

The donkey: Luke 2.1-5

Don't forget to go to our church website to experience the Advent Calendar online! You'll find a story, a song and a craft activity linked to today's TFTD. Just click on the link below:

<https://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk/advent>



You may be surprised to know that a donkey is not mentioned in any of the nativity stories. I know, it is a surprise, isn't it? In normal times we would have a real one at our service on Christmas eve because that is how important the character of the donkey is.

But it isn't there. It isn't mentioned at all. Mary and Joseph had to make the 75-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem: it would have taken them 4-6 days on foot. They may have walked, they may have had a donkey, a cart or something else - we just don't know.

I do know that in the nativity plays my son was in at school, I can remember the character of the donkey because it was the comedy character. (My son played the Cockerel, who along with the Owl were the other comedy characters because he had to keep moaning that Jesus was waking people up when that was his job with his cock-a-doodle-do!).

The donkey had a very memorable argument with the taxi driver (it was a non-traditional nativity play) that had come to pick Mary and Joseph up. The donkey had a fantastic monologue about how he only had one job every dear, that it was very important and the taxi driver was muscling in on it and that he wasn't going to let it be

taken away, at some point, I think he threatened to contact his union! The child playing the donkey was so good at being angry and the taxi driver was so good at looking sheepish that it was very, very funny.

Anyway, there is no donkey in the biblical accounts (or taxi driver for that matter). Does that mean we should we remove all donkeys from all nativity sets? Or not invite the donkey to our donkey service on Christmas eve? No!

Maybe we can take it for granted that there was a donkey, just like saying if someone were going on a journey now, they would most likely go in a car, Mary and Joseph most likely went on a donkey?

But it did get me thinking, what else are we taking for granted in the nativity story?

Is the stable mentioned? – no. What about an innkeeper? – no. Were there animals? — not mentioned. What about angels at the birth? — sadly not (they were out on the hillside with the shepherds). The kings weren't royalty and we just don't know how many there were — and there is no mention of camels!

And on top of that, it also wasn't snowing, there was no robin flying around and Jesus probably wasn't very silent.

Have I ruined Christmas? — well I hope not! Because Christmas isn't about the donkey or the innkeeper or the robin or even the camels. It is an event that happened over 2000 years ago, I think we can expect a few details to get mixed up especially when they are the bits that, in the grand scheme of things, don't really matter.

We celebrate the good news that Jesus — the Son of God was born on earth. As *The Message* puts it, God "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood."

It is a completely wonderfully mind-blowing idea that Jesus, fully God and fully human, was born. As John says, Jesus is the Word that was with God in the beginning, that all things were created through him, and that Word became a tiny, helpless baby. The light of all had come into the darkness, and that light was going to show us the way and was going to be the way to salvation. It is mind-blowing, I don't profess to understand it all but it is good news and worth celebrating with or without a donkey.