

A background image of a nativity scene. In the center, a white donkey stands looking towards the right. To its right, a yellow rooster stands on a wooden platform. In the foreground, a ginger cat sits looking towards the left. The scene is set in a rustic, stone-walled environment.

It is that time again. Time to retrieve the Christmas decorations which always seem to be the toughest thing to get to in the basement. But, hidden beyond the tattered golf bags and heavy tubs of old college textbooks are the boxes of Christmas magic ready to be set free and displayed.

We all have favorite or special Christmas decorations. Maybe there is an ornament that holds sentimental value or perhaps there is something special about a Santa Claus figurine which brings you a little joy and a warm smile. While I have several favorites, I admit one thing is on the top of the list. This favorite is the nativity scene.

We have had several versions of the nativity scene in my family. My Mom made one herself in the 1960s from papier mache. It lasted for decades until my little Miniature Schnauzer, Gucci, ate it. (Dogs must like flour and I'm convinced she didn't mean to do it, but Mom may have a different answer.) Other nativity scenes have graced the tables and mantles in our homes and now I have another one which will again be displayed. This one plays *Away in the Manger* if you press the angel on top of the barn.

I carefully arranged the scene. As I did, I thought about what Mary and Joseph may have been thinking on this special night. Pretty special, right? My version includes the three wise men, so it was fun to ponder their thoughts. It was interesting to wonder what the angel was thinking, too.

But, has anyone considered what the donkey was thinking? "Gosh, I have been walking for a really, really long time. My legs hurt. Maybe I should work out more." "Are we there yet?" "I'm hungry. I hope there is some yummy straw whenever we get there." "Joseph, could you save us all a little time and just ask for directions?" "I'm tired and I need to go to the bathroom."

There is a debate that a donkey did not carry Mary to her destination on that special night. Some say there are other possibilities of how she got there. But, many artworks exist which depict that a donkey was, in fact, her transportation. Either way, there the donkey is, in my nativity scene present as present can be and looking fairly content as it watches the Baby Jesus who looks happy, as well.

These beautiful creatures are often overlooked in modern society because they are quiet in appearance. They are gentle, affectionate and have high intelligence, too. However, they are mentioned over 100 times in the Bible depending on which version you read. They were present in a few of the most famous stories in the Bible. Some scholars will argue donkeys are symbolic of service, suffering, peace, wisdom, and humility. Donkeys are prone to be some of the most loyal animals around and will humbly take on whatever is asked of them. Maybe if a donkey did carry Jesus's mother, it knew it was doing something important and took on the task willingly with the full expectation it would complete the task at hand no matter what.

Interestingly enough, we do get a chance to hear what a donkey was thinking (Numbers 22:28) and I have to admit it was a valid and thoughtful question to ask its owner. So, if given that same opportunity to hear the lucky donkey who was a part of that Holy Night, I would like to think it would say, "Gosh, that's a pretty star up there, maybe we should follow it." Shouldn't we all.

Merry Christmas, Kelly