



The Promised Star



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I guess I should introduce myself. Hi, I'm Jack, the donkey.



I come from a long line of pretty important donkeys. Throughout the Bible, you can find my relatives chipping in behind the scenes, carrying heavy loads and being reliable helpers.



Do you remember Father Abraham, the guy with “many sons”? God blessed him with a lot of my family members.

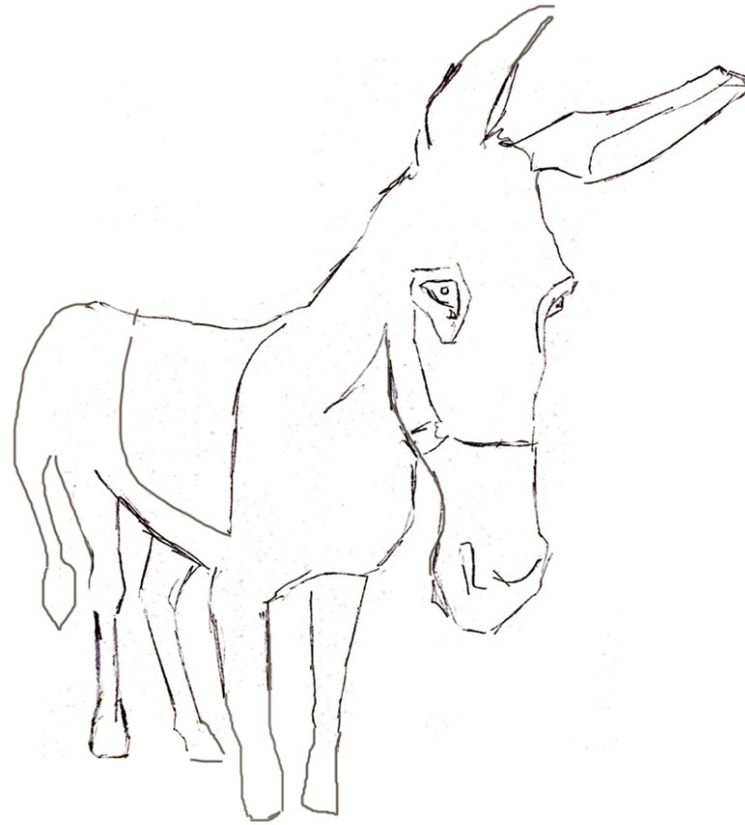


What about the story of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau? They got in a pretty big fight and later forgave each other. As a peace offering, Jacob gave Esau a herd of donkeys. What a great gift!



Oh yeah, don't forget Moses, the guy who talked to God in a burning bush and split the Red Sea. He put his wife and kids on a donkey and entered Egypt with God's staff.

Legend has it, a relative of mine – we call her Grandma Edna – was famous for actually speaking to a prophet who predicted the birth of the King of Kings. Can you believe it? It’s a long story, so I’ll try to make it short. See, there was this evil king named Balak who was afraid of God’s people. So he hired a well-known spiritual guy, Balaam, to curse them. The king said to him, “You have a reputation: Those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed.” But after speaking to God, Balaam realized that cursing the people was not an option.





But the evil King Balak wouldn't take no for an answer. He sent princes to offer Balaam an even greater reward, saying, "I'll pay you anything to curse these people." Balaam knew he had to ask God's permission first. Of course, God did not agree to the cursing, but he did say that Balaam could go meet King Balak, with one rule: "Only do what I tell you." So Balaam and Grandma Edna went to see the king.

On the long journey, Balaam started thinking more and more about all the money the king would give him. God knew his heart was getting greedy, so he sent an angel with a sword to block his path and remind him about what they agreed on. Balaam was so focused on getting rich that he did not see the angel, but you know who did? My Grandma Edna, his faithful donkey!



Three times she turned away to avoid the angel and three times Balaam punished her angrily. Finally, Grandma Edna laid down and said, “What have I done that you would treat me this way?” She said it right out loud! Using people-words! Weirdly enough, Balaam replied back to her, “You have embarrassed me! Now, I look like a fool.” Grandma Edna replied, “I have carried you for years. Have I ever given you reason not to trust me?” Then God opened Balaam’s eyes to see the angel.





The angel asked Balaam, “Why have you punished your donkey? She saw me blocking your path because your heart was not right. If she had not turned away, you would have met my sword.” Balaam was very sorry and the angel responded, “Go see the king, but remember to only say what you’re told from God.” So, Balaam and Grandma Edna went to meet King Balak.

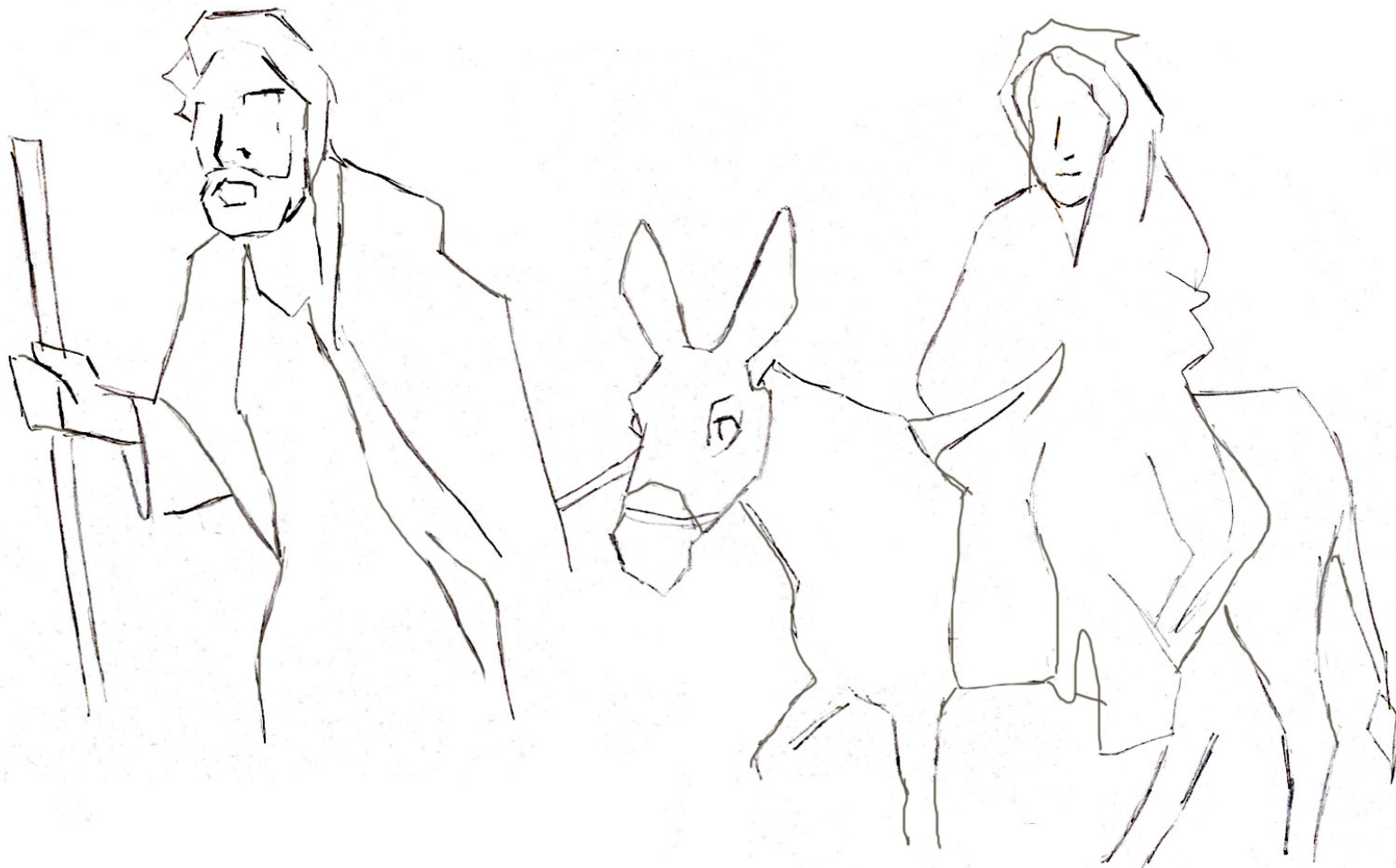
The king took Balaam to a high place to curse God's people, but instead, Balaam blessed them three times. In his final blessing, he spoke of a star that would rise, a promised son, the savior of the world.

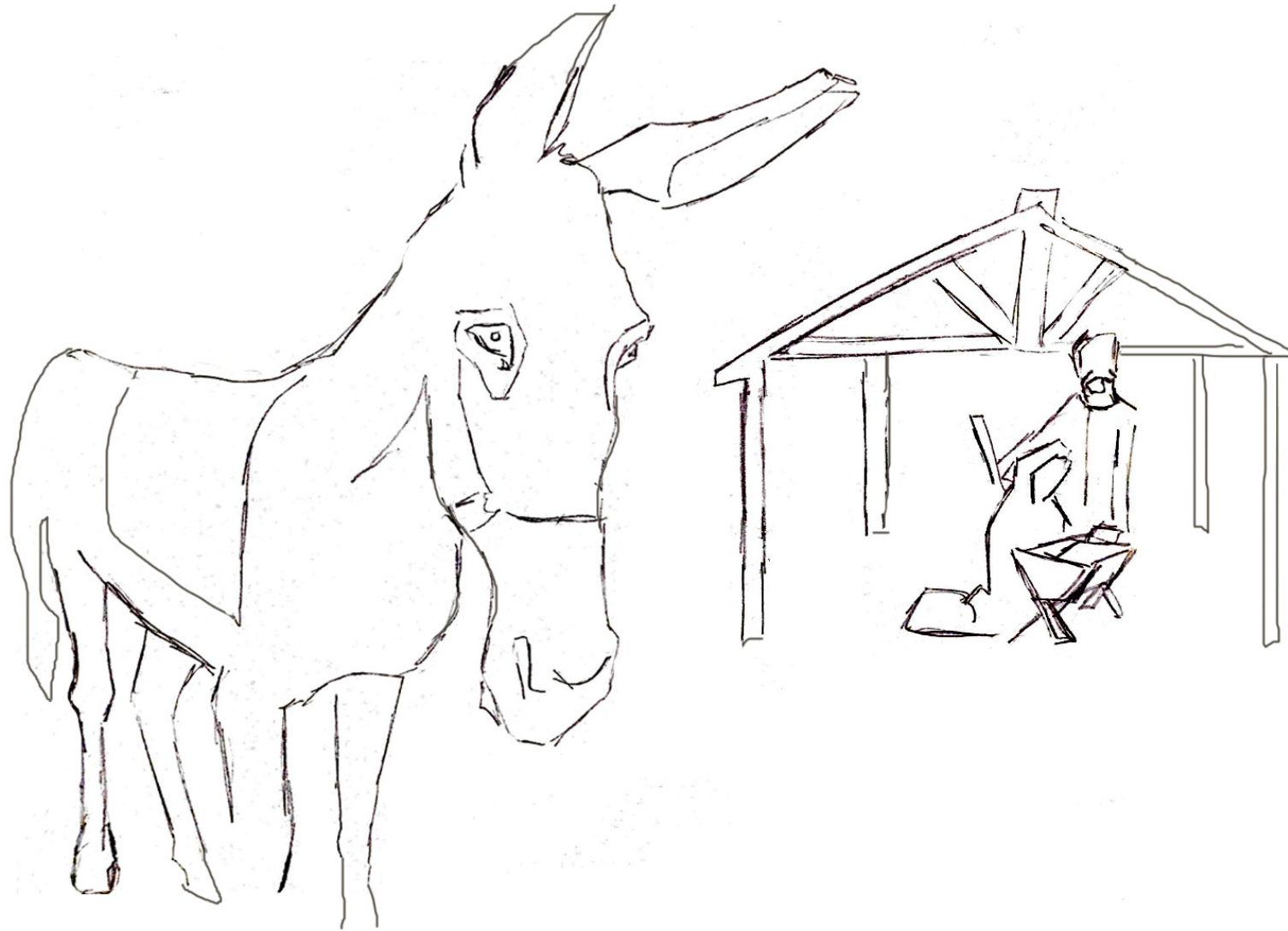




So, you see, God gave many of my relatives some pretty important roles to play in his BIG story. I was beginning to wonder if I was special enough to be part of it? What would God do with a stubborn donkey like me? While I was busy wondering, God was at work.

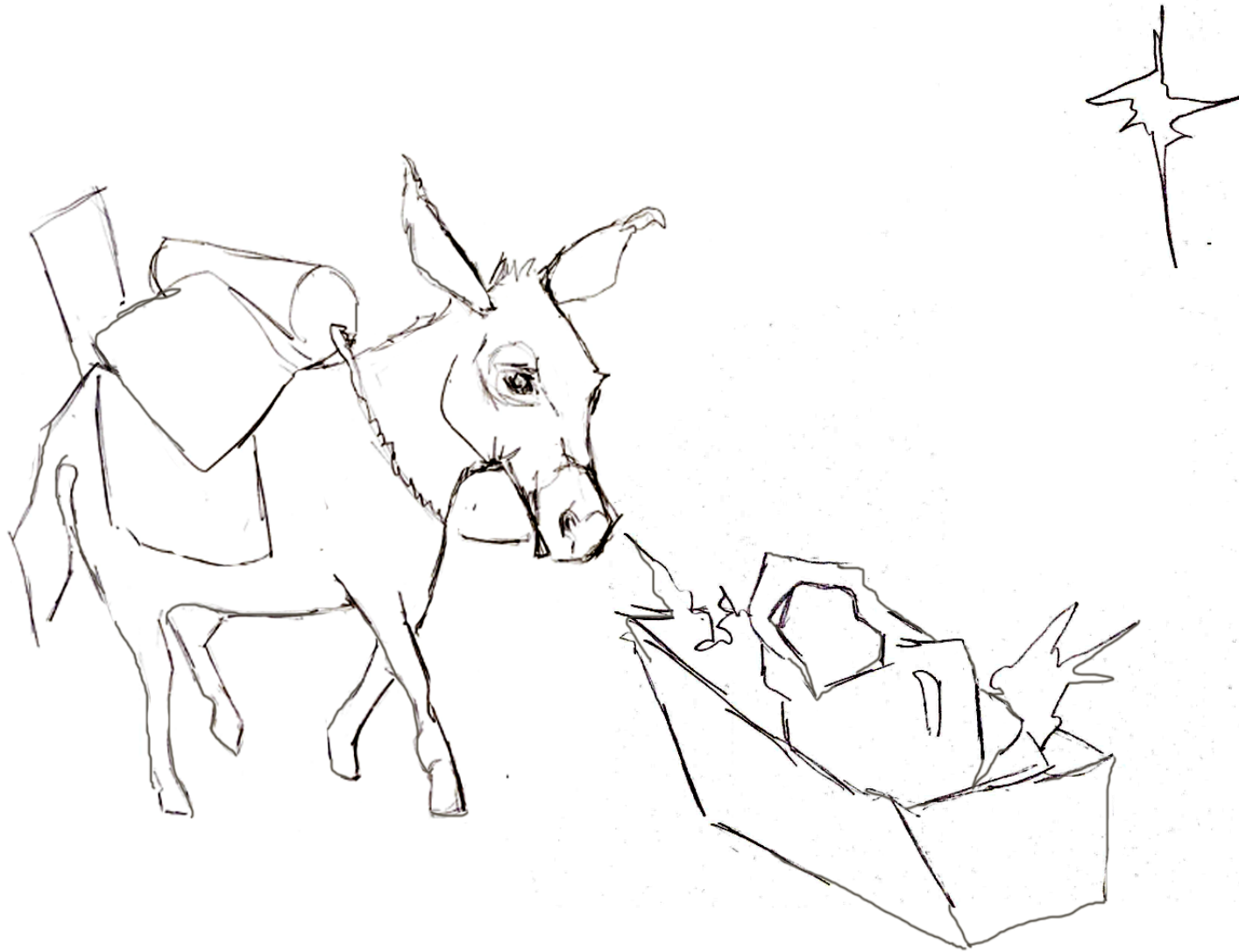
One day, my owner Joseph let me know I'd be carrying some precious cargo, his pregnant wife Mary. No pressure! He said we were going to Bethlehem to be counted for a census. I didn't quite know what that meant, but I wanted to make him proud. I wasn't sure what the journey would bring, but somehow I knew God was with us.

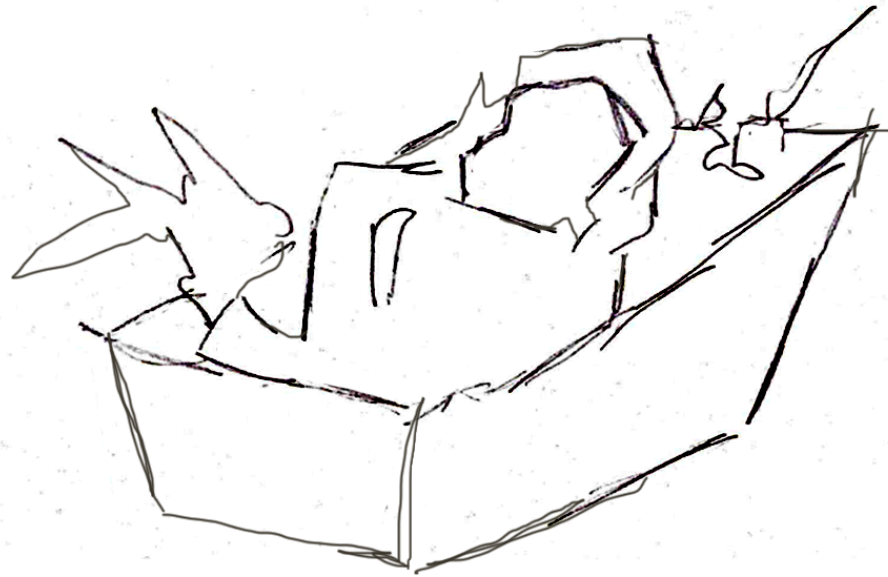




When we finally arrived in Bethlehem, we were exhausted but grateful that God had provided a safe trip. Just when I thought we would part ways, Mary & Joseph bunked with me and the other animals for the night. There was no room in the guesthouse.

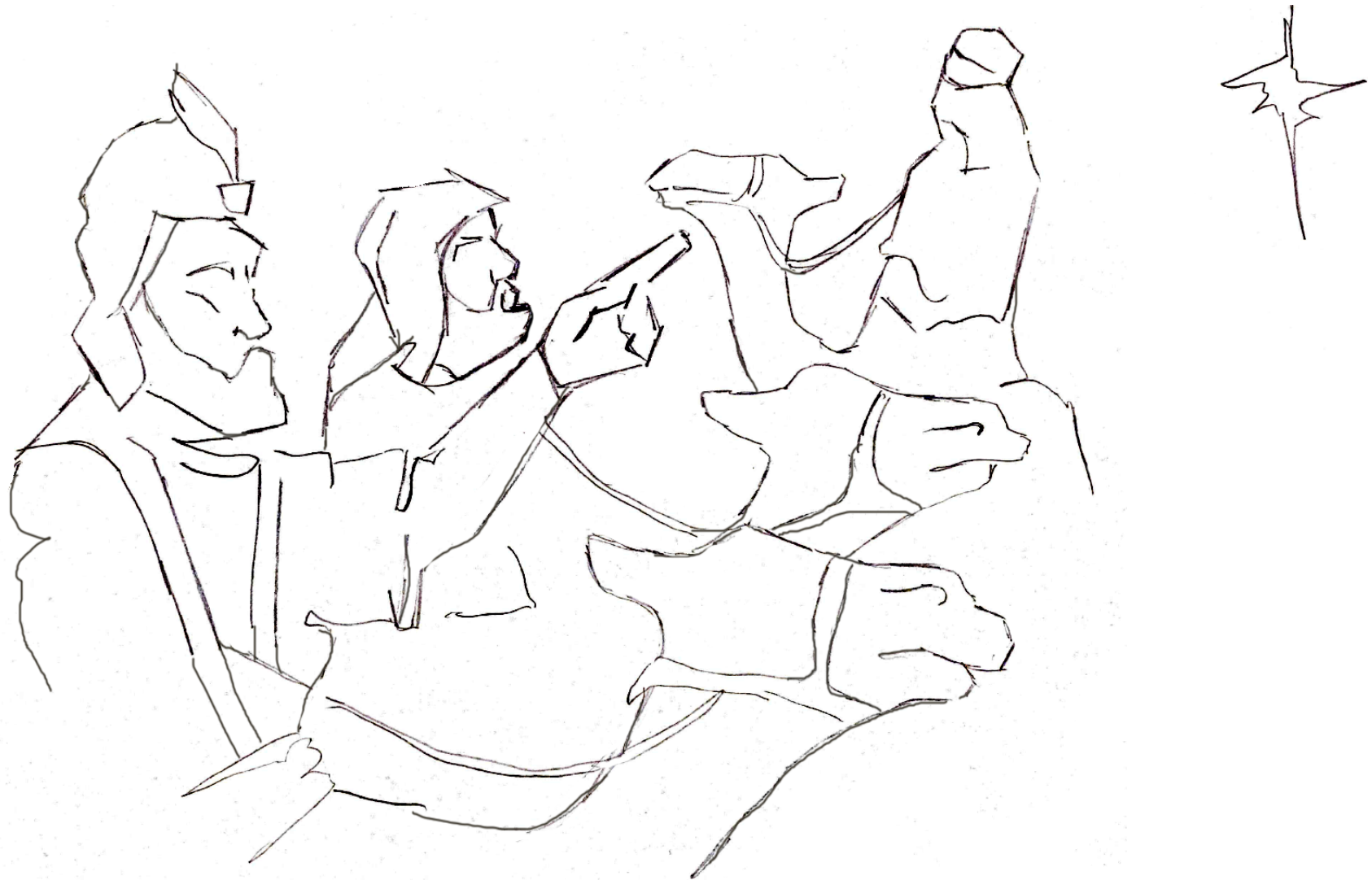
Before we knew it, the time came for Mary to give birth and I had a front-row seat. I wasn't quite prepared for it, but I tried my best to remain silent and make space. I even offered my feeding trough as a bed for the little one.

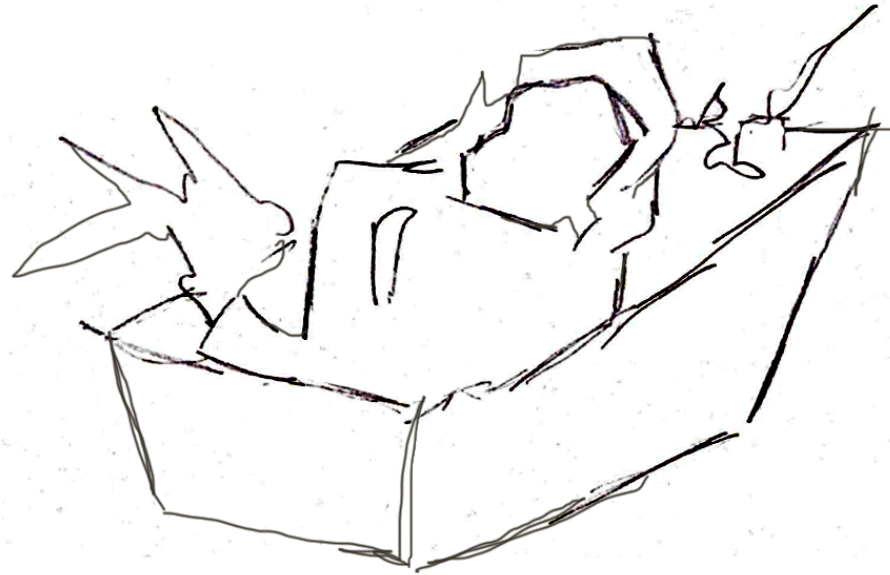




When he finally came, I was amazed. There was something so special about him. Everything made sense when Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, which means, “the Lord saves.” The stories about Grandma Edna were true! This was the child Balaam had spoken of many years ago, the promised savior of the world!

Balaam's words were once again confirmed when wise men from the east came to celebrate Jesus' birth. They asked, "Where is the newborn King? We saw his star rise." The promised star brought them directly to us. But I think we all know who the real "star" of this story is Jesus.





Story by Paige Slighter/ Pictures by Erik Swenson
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