

Character Sketch

This month's bible study | Read Zechariah 9-11, Matthew 21:1-5

Jesus illustrated His humility when He chose the lowly donkey as His servant

When we think about the biblical story of Christmas, what often comes to mind are mangers, wise men, angels, shepherds and stars. But we don't often think about donkeys.

Donkeys are small, unglamorous beasts of burden. While they're useful for such things as bearing firewood, hauling produce to market or pulling up roots and stumps, they aren't animals that we associate with pedigree or status. You've probably never heard someone say, "What a beautiful donkey you have!"

However, the lowly donkey has served well the King of all creation. It played a key role in not only the Christmas story but also other key events in the life of Jesus. The Gospel narratives do not specifically say Mary rode on a donkey when she and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of about 80 miles (see Luke 2). But it is not likely that a young woman who was nine months pregnant would have walked that distance.

It is also not likely that Joseph would have owned a cart or a horse, based on his economic status. We must therefore assume, like most Christmas artists, that Mary traveled by donkey.

When Zechariah prophesied about the coming of Zion's king, he said: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey" (Zech. 9:9, NIV). Most students of the Bible assume this points to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem—and this is valid—but it can also refer to His

entry into Bethlehem while still in Mary's womb.

The *Fire Bible: Global Study Edition*, in its note about Zechariah 9:9, says, "The coming of the King (Christ's first coming) would be a great cause for rejoicing, not because of His royal splendor or conquering power, but because of His humility."

You can't get more humble than being born in a stable surrounded by a donkey, and a few head of other livestock. But there was indeed rejoicing both by the angels on high and by shepherds below when Jesus came in the form of a man, as a baby, so He might be like us in every way.

The next time we see Jesus with a donkey is in Matthew 21:6-11. Here, He enters Jerusalem in a manner similar to a conquering hero, returning triumphant to Rome. But, again, He did so in the most humble way—on a female donkey and the young colt she was training.

He did not come on a noble steed or riding in a powerful chariot; He came in gentleness and peace. He came prepared to die that we may be forgiven of our sins and be re-established in a right relationship with the Father.

At this Christmas season, think about the next time Jesus will appear. At that time He will come seated on a great white horse (see Rev. 19:11). He will come to put an end to all sin, suffering, sickness and sorrow.

He came humbly to a stable, He entered Jerusalem humbly on a donkey—but He will return in victory! This Christmas remember to look not only back to Jesus' birth but also forward to His soon return.