

## Dunky the Donkey

Most people look at me and have no idea. Well, they wouldn't would they? How could they? They just see a donkey that gives rides to children. And nothing wrong with that. Nothing at all. But I've seen something most folks can only dream of, I've seen a very precious thing. My name's Dunky, my mum called me Duncan but all the kids I meet shorten it. So I'm Dunky. And I like that.

Things began I think when a man and woman were trying to get to Bethlehem. They had to put their names down on a very important list. Because there was a kind of referendum going on. They started out in a car they had borrowed, but then the engine overheated – hiss, boom! - and they had to leave the car by the roadside and walk to the nearest railway station. The train there went for one stop then was cancelled – 'Right! Everybody off!' - and so they had to get off and board a bus. The bus took them so far then ran out of fuel – chug chug blugh! And that's when I saw them. A weary couple sitting on their cases, sighing and scratching their heads and wondering what they could do now. It was dawn and I just saw two dark shapes, one of them very round indeed because all through this journey the woman was very pregnant! And by then she was tired and snappy and hungry for a fish and fig sandwich! Apparently being pregnant made her love fish and fig sandwiches. The man wandered over to the barn where I live and spotted me in the doorway. I saw his eyes light up then – ping! – and he pulled some coins from his pocket – chink! – left them in a little tower by the spot where I sleep and grabbed my reigns – lug! – and off we went – clip clop! He took me over to the woman and she climbed on board. Now I'm used to children on my back, but a woman with a tiny child inside her gave me a bit of a start – yikes! But I got used to it, and the man was kind and patted me and told me it wouldn't be too long. It was long though! Quite a trek – phew! – but we clip-clopped on and eventually, as it was getting dark again, we arrived in Bethlehem.

Then the fun began. You see everyone else had arrived too, so all the hotels and guest houses were jampacked with folks sleeping in the bedrooms, the backrooms and the bathrooms. Yikes! What could we do? The woman was rubbing her tummy a lot and saying, 'He's on his way. He's on his way!' I didn't know who she meant but I could feel her jiggling about up there on my back. Then the man let go of me and just ran off, and I thought 'Oh great! Thanks very much!' And we stood there in the street, blocking the way. With people squeezing past, saying, 'Scuse me! Scuse me! Do you mind!' Thankfully the man came back, his face flushed and his eyes wide and he grabbed my reigns – lug! – and practically ran me down to the end of the street. There was a little animal house there, and I could see a couple of sheep look at me and roll their eyes. 'Baa! Humbug!' – they seemed to say. We trotted in, the woman practically fell off me and she landed in the sheep's bedding. 'Baa! Humbug!' They didn't like that! And that was when it happened. It's hard to explain, but as the baby came out, and the woman yelled and the man cried and they both smiled... well... a bright light appeared in the sky. And I felt very strange indeed. And I knew I was seeing no ordinary baby. I mean, he cried, and they had to clean him up, and he was looking all pink and startled... like any baby... but I saw something else. I saw he was different. He was... not like any other child I'd ever given rides to before. It was like the world was in his eyes, and all the really good things of life were in his tiny fingers. Funny isn't it? To think that of a baby. But I wasn't the only one. Other people came to see him and it all got a bit crowded – Squeeze! Squeeze! Squeeze! Some scruffy shepherds, covered in sheep dung, ran in. And they could see it too, I'm pretty sure. And they went away talking about his eyes and his tiny fingers. And that was it. The precious thing. Best night of my life. That baby in the stable. Brilliant! I just had to tell you.