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# Advent Devotional "Witnesses: Donkeys"

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Advent Devotional  
December 24, 2014  
Witnesses: Donkey  
Luke 2:7; Matthew 21:5,7

My kind has worked with humans for two hundred generations. Not as long as sheep, but a long time nonetheless. Our ears and loudness (we can hear each other almost two miles away), strong sense of self-preservation (which humans call stubbornness), and work as beasts of burden have led humans to assume that we have low intelligence. Nothing could be further from the truth. We may not appear fetching with our shaggy coat and rugged structure fitted to reliability bearing burdens, and we may not move with great speed (unless food is involved), but we have good, retentive memories to go with keen minds.

Donkey lore, resplendent in those memories, stretches for millennia and contains much detail for recent and distant events alike. Since our average lifespan is about fifteen years, one human's story can involve several of our generations. So it is with our lore about The Voice.

My grandfather told stories of the human jack with whom he worked. This human built large and small things of wood, and my grandfather carried wood and finished products about. He became associated with the human woodworker when the jack lived with his jenny in her home. Everything changed when he selected a jenny for himself. She was very young when he chose her; she had lived less than one of our generations. And my grandfather said that his human suffered much turmoil

in making that decision; she was already mated when the jack chose her.

Shortly after that choice, the human prepared my grandfather for a journey. He would carry the jenny and supplies, while his human walked with them. They walked for seven dawns, and so many other humans were also traveling that when these reached their destination, there was no place for them in the common room. All three stayed together with the other animals.

The jenny had traveled without complaint, though she surely missed her own pace and particularly its jennies. She must have been lonely with only her jack; it was obviously time for her to foal. Sure enough, they found cover just in time. The night they arrived, she foaled!

That night was like none other, my grandfather said. The light was different, and there was more of it. As the night progressed, stable occupants became more and more restless. All sensed something unusual about to happen, something like but yet unlike a storm or an earthquake—something completely extraordinary. Then they heard The Voice. In a way, the foal sounded like every other human, but something indefinable made it completely different. None knew what the difference might be, but The Voice spoke to something ancient, something deep within each. It was at once strange and familiar, as if at some time in the distant past of their lives, each had heard it. The Voice stirred and strangely warmed them all.

The jenny put her foal in the feed trough. She would suckle and clean him, but when one of the humans wasn't holding the foal, he lay in that manger. Others

must have heard The Voice as well; beasts but also humans came to see the foal, acting strangely and then departing—still acting strangely!

My grandfather stayed with his human in the new place, carrying the things he had carried before. Occasionally he saw the foal and heard The Voice. He also mated with some jennies there and told them and their foals again and again about The Voice and particularly about that night. Eventually he left with his human pace and did not return.

I grew up hearing the stories of The Voice from my father, but I thought them the ramblings of a garrulous old donkey trying to make his life sound important, and probably not true. I found myself leaving the place of the stories for another place—much like my former home, only larger and noisier. Then, in that new place, something strange happened.

Some humans came and led me away. They prepared me to carry my first burden. Imagine my dissatisfaction when it turned out to be a human jack! I was prepared to be uncooperative when I heard The Voice! Suddenly I knew that my grandfather's stories were true, and that I would add my own stories to his, stories about The Voice and the difference that sound could make in a simple donkey's life.

Ray Granada