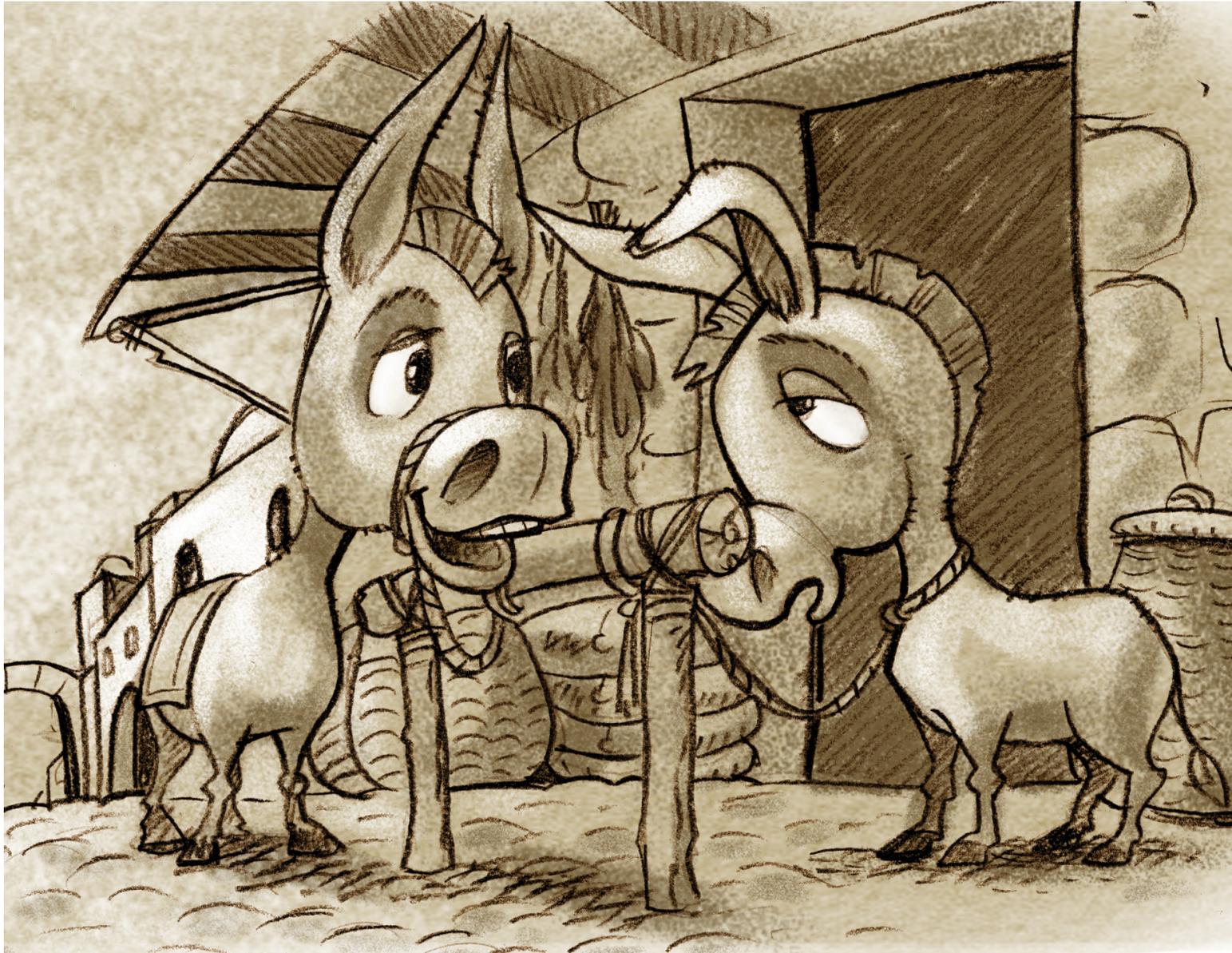


A Donkey's Tale



My master tied me near the entrance of the store, then went inside to pick up supplies. Another donkey stood dozing nearby.

"Hi, there," I said.

The donkey opened one eye. "Ah, I guess your master must also be getting supplies for his trip."

I didn't know why my master had gone to the store, and I told the other donkey so.

"Well, that's my guess," he said sleepily. "It seems like half the town has been by my master's store, and I'm expecting the rest to come by soon."

"Why?"

"Everyone's talking about how they need to visit the town of their origin to pay taxes. My master is doing good business selling travel supplies," he said.

CLIP, CLOP! CLIP, CLOP! The sound of hooves clattering on the stony road made my ears perk up. A Roman patrol was approaching. The other donkey closed his eyes and ignored them, but I watched intently. I had heard men speak many times of the great king who would come to deliver our land from the rule of the Romans. They talked of this king riding through the streets on a majestic horse, followed by his soldiers mounted on great steeds.

I used to dream of carrying one of these soldiers. But with a look at the reflection of my long ears in the trough of water, I was reminded that I was only a lowly donkey. If I was included in the procession of this great king, I would be all the way at the end pulling a wagon full of heavy supplies.

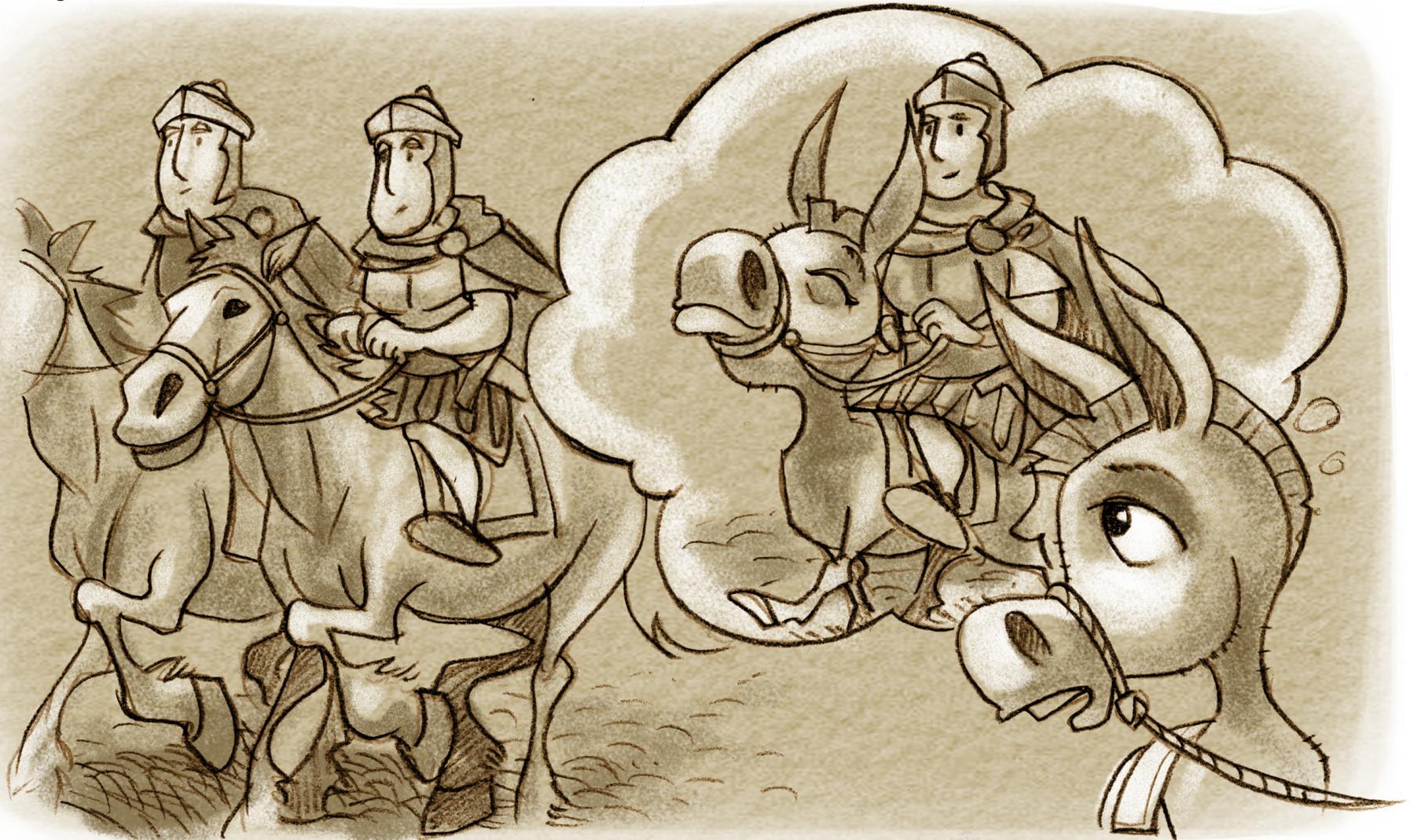
"I wonder where those horses come from," I thought aloud. "Do you suppose they came all the way from Rome with the soldiers?"

"Perhaps," the other donkey mumbled.

"Rome! What an adventure that would be! I've never left Nazareth. All I do is carry loads and pull an old cart full of woodcrafts that my master makes."

"Well, if your master needs to go elsewhere to pay taxes, you might get to travel a bit."

Early the next morning, my master came to the barn, placed a blanket on my back, and led me to the front door of his home where his wife was waiting. She gently scratched the top of my head. "Thank you, dear donkey." My master and his wife had always treated me kindly, but I was unsure why she was thanking me.



My master lifted his wife onto my back along with a couple of bags that he hung on both of my sides. He then took my reins and started walking. Despite the fact that his wife was obviously soon to give birth to a baby, my master's wife and their bags were lighter than the loads of wood I was accustomed to carrying.

As we passed the walls of our city, I realized I was going farther than I'd ever been before. I was elated.¹

We traveled for several long days before reaching our destination—the city of Bethlehem. We were exhausted from the long trip, and my master set about to find lodgings for us. I was looking forward to a good meal and a long rest, but alas, things didn't go very well.

"Sorry, I don't have any room," an innkeeper said as he closed the door.

"There's nothing I can do. My inn is full," replied another innkeeper to my master when he asked for a place to stay.

"You'll have to try someplace else. There's nowhere for you here."

"I can't help. Can't you see there are already too many people staying here?" Some of the innkeepers were even quite rude and would slam the door in our faces or tell us loudly to be gone.



¹elated: very happy

Finally, one innkeeper felt sorry for my master's wife. "I ... umm ... well ... I have a place you might be able to stay," said the man. "It's not a room, but ... well, let me show you." And he led us to a stable behind his inn.

I'm a donkey, so I didn't mind. After all, even if my master and his wife had stayed in a room in the inn, I would have stayed in the stable. But I couldn't imagine them staying in a stable!

By then they were so tired and thankful for a place to stay that they said they didn't mind either. "Thank you, kind sir," my master said to the surprised innkeeper. "We're sure your stable will be just fine."

The innkeeper's wife helped to get us set up. "Here you go, donkey," she said as she placed a pile of hay in front of me. I hardly ate anything. I was so tired I soon fell asleep.

I woke to the cry of a newborn baby and a stable full of people: the innkeeper and his wife, as well as several shepherds with their sheep.



"What's going on?" I asked groggily. "Why are all these people here? Was there also no room for them at an inn so that they had to sleep in the stable as well?"

"No," a cow answered. "These shepherds were on the hill just outside of the village when angels appeared in the sky!"

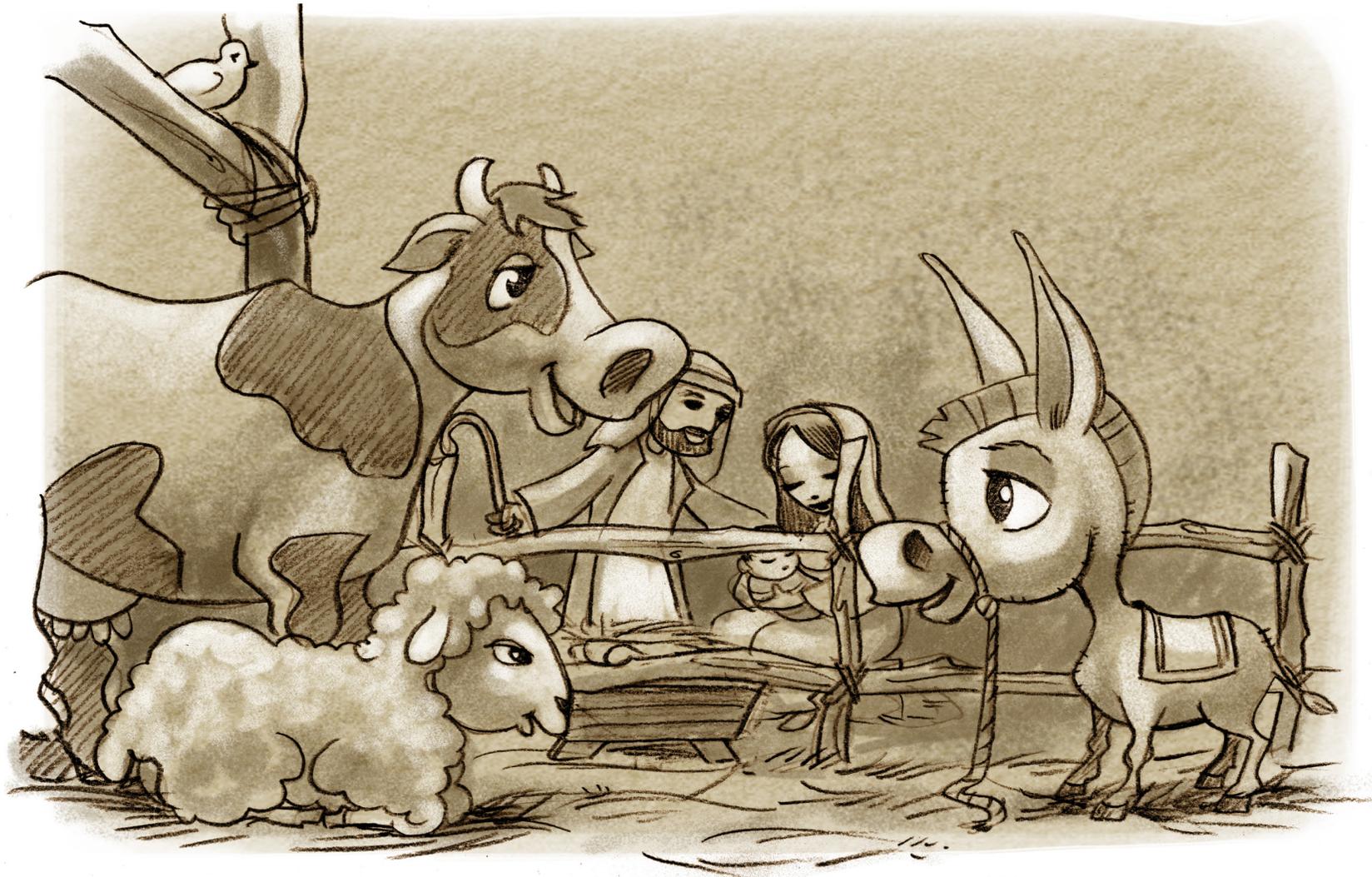
"It was wonderful," a nearby lamb bleated. "The whole sky was filled with angels."

"They were singing and praising God," a ewe added. "They told us exactly where we would find the baby. They said He was the Savior, Christ the Lord, and that we had been chosen to be the first to know!"

"We're very honored that He was born in our stable," the cow said. The other resident animals nodded.

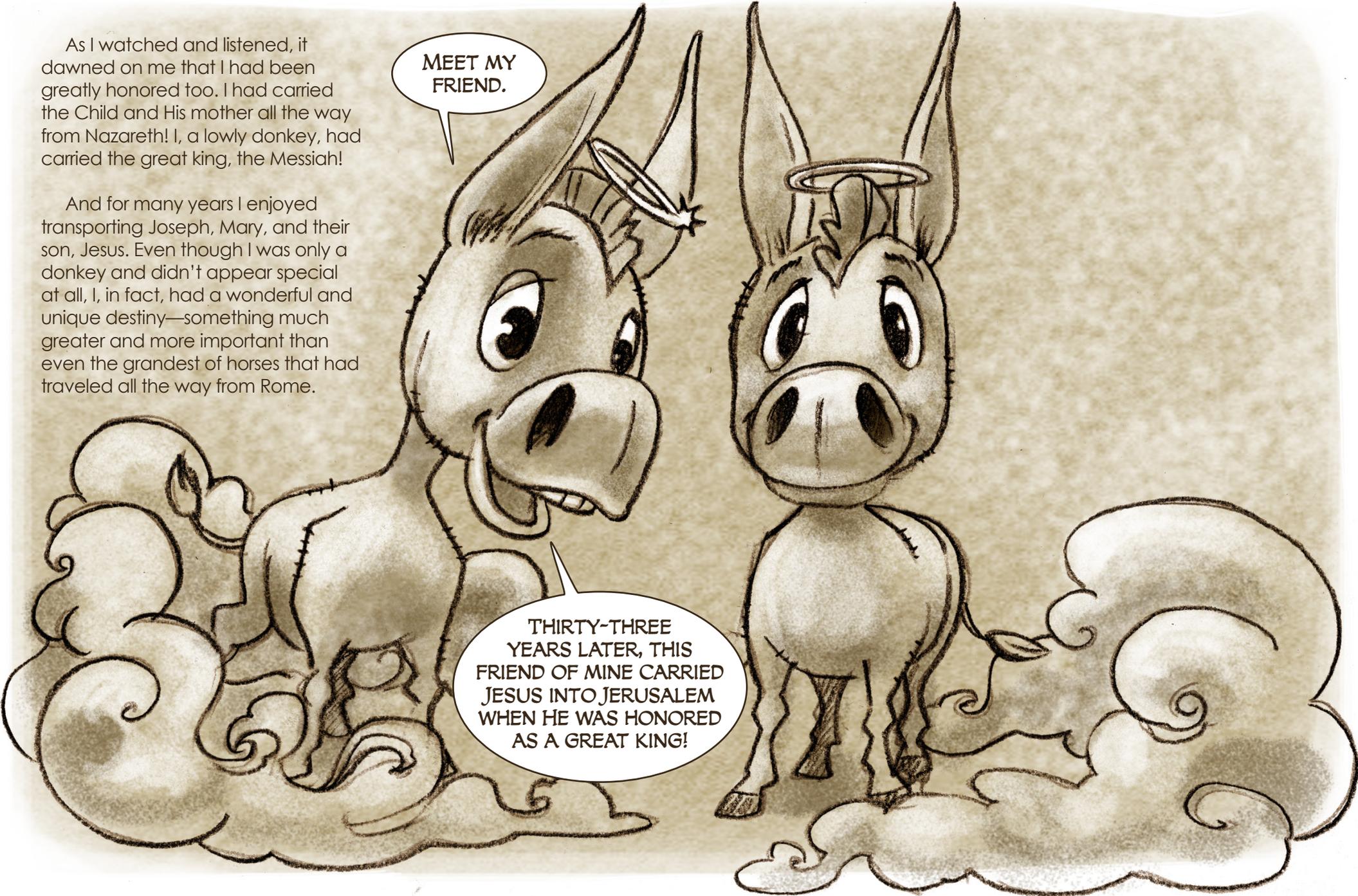
"The baby is so beautiful!" cooed the dove from the rafters.

"The innkeeper's wife was here to help the mother," said the cow as she continued to explain the story. "She called the innkeeper right away when she heard the shepherds' story. It's a great privilege to be here on such a night as this!"



As I watched and listened, it dawned on me that I had been greatly honored too. I had carried the Child and His mother all the way from Nazareth! I, a lowly donkey, had carried the great king, the Messiah!

And for many years I enjoyed transporting Joseph, Mary, and their son, Jesus. Even though I was only a donkey and didn't appear special at all, I, in fact, had a wonderful and unique destiny—something much greater and more important than even the grandest of horses that had traveled all the way from Rome.



MEET MY FRIEND.

THIRTY-THREE YEARS LATER, THIS FRIEND OF MINE CARRIED JESUS INTO JERUSALEM WHEN HE WAS HONORED AS A GREAT KING!