ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

CHRISTIAN

The Tale of Eleazar
Priscilla Noble-Mathews
AuthorHouse UK
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Three Stars (out of Five)

First published in *Good Housekeeping* magazine in 1966, Priscilla Noble-Mathews' *The Tale of Eleazar* recounts the New Testament story of the birth of Jesus as told through the eyes of the Virgin Mary's donkey. It begins with a charming enough conceit: What would the joys and tribulations of Mary look like from the point of view of a loyal little donkey named Eleazer who accompanies her from the days of her carefree youth to her marriage to Joseph and the birth of Jesus?

As the story unfolds, young readers familiar with the biblical account will quickly catch onto the intellectual interplay between events. The young carpenter coming around to the teenage Mary's house is none other than her future husband and stepfather to the Christ child. When Eleazar, after a long journey, falls asleep in a barn and awakens to the crying of a baby, savvy readers understand, without being told, that those cries mark the entrance of Jesus into the world.

However, a young reader coming to this story without prior exposure to the New Testament version of Mary's life may be more mystified than entertained or enlightened. It is difficult to imagine, for example, what an unschooled reader might make of the passage in which Eleazar describes an eerie scene: Mary's house is "shimmering as if the wings of a mighty bird were fanning the air around it," and, when the odd moment passes, the breeze ruffles the donkey's coat "like the hand of an unseen messenger departing." For a reader familiar with the New Testament, this passage may resonate as a lovely description of Mary's encounter with the Holy Spirit. But it's much less clear how it, and other passages like it, will appear to a child without knowledge of the New Testament story.

There are other problems with this book. With just three black-and-white illustrations, it is not a book in which the artwork may prove as appealing, or as important, as the text. And one wishes that Noble-Mathews had made corrections to a fair number of typographical and grammatical errors before reprinting her story. In this slim, sparse volume, lapses may stand out

even to a young audience.

A charming, if less than professional product, *The Tale of Eleazar* will appeal to a specific segment of young readers.

Diane Taylor