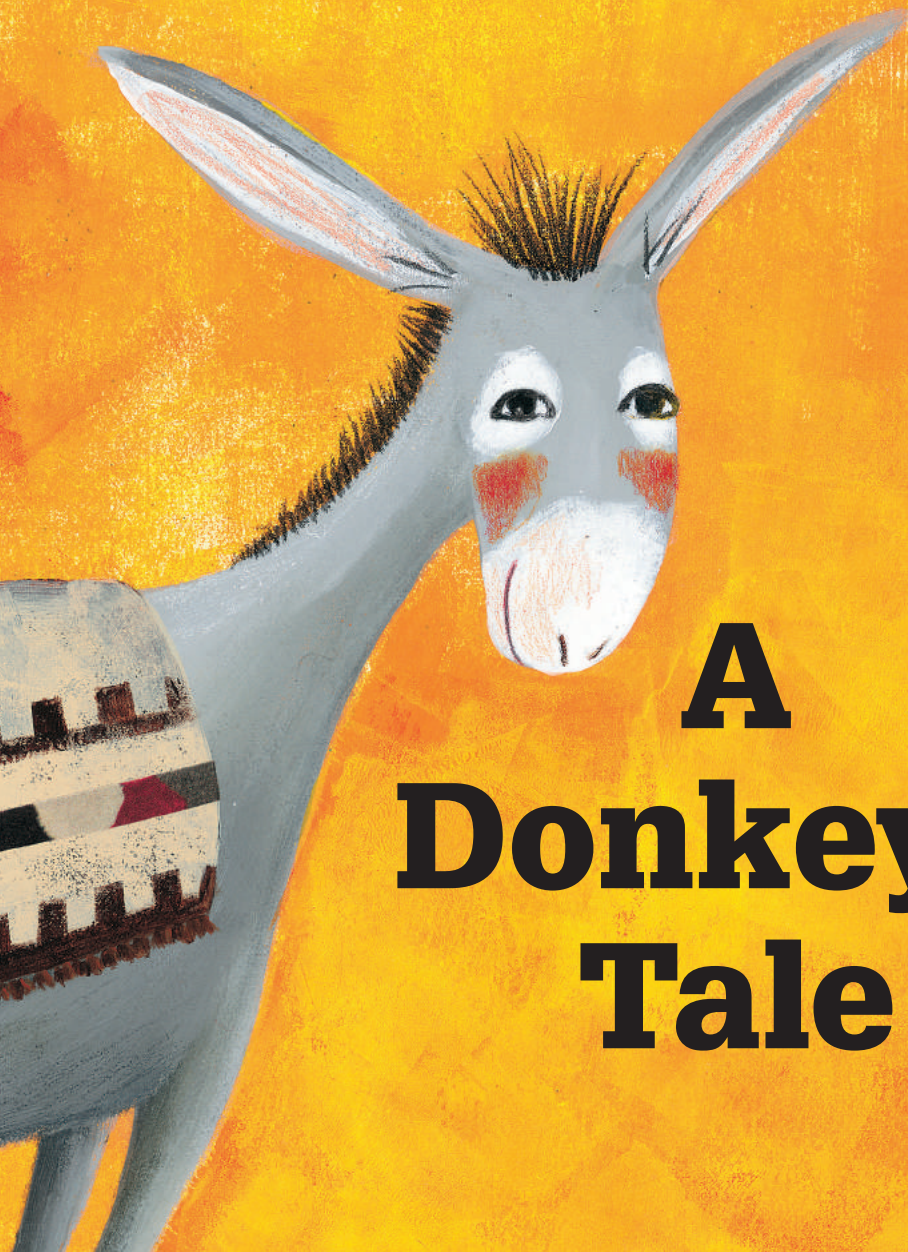


Stefano Gorla



**A
Donkey's
Tale**



A Donkey's Tale

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Illustrated by Angela Marchetti

Ladan

I am Ladan, son of Abinar, son of Nad. I am a light-haired, gray donkey. “You will witness many wonders; that’s why we named you Ladan,” my mother said. My name means *witness*. My mother was right—I have seen many amazing things. I have walked up and down the Holy Land along the streets of Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. I followed a man named Jesus and traveled with his disciples. Sometimes I stood close. Other times I watched from afar. I have been blessed. I have known Jesus since he was a baby because I was there when he was born. I heard his words and saw his kind deeds. I loved every minute I was with him—and am happy every time I remember. Now I tell the story to whoever wants to listen. Because I, Ladan the donkey, was there.



The Miracle of Life

It was a dark time of year, and by the time we got to Bethlehem it was late evening. The innkeeper brought us to a nearby stable and made space for the couple among some animals there. Joseph was busy trying to make things comfortable. Mary looked tense. Her face was tired and her belly was big. They were both exhausted and hungry from the long journey. So was I, from carrying her. Joseph gently spread a cover over the straw and invited Mary to carefully sit down. A restful silence surrounded us and I fell asleep in the straw.

Then, as sudden as a thunderstorm, the room was filled with gasps for air and an unfamiliar cry. A child, a little boy, had been born. Mary held him close to herself. Joseph pushed me closer so that I could warm them with my breath. It was then that I saw the smiling baby. "His name is Jesus," said Joseph. "It means 'God saves.'" He smiled. The new mother smiled and smiled. And I, Ladan the donkey, also smiled. I saw the miracle of life because . . . *I was there.*





Adoration of the Shepherds and the Magi

One shepherd gave the baby a warm blanket. Another shepherd brought some milk for the joyful mother and cheese for her husband. A bright light stopped in the sky above us; it helped others to find us. Mary smiled and, with an astonished look, gazed at Joseph and then at her baby. Mary noticed everything: her baby's sweet breath, the comings and goings of the shepherds with their gifts, and the silence of the night illuminated by the light of the great star.

Then, unknown visitors came from faraway lands. The three men and their camels had traveled a long way, but the men were more happy than tired. They also brought gifts for this little baby: gold because he is a king for his people; frankincense because he is the Son of God; and fragrant myrrh, for someday he—like all men—would die. They placed their gifts at the feet of the little one and his mother. The camels hissed at me, but Joseph led me behind the baby. Little Jesus looked at me and smiled. I know all this because . . . *I was there.*

An Escape into Egypt

“Quickly,” whispered Joseph, “we must leave quickly.” It was still night, but Joseph was collecting their few things and loading the sacks on my back. “The dream, the sign . . .” he murmured to himself, then he gently woke Mary and the baby. “We must leave now, Mary. The evil King Herod is searching for Jesus and plans to kill him.” Mary’s face flashed with questions and fear. “Let’s go, Ladan. Let’s go,” Joseph urged, almost as if any delay was my fault. “Let’s go!” he repeated to give himself strength and courage. In the middle of all the commotion, the child looked silently at his mother and then at Joseph. He saw their quick gestures and their fear. Yet baby Jesus was peaceful and calm. While Mary was seating herself on my back, he looked at me and smiled. Jesus smiled at me, Ladan the donkey, and I carried him to safety because . . . *I was there.*

