

The story of Jenny - Christmas Day 2021.

I don't often get to tell my story, but just recently my old man came to see me with some questions on his heart, and because God had blessed me with a special task, I was able to help him.

He came into my stable carrying an armful of fresh hay, and sat heavily down on a stool that he usually used for milking my cow friends, but sometimes, when I've had a foal, he would milk me too, and especially if one of his grandchildren was sick.

My old man wanted to be sure of something, and being a bit forgetful, he wanted me to tell him my story again.

It had been a long, hard journey - around 90 miles - from the northern town of Nazareth, just about 10 miles west of the Sea of Galilee, to Bethlehem, and it had been winter time.

Two youngsters needed me to take them down all the way to Bethlehem in the hill country of Judea in the south. They were only teenagers but the young girl was carrying a baby in her tummy, so she had to ride all the way as she wasn't far off her time.

I felt sorry for her as I knew for myself how hard it is to try and work when I have a foal ready to come and greet the world. But Joseph, the young man, didn't force the pace, and Mary was easy on my strong back, and I

avoided the difficult rocks so that I didn't stumble and jar her.

We had set out at dawn on the first day, with some food for all of us in panniers across my haunches, and Joseph carried water in skins for us, replenishing them at every well we came across, and drawing some for me too.

We didn't push the pace and it took us a full four days to cover the journey, and we arrived in the town of Bethlehem late in the evening.

People were finishing their evening meals and closing up for the night. Dogs were whining to be allowed into the houses to keep out of the cold as snow was just beginning to fall. I saw a

few cats creeping into barns to see if any late mice were off guard, and then curling up in piles of hay.

We stopped in the middle of the street as Joseph had been knocking on doors to see if there were any places with a room to spare - but so far he had had no luck. I was tired too by now, and I was aware that Mary, the young girl on my back, was getting restless and moaning quietly.

Suddenly, I felt a warm, wet sensation over the small of my back and Mary gave a start and a big groan. "Joseph!", she cried, "it's coming - it's coming now!"

"O dear God!", he muttered, "there's nowhere to go!" And he rushed to hold her.

Just then I caught the voice of a cow nearby, telling me to come to her; so I followed her gentle lowing. It was easy to see in the dark streets because of an amazingly bright star in the night sky, which seemed to be leading me towards a stable hewn out of the rock, where I could see my friend the cow nodding slowly to say, "This way, that's right - you'll all be all right here; there's plenty of room and it's warm."

Now, I've had some nights out under the stars - in fact, I like it in the summer time when I can look up and see all of them twinkling like

fireflies, and hear the crickets and frogs singing before they go to sleep, but I have never seen a star the like of this one - huge and shining brighter than sunlight on a waterfall, and with a halo around it like a dazzling rainbow that seemed to shimmer and dance for joy.

And yet there was the stillest hush - it seemed over all the world at that moment... until I was brought back to my task.

We just made it to the stable before Mary, straining and crying, pushed out her little foal - and he cried. We didn't have much in the way of cloths there, so Mary was happy to let me

and my cow friend, who told me her name was Judith, lick him to get him clean.

Mary was smiling now, Joseph wiping away her sweat and tears, and just then a big old dog - or he could have been a wolf - shuffled in, low on the ground, growling softly, as if looking for food or somewhere warm to rest.

I thought he was on his own, he wasn't hurting anyone, but then following him came the sound of more shuffling feet and the distinct bleating of sheep.

I'm not being rude, but you can't mistake the smell of sheep - or their shepherds. Actually, it's a smell I rather like, and I've always found

sheep good company - even if a little short on conversation.

The shepherds came in wide-eyed and awed, looking at Mary's little child, now half-asleep and falling off her breast. Joseph had found an old sheep-swaddling cloth, and wrapped him up against the prickly hay and keep him warm.

The shepherds were muttering to themselves about some singing they had heard whilst in the open fields, and how they had felt sure that the sound had meant they should come to see this little baby.

That's about all I remember about that night, because it had been a long four days of travel, and I was ready to sleep. But as my eyes were closing, I was vaguely aware of the smell of camels and more voices with strange accents, and the scent of the smoke that came from the temple when we passed it going through Jerusalem.

My old man got up rather stiffly and said, "Thanks, Jenny, I remember it now. It seems you must have a very special family, old girl, because your grand-foal has just been borrowed by some of that baby's followers, and they are throwing blankets on him and cutting palms for some sort of procession.

No doubt I'll get that story from him later."