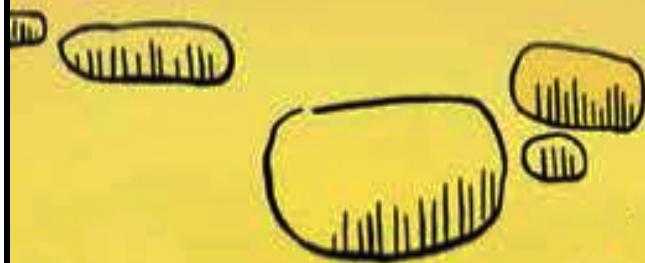


A Christmas Long Ago

—As told by Trudge and Zippy



Hi,
I'm Zippy!

And
I'm Trudge!

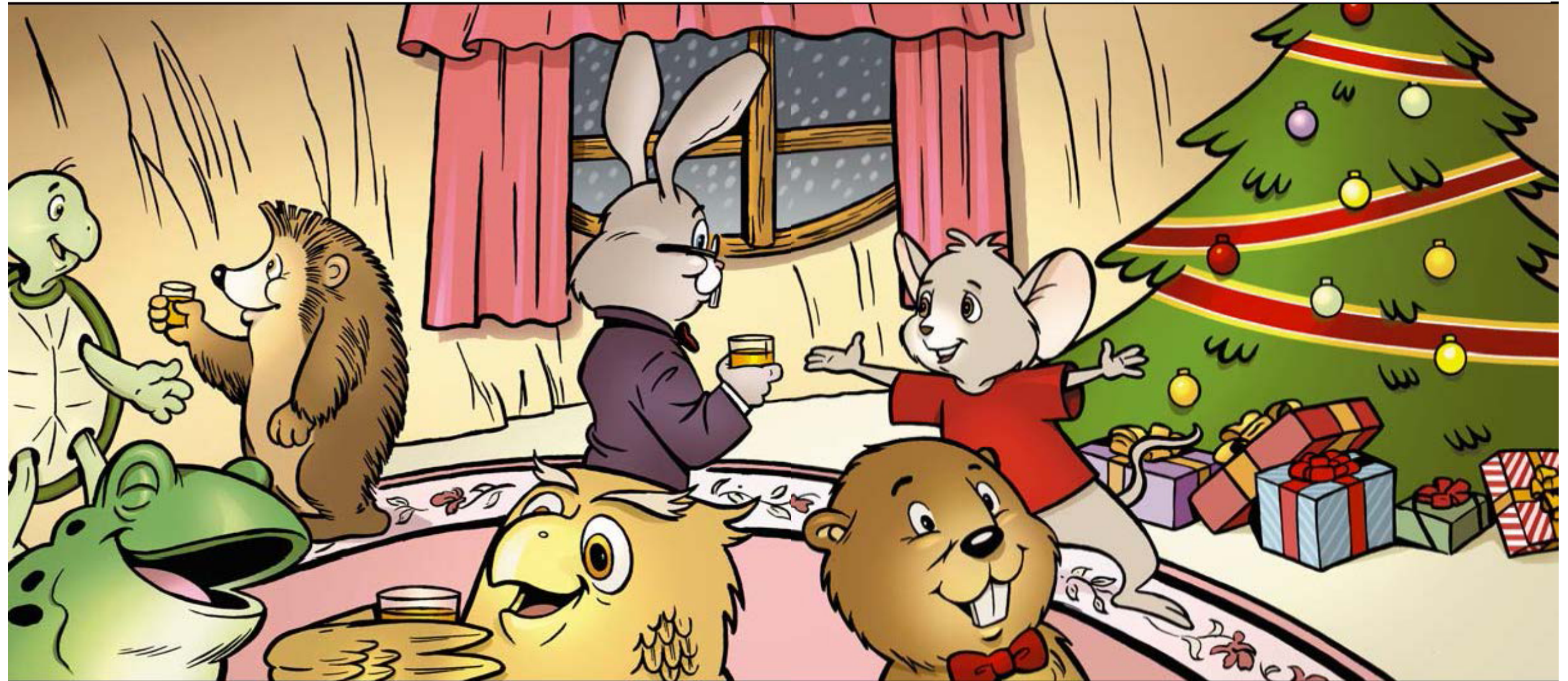




It's Christmastime, and we love to celebrate! On Christmas Eve all of our family and friends will be coming over.



I can hardly wait for all the delicious treats we'll eat, like pizza, cheesecake, and cheese sticks ... Oh, and don't forget the presents! I wonder what I'll get this year? I hope I get a giant chunk of cheese!





But Zippy, Christmas isn't only about the parties and food and presents, is it? Isn't Christmas when we celebrate Jesus' birthday?



You're right, Trudge. Well, sometimes I get so excited about the food, presents, and singing that I forget why we celebrate Christmas in the first place.

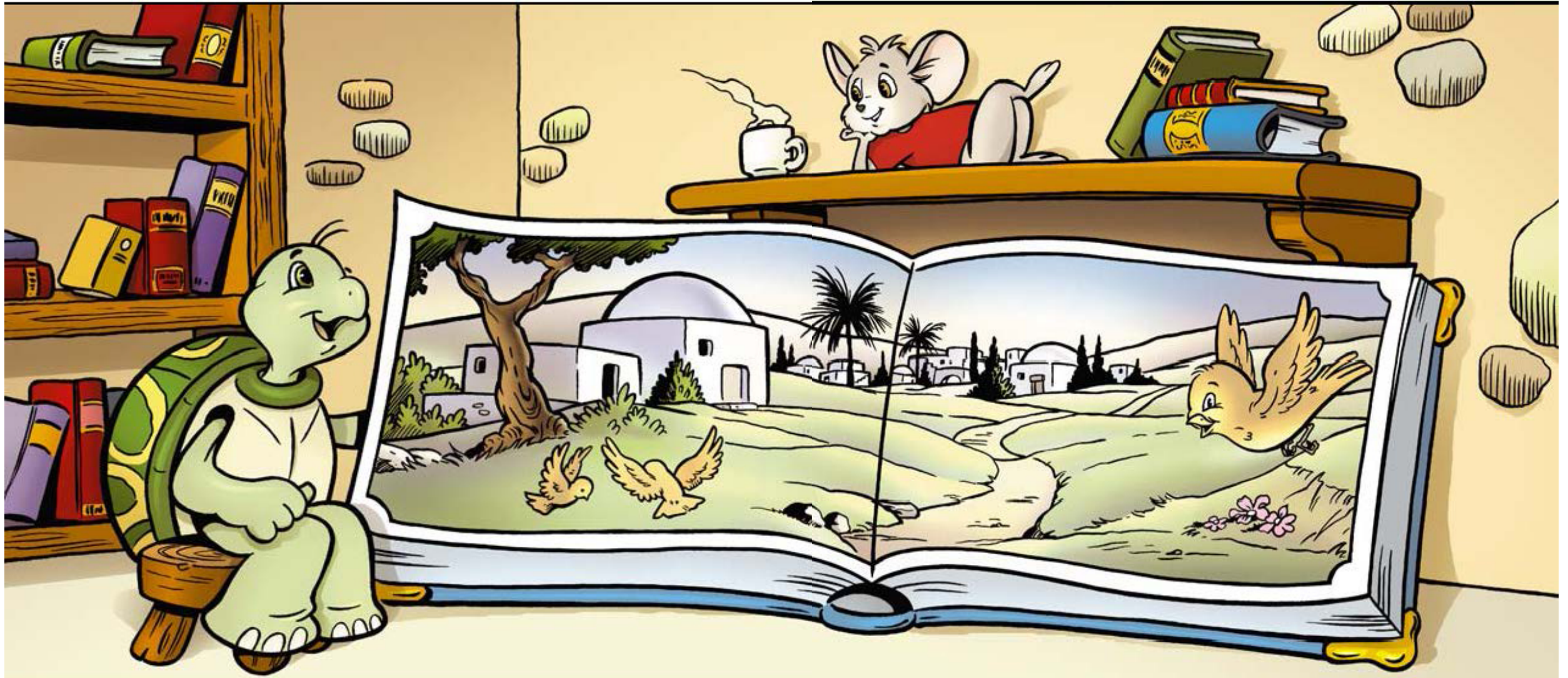




Do you kids know the story of the very first Christmas?
Zippy, why don't we tell the kids the story of Baby Jesus?
This is one of my favorite stories.



Me too! It happened a long, long, long time ago—in fact,
over two thousand years ago, in a place called Palestine
or Israel.

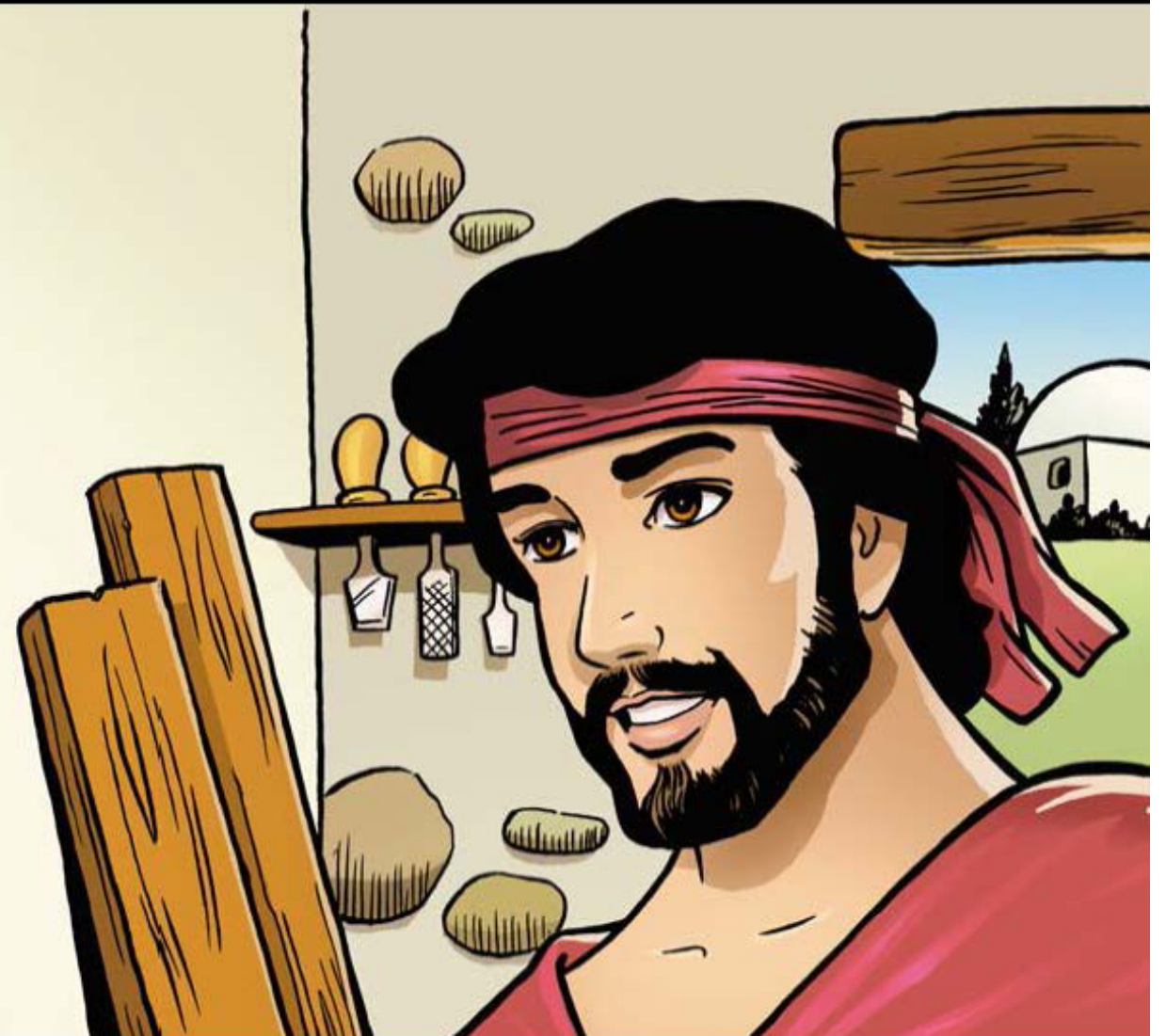




In a little house in the town of Nazareth lived a young woman named Mary. Mary was going to be married to a good man named Joseph.



Joseph was a carpenter. A carpenter is someone who builds or fixes things that are made out of wood. Sounds fun, doesn't it?





One day something amazing happened to Mary. An angel of the Lord visited her.

"Who are you?" Mary asked the angel.

The angel answered Mary and said: "I am Gabriel! Don't be afraid, Mary. God loves you very much, and He is very happy with you. I have been sent by God to tell you that you will have a son. He will be a very special child."



"I'm going to have a son?" Mary asked in surprise.

Gabriel said, "His name will be Jesus. He will be a great man, and will be called the Son of God!"

"I am God's humble servant. May God's will be done," Mary replied.

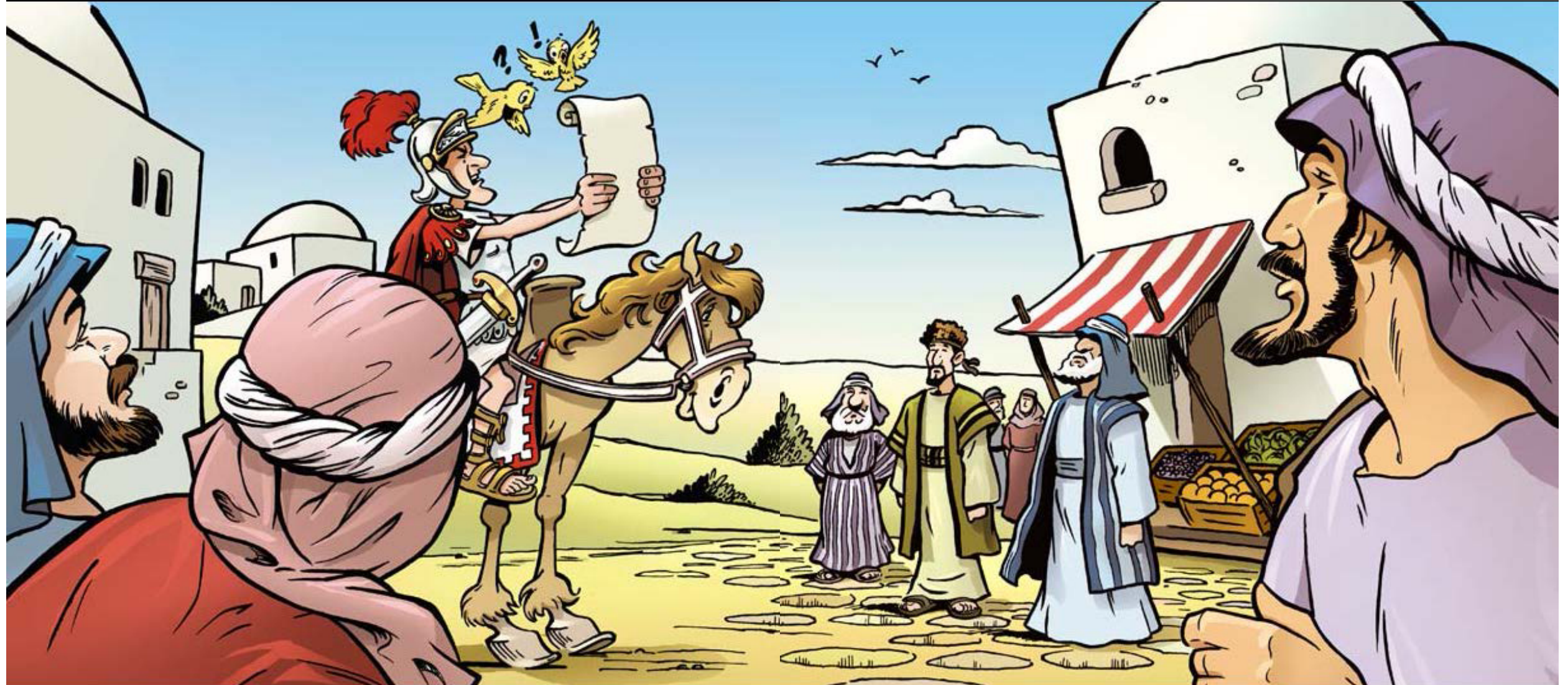
Mary wanted to do what God was asking of her, because she loved God.





Near the time that Mary was going to have her baby, soldiers announced a new law:

"Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, commands that everyone return to the city where they were born, for a census!"





A census is when a government counts all the people in their land. The Romans did this so they could make sure people were paying their taxes. A tax is money people must pay to their government.



Bethlehem was where Joseph was from, so he had to go there to be counted—and he had to take Mary too. Mary and Joseph traveled for several days from Nazareth to Bethlehem. But when they got to Bethlehem, there was a problem.

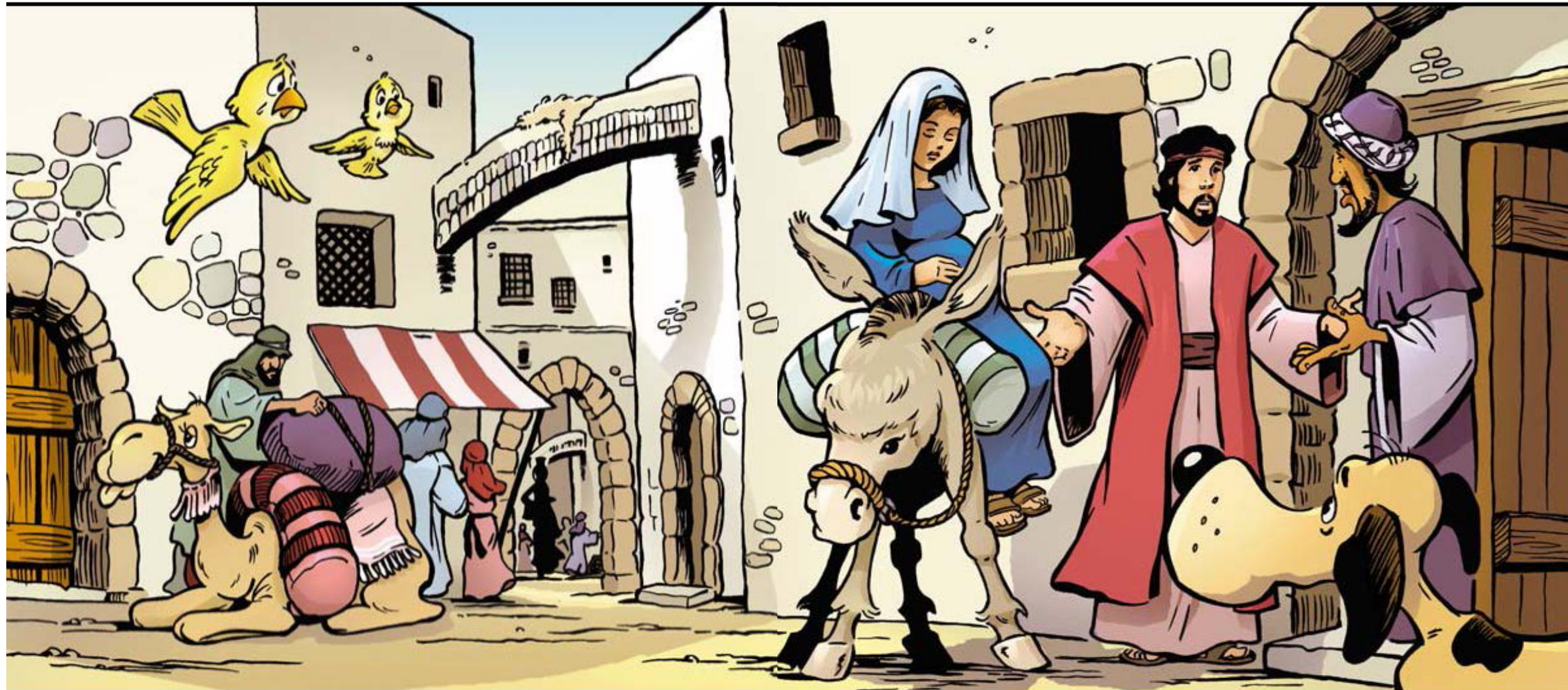




All the hotels were full! Well, they weren't called hotels then, they were called inns! Joseph and Mary had been traveling for a long time, so they were very tired!



They looked and looked for a place to stay, but every place was full. And now Mary was about to have her baby. They didn't know what to do!





Joseph knocked on the door of one of the very last inns in town. There was no room in that inn either! But the innkeeper was a kind man, and he helped Joseph and Mary find a good, but unusual, place to stay.



It wasn't a fancy inn. In fact, it wasn't an inn at all! It was a place where no one would have expected the Son of God to be born.





It wasn't a palace, or a castle. And it wasn't a big, fancy hospital either. God's son was born in a humble stable! A stable is a building where farm animals sleep at night.



Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus were nice and warm in that little stable. God had prepared a place for them. There was also a big star shining brightly in the sky on that wonderful night!





Nearby, some shepherds were watching their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared in the sky and spoke to the shepherds!

He said, "Don't be afraid! I bring you good news!

Today a savior is born, Christ the Lord. You will find this baby lying in a manger."

Then the whole sky filled with a big crowd of angels, who were praising God and singing.





That must have been quite a sight! They were so happy that Jesus had been born!

When the angels left, the shepherds ran to the stable, and found Baby Jesus in the manger just like the angel had told them they would.



Did you know that if you stop and listen, you can hear the angels' song in your heart, showing you the way to Jesus?



Yes, that's right. Oh, I like that story, Zippy!





We hope you kids have a very happy Christmas. Remember, love is the best present you can give to anyone during this happy season! There are many ways that you can show love to others. Let's see...



You can share your toys, give a friend a gift, or show someone love by doing something thoughtful. When you show kindness to others you make them happy, and you will be happy, too. Have fun, kids! And merry Christmas!



