest you find this parable
Irrational or wonkey
Please know that they're..., well, truth told
Please know that they are donkeys

I know what you're about to say
“Now donkeys, they can't talk”
And surely, I'd agree with you
And call this tale a crock

Except that in the bible
There's a story to review
Within the book of Numbers
Found in chapter twenty-two

Old Balaam is God's prophet
Who's about to disobey him
So, God sends down an angel
With an unsheathed sword to slay him

As Balaam rides his donkey
Down to where he should not go
The angel stands, unseen
Right in the middle of the road

Though Balaam's eyes are blinded
His old donkey deftly spied him
And swerved into a field
Just as the angel tried to smite him

Balaam didn't realize
That he'd been clearly saved
And, he beat his faithful donkey
Thinking he'd been disobeyed

Two-times more he tried to ride
To where the angel waited
But, his donkey kept him safe
From being struck and ventilated

In anger and frustration
He once more attacked his ride
It was then that God delivered
A rebuke - and a surprise

"Why do you keep hitting me?"
"What outcome are you seeking?"
And surely Balaam listened
For, it was his donkey speaking

“I’m irritated that you won’t”
“Proceed as you’re directed”
The angel with the deadly sword
Still hadn’t been detected

Then, Balaam’s eyes were opened
And he saw the winged assassin
Fully understanding why
His donkey checked his passing

He on-the-spot repented
Garnered what God had to teach
And the donkey? God rewarded him
And let him keep his speech

Not only he, but all his progeny
His donkey kin
Could talk and laugh and carry on discussions
Just like him

From parents down to siblings
Over many generations
These beasts-of-burden
Guard their aptitude for conversations

And so, we come full circle
To a mother and her son
And the legendary saga
That she’d barely just begun

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“It happened long ago” she said
In low and earnest breath
“When my master had just settled”
“In the town of Nazareth”

“Bringing with him tools”
“That hammer, measure, saw and chop”
“He labored as a carpenter”
“And opened up a shop”

“I was very happy”
“And just followed him around”
“To his jobsites, to the synagogue”
“Or shopping in the town”

“Life was going smoothly”
“Like a ship with filling sails”
“When all at once my master”
“Seemed to run right off the rails”

“He developed trouble sleeping”
“Had no interest in his food”
“Walked around distracted”
“In a foggy, dreamy mood”

“I recognized this malady”
“That he was victim of”
“The poor man had succumbed”
“And fallen hopelessly in love!”

“She was our local neighbor”
“And my master, he would tarry”
“At the well when he would see”
“That drawing water there was Mary”

“She was quite a beauty”
“Although young, her heart was dosed”
“With a gentle, loving spirit”
“Much more deeply set than most”

“She used to give me water”
“And then scratch behind my ears”
“Her laughter would dispel the blues”
“And dry up all your tears”

“So, is it any wonder”
“My man felt his heart unfurl”
“For this charming, comely maiden”
“Not two-steps beyond a girl”

“In good time, my master”
“Like an animal uncaged”
“Felt his life had blossomed”
“When these two became engaged”

“I’d hear him say he loved her”
“Praise and compliments conveying”
“And, all the time, he never guessed”
“I knew what he was saying!”

“Were ever there two people”
“More completely lost in bliss”
“Then all at once, their joy collapsed”
“Into a dark abyss”

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“It happened late one afternoon”
“When Mary came to visit”
“Her countenance was troubled”
“Joseph asked “My love, what is it?”

“I wasn’t there to hear or know”
“Exactly what she said”
“But, whatever was related”
“Mary quickly rose and fled”

“My master, in a stupor”
“Put a blanket on my back”
“And we rode into the hills”
“Until the sky was midnight black”

“Throughout this aimless ride”
“A steady discourse he was keeping”
“His words of anger morphed into”
“A heart-consuming weeping”

“I surmised from bits and pieces”
“Of his tortured monologue”
“That the nuptials were canceled”
“Their betrothal, to the dogs”

“The bad news didn’t stop there”
“It seemed multiplied and piled”
“When his comments made it clear”
“That there was going to be a child”

“Dismounted now and standing”
“Neath the solitary moon”
“He heaved a cleansing sigh”
“And sought to staunch his throbbing wound”

“No matter the offense,” he said
“The law that’s poised above her”
“I will not have her damaged or disgraced”
“For I still love her”

“I’ll see a private marriage cancelation”
“Is enforced”
“With no display or fanfare”
“We’ll be quietly divorced”

“He hung his head in anguish”
“There was nothing left to say”
“That’s until I heard him quietly”
“And oh, so briefly pray”

“Oh God, her claim is you”
“Your Holy Spirit did conceive her”
“Please know how much I wish”
“Oh, how I wish I could believe her...”

“After this, our home”
“Was as depressing as a tomb”
“For my master only worked”
“Then sat morosely in his room”

“But, soon an evening came”
“That brought an end to this dismay”
“I remember it so clearly”
“Like it happened yesterday”

“My master had retired”
“He’d gone early to his bed”
“I was grazing in the yard”
“I’d been neglected to be fed”

“I noticed from my master’s bedroom window”

“Came a light”
“It was golden, and it outshone”
“The enveloping twilight”

“I was spurred by curiosity”
“So, with my donkey nose”
“I gently nudged the shutter”
“Which was only part-way closed”

“The sight that struck my vision”
“Made it difficult to stand”
“T’was an angel straight from heaven”
“So magnificent and grand”

“He was talking to my master”
“Though the master never woke”
“He was telling him of Mary”
“And the baby as he spoke”

“Joseph, Son of David”
“God is with you, do not fear it”
“Mary’s baby was conceived in her”
“By God’s own Holy Spirit”

“Take her as your wife”
“Prepare a home for her to live in”
“And, when she bears her first-born”
“Jesus is the name you’ll give him”

“My master, sighed so deeply”
“For his sleep was strong and good”
“Then, the angel turned his gaze”
“Right to the window where I stood!”

“At first his eyebrows narrowed”
“And I feared that I was doomed”
“But, a subtle smile developed”
“As he walked across the room”

“I knew I’d really done it now”
“My presence was a bother”
“Then, the angel said, “Why, little one”
“I knew your Great-Grand Father”

“A trusted, faithful donkey”
“As has ever chewed the bit”
“He saved old Balaam from my sword”
“Was blessed because of it”

“He touched me on the head”
“And ran his hand along my cheek”
“Your secret’s safe with me, my dear”
“I know that you can speak”

“Suspecting Mary’s circumstance”
“Had into sadness cast her”
“I asked, “Will all be well?”
“With the young maiden and my master?”

“The angel answered”
“Yes, but they’ve an odyssey ahead”
“He then caressed my neck”
“Lifted up my chin and said”

“Your master and his wife”
“Will journey to a distant town”
“You, my friend, will bear her”
“And you must not let me down.”

“For, the baby that she carries”
“This unique, anointed girl”
“Is Emmanuel, God with us”
“He’s the Savior of the world”

“I can’t do it!” I retorted”
“I can’t take that kind of pressure”
“And I felt the angel mark me”
“To begin to take my measure”

“Little one” he said”
“If you react this way, just think”
“What Mary must be feeling now”
“The cup that she must drink”

“Both she, and your master”
“By the Father, they were chosen”
“And also, you” he gently said.”
“My heart became unfrozen”

“His eyes were fixed upon me”
“And I felt my strength unfurl”
“As long as I’m alive,” I said”
“I’ll take care of the girl”

“He smiled and slightly nodded”
“As I promised, and I vowed”
“Then he said, “Brave little donkey”
“Your Great-Grand Dad would be proud”

“He touched me on the forehead”
“Oh, so softly with his palm”
“Then raised his mighty wings”
“And, in an instant, he was gone”

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“Well, things around the house”
“Seemed gathered in a whirlwind”
“With the master and his lady”
“Back together once again”

“My master cherished Mary”
“With a self-less love, he plied her”
“Always watchful, always caring”
“As the baby grew inside her”

“Then, the laughter in our home”
“The sweetest sound I’d ever heard”
“Went suddenly awry”
“Due to a simple, single word”

“Chaos and confusion”
“All the trouble now condenses”
“Around something I’d not heard before”
“It’s something called a census”

“Whatever that expression is”
“It made our peace unravel”
“And clearly now the three of us”
“Were going to have to travel”

“From Nazareth to Bethlehem”
“A journey fraught with trials”
“And, all of it by donkey”
“Just about one-hundred miles”

“My master’s greatest worry”
“And my overwhelming fear”
“Was the wear and tear on Mary”
“Whose delivery time was near”

“My saddle overflowed with pillows”
“Blankets, throws and quilts”
“Just to try and somehow cushion”
“All the bounces, bumps and tilts”

“Every step, I took in earnest”
“Each traverse, I made with care”
“Thinking always of the holy”
“Precious cargo that I bear”

“Then, climbing up a hillside”
“Curving slowly ‘round a bend”
“We finally reached the outskirts”
“Of the town of Bethlehem”

“With the village full of travelers”
“Lodging prospects looked forsaken”
“For, the rooms at all the hostel’s, inns”
“And taverns had been taken”

“At the final habitation”
“At the far end of the town”
“My master sought the Innkeeper”
“Who flatly turned him down”

“As he and Mary rested on a bench”
“He looked morose”
“For she whispered as it darkened”
“Love, my time is getting close”

“It was then that I decided”
“To get up and intervene”
“For my heart was fairly breaking”
“At this melancholy scene”

“I’d seen the chubby Innkeeper”
“Stroll over to his well”
“And, I ambled that direction”
“So discreet he couldn’t tell”

“I deftly faked some grazing”
“With my head down in the grass”
“So, he couldn’t see my lips move”
“When I spoke up and I asked”

“Are you happy with yourself?”
“How will you sleep tonight?”
“Leaving that expectant couple”
“Helpless in their plight?”

“Who said that? Who is talking?”
“The surprised Innkeeper said”
“It’s me, your angry conscience”
“I replied, with lowered head”

“Where is your compassion?”
“The imposter conscience called”
“I’m overwrought, embarrassed”
“And indignantly appalled!”

“There’s nothing I can do”
“The frantic Innkeeper commented”
“No vacancies or cancellations”
“Every room is rented”

“I can’t produce accommodations”
“Out of the thin air”
“Besides, they’re not my relatives”
“Why should my conscience care?”

“I care because we’re human”
“(My oh my, that was a stretch)”
“If not for me, you’d turn into”
“A loathsome cad or wretch”

“You’d better think of something quick”
“The voice of scruples taunted”
“Or I’ll keep right on talking”
“Till it feels like you are haunted”

“Okay, okay” he stammered”
“I don’t have a bed or table”
“But, I reckon they can get out of the weather”
“In the stable”

“We’ll take it!” I declared.”
“I mean..., they’ll take it” I corrected”
“I knew you had it in you”
“Your good manners I suspected”

“I’ll go and make the offer”
“The resigned Innkeeper said
“And you, you’ll stop this diatribe?”
“This talking in my head?”

“At once” I quick assured him”
“Then, the conscience voice denotes”
“Just one more thing”
“Make sure their donkey gets a bag of oats”

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“Our shelter is as cozy”
“As the couple now can make it”
“The straw and hay are perfect”
“Where my master smoothed and raked it”

“So, we three settled down”
“To our positions on the floor”
“When all at once a face was peeking
“Through the creaking door”

“A woman with a steaming bucket”
“Boiling like a broth”
“Now rushed into the stable”
“Bearing folded, linen cloth”

“I’m married to the chubby lout”
“Who put you in this barn”
“He told me, but I’d just assumed”
“He’d spun a whopping yarn”

“She kindly looked at Mary”
“Don’t you fret or fuss my daughter”
“I’ve done this many times.”
“She then put down the pail of water”

“Mary was a trooper”
“Joseph never left her side”
“And, it wasn’t too much later”
“That the little babe arrived”

“Turning to my little family”
“What an awesome sight”
“The woman had helped Mary”
“Wrap the baby, clean and tight”

“Joseph brought a manger over”
“Small, for little lambs”
“And Mary laid him in the fresh-cut straw”
“With her own hands”

“Then, kneeling by that humble cradle”
“Serving as a bed”
“Your name is Jesus” Joseph sighed
“Just as the angel said”

“I’m leaving now” the woman whispered
“But, you have my oath”
“I’ll be back tomorrow morning”
“With some breakfast for you both”

“Then, at the door she paused”
“And said a thing so odd..., but right”
“The hopes and fears of all the years”
“Are met in thee tonight”

“Self-consciously, she smiled”
“And nodding, hurried out the door”
“And we were left in peace”
“And quiet solitude once more”

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“But, the silence didn’t last too long”
“When voices filled the air”
“A man said, “Let’s check this one”
“It may be we’ll find him there”

“Entering the doorway”
“A few anxious, timid paces”
“Several men were standing there”
“With wonder on their faces”

“I knew it” one man whispered”
“We just needed to keep searching”
“He had to be a shepherd”
“Around his neck, a lamb was perching”

“A second man then spoke”
“He wasn’t much more than a boy”
“I told you, it’s a miracle”
“T’was not a prank or ploy”

“So, the angels..., they were real?”
“Said a third with hesitation”
“It wasn’t a delusion”
“Or some wild hallucination?”

“My master, next to Mary”
“Rose-up slowly to his feet”
“May I ask what you are looking for”
“Inquire what you seek?”

“Beg pardon, you must think us rubes”
“To interrupt like this”
“They shifted shyly, foot to foot”
“Our behavior seems amiss”

“But, earlier this evening”
“We were sitting with our sheep”
“When suddenly, the air was filled”
“With singing, rich and deep”

“It just kept getting louder”
“Like a widening encore”
“And then the sky was bursting forth”
“With angels by the score”

“Their lyrics were amazing”
“Beautiful from end-to-end”
“Singing mostly “Peace on earth”
“And also, God’s good-will to men”

“Then, one impressive angel”
“Separated from the throng”
“He spoke to us, while all the others”
“Celebrate in song”

“He proclaimed that Christ was given”
“He’d been born in Bethlehem”
“That we should leave our sheep
“And go at once in search of him “

“He said “look in a manger”
“Which we thought was quite bizarre”
“But, we scouted all the stables”
“And, at last, well..., here you are”

“My master listened calmly”
“As the shepherd’s story ends”
“Then hugs them and pronounces”
“You are welcome, precious friends”

“Now gathered near the manger”
“Mary lifts him from the straw”
“And they gaze in awesome wonder”
“Quiet reverence and awe”

“It was then, the youngest shepherd”
“Still astonished and inspired”
“Said to Joseph “Can I ask”
“Is that your donkey?” he inquired”

“Why, yes,” replied my master”
“She’s dependable and sure”
“Would you mind,” the shepherd prodded”
“If I went and petted her?”

“Not at all” my master chuckles”
“This boy’s innocence endears”
“She likes a scratch“ said Mary”
“Especially right behind her ears”

“He rose up from the circle”
“Just as gently as he could”
“And walked back to the corner”
“Of the stable where I stood”

“He softly ran his hand”
“Upon the contours of my cheek”
“Then, in a quiet whisper”
“This young man began to speak”

“I made a solemn promise”
“To the angel in the field”
“A sacred vow to keep”
“Your rare ability concealed”

“He said that you would comprehend”
“My words; my voice and tone”
“That you could even answer me”
“In phrases of your own”

“I feel a little silly”
“For, I don’t know if it’s true”
“But, this is what the angel said”
“I was to say to you”

“Faithful little donkey”
“You’ve done everything I asked”
“Performed your job magnificently”
“Each and every task”

“Serve your master’s family”
“Keep yourself in fighting trim”
“For you, and your descendants”
“Will be called upon again”

“Though my heart was fairly leaping”
“From the angel’s lordly quotes”
“I maintained donkey demeanor”
“And just blankly chewed my oats”

“It figures” said the boy”
“Who thought his chain had just been yanked”
“As he turned and walked away”
“Soft and distinct, I whispered “Thanks”

“He froze there for a moment”
“But he never turned around”
“Just shook his head and joined the others”
“Kneeling on the ground”

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“And that is how, my little boy”
“Your mother came to be”
“The single, humble donkey”
“At the first nativity”

“Oh mommy, please keep going”
“For you know there’s more to spin”
“How you carried them to Egypt”
“And then brought them home again”

“You’ve had such fine adventures”
“Best ones that could ever be”
“I’ve barely left this barn”
“Why, no one’s even ridden me!”

“Let’s save that little story”
“You don’t want your ears to numb”
“Besides, as for adventures”
“Don’t you fret, your time will come”

“I’ve served so many masters”
“Since my days in Nazareth”
“You never really can imagine”
“What may happen next”

As she said this, voices came
Beyond the stable walls
“The Teacher said we’d find one”
“Let’s go look inside these stalls”

Sunlight filled the stable
As the door was pushed ajar
A man stuck in his head and cried
“I told you, here they are”

Walking 'cross the hay-strewn floor
Three men looked fairly stunned
"How does the Teacher always know"
"It must be the little one"

"Wouldn't it be better" one man said
"To bring the jenny?"
"The small one seems so very young"
"Too light, and kind of skinny"

With her son about to protest
Momma gave the colt "the eye"
That look that said don't talk or laugh
Or speak or shout or cry

"The Teacher said to bring a colt"
"He'll be the first to ride him"
The man then moved
To pet the little donkey and untied him

As this group prepared to exit
To the open air
A voice just at the doorway cried
"What's going on in there?"

Entering the stable, came a man
His temper brewing
"I am that donkey's owner"
"What in God's name are you doing?"

The tallest of the men, he said
"My friend, God's name indeed"
"My master said to tell you"
"Of this donkey, I have need"

Blinking once, then twice
The stable owner stepped aside
"Please," he said, "return him"
"When your master's made his ride"

The little colt, he winked
And trotted to his first indenture
As if to say "Mom, look at me!"
"It's time for my adventure!"

His mother heard their words
As they departed, growing dim
"Now Jesus has his special ride"
"Into Jerusalem"

Her eyes grew wet and misty
Wonderous feelings dart inside her
Then suddenly, she's standing
With the angel right beside her

"Mother", he began
"Shall we indulge a little walk?"
"I do so like your company."
"Let's stroll awhile...and talk"

Devotional Thoughts

I often think, in our modern world, the figures of Mary and Joseph have become just that – figures. We see them standing or kneeling in our nativity scenes, or in classic artwork where they seem stiff and emotionless. Bearing halos and surrounded by angelic characters, it's easy to forget that Mary was a teen-age girl. Special, certainly, but a girl none-the-less, with all the hopes, dreams and fears any normal girl would have. And Joseph, though he is described as a "righteous man", was still, at the end of the day, just a man in love with a maiden who was soon to be his bride.

How difficult was it for Mary to try and explain this impossible situation to Joseph? Can you imagine? "Joseph, I'm with child and the father is God." And poor Joseph, who obviously could not bring himself to believe Mary's explanation until it was confirmed to him by an angel in a dream. Yet each, when chosen, accepted the difficult role that God had asked them to play. What extraordinary, ordinary people they were!

This Christmas season, let's not forget that God specializes in making the ordinary extraordinary. Let's offer Him our "ordinary" lives, and then stand back and see the wonders he can perform when, through faith and obedience, we can be extraordinary in Him.