



THE STORY OF MARY

These moments in Mary's life offer us the opportunity to learn from her and emulate her response to God. Mary teaches us how to lead our lives in faith and hope and love.

Mary was a young Jewish woman who lived in Nazareth in what is now Israel. The early traditions of the Christian community named Mary's parents Anne and Joachim. Because of Mary's faithfulness as a Jewish woman, we can imagine that her parents were also devout Jews and raised their daughter in accordance with their faith. Their tender care and devotion helped Mary to grow into the confident, yet humble young woman who would say yes to God.

Because of the time and area in which Mary lived, we can make some pretty good guesses about what her life was like. Mary was probably a peasant. Life in a rural village of the Middle East such as Nazareth would have been filled with hard work. Most women and many men were illiterate.

During this time period, Mary's homeland was occupied by the Romans. It was a difficult life under Roman rule, filled with violence and poverty. The Jews looked for a Messiah who would liberate them from the oppressive rule of Caesar. Mary notes the injustice of the world around her in her *Magnificat* when she recalls God's promise to "[throw] down the rulers from their thrones, but [lift] up the lowly." (Luke 1:46–55)

As a woman deeply rooted in the Jewish faith, Mary trusted that God heard the cries of his people and would "remember his mercy." (Luke 1:54) Too often we forget that Mary and Jesus were Jews. In her article "In Search of the Real Mary"¹ theologian Elizabeth Johnson says that too often we "bleach" Mary of her Jewishness: "We've done this ethnically by turning her swarthy Jewish complexion into fair skin and blonde hair and blue eyes. But we've also done this religiously by turning her deeply rooted Jewish piety into that of a latter-day Catholic. She wasn't." This, Johnson notes, "does no honor to [Mary's] memory."

¹ Elizabeth Johnson, "In Search of the Real Mary" in *Catholic Update* (May 2001).
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0501.asp>

Mary would have been about 15 years old when she received God’s message that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. She said yes to God and became pregnant with God’s Son. This posed quite a problem in Mary’s society. Because she was unmarried, she could have been killed as an adulteress. An angel told Joseph that his betrothed Mary was pregnant with a child conceived through the Holy Spirit. Joseph listened to God’s messenger and did not leave Mary or shame her. Instead he married Mary and protected her. In the last month of her pregnancy, Mary and Joseph had to make a long and difficult journey to Bethlehem. After Jesus was born, they became refugees, escaping to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod’s soldiers. They lived as refugees for a while until it was safe to return to their homeland and settle in Nazareth.

In this setting, Mary and Joseph raised Jesus to be a faithful Jew, aware of the injustices in the world, but believing in God’s justice, mercy, and love—believing that there is another way. By doing so, they changed the world.

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Illustrations: Yoshi Miyake

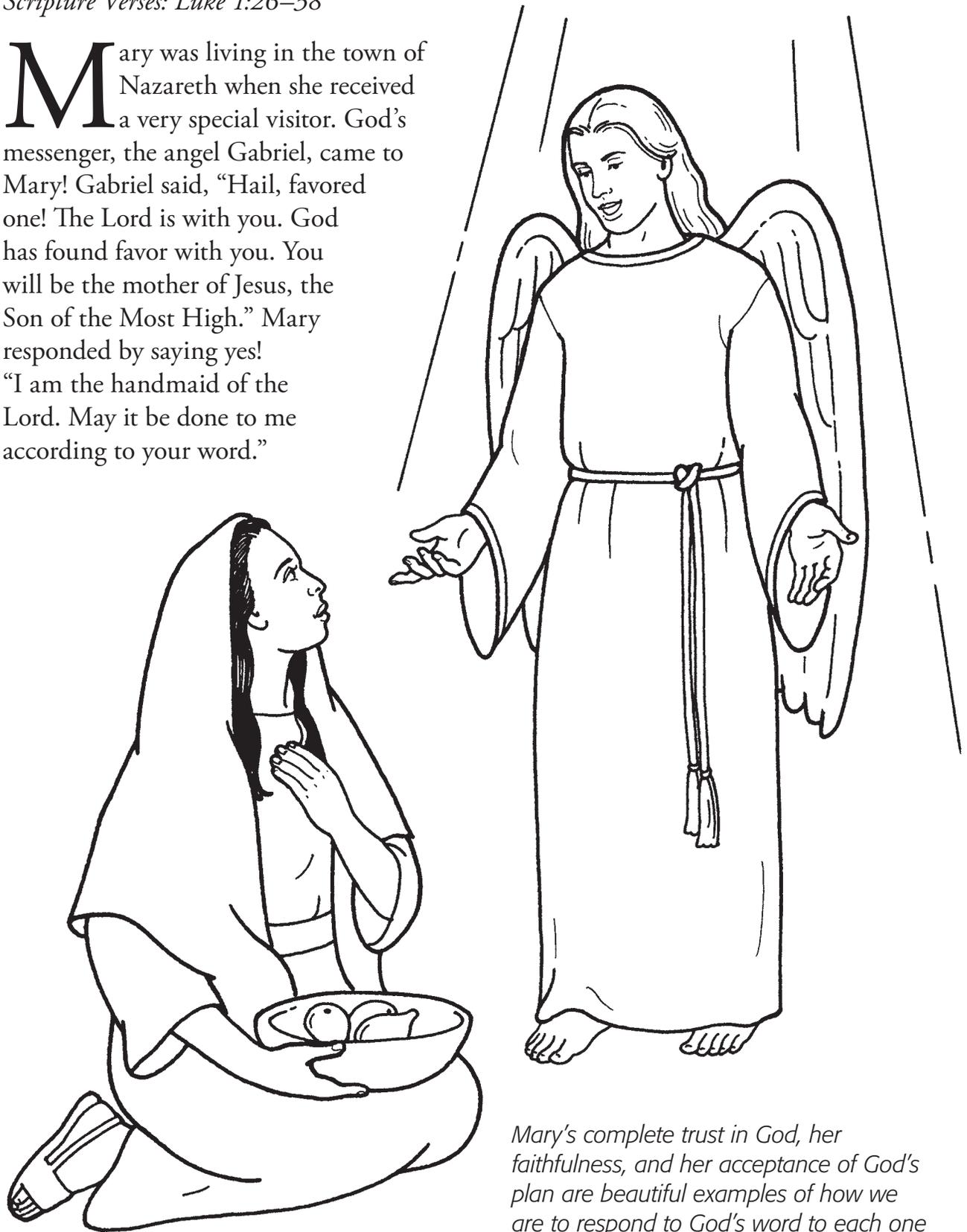
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Annunciation

Scripture Verses: Luke 1:26–38

Mary was living in the town of Nazareth when she received a very special visitor. God’s messenger, the angel Gabriel, came to Mary! Gabriel said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you. God has found favor with you. You will be the mother of Jesus, the Son of the Most High.” Mary responded by saying yes! “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”



Mary’s complete trust in God, her faithfulness, and her acceptance of God’s plan are beautiful examples of how we are to respond to God’s word to each one of us. Jesus, help us to say yes to you.

Visitation

Scripture Verses: Luke 1:39–45

Mary had learned from the angel that her relative Elizabeth was also going to have a baby. Mary went on a difficult journey to see her. Elizabeth's son would grow up to be John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, she cried out, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Elizabeth called Mary blessed because she knew that Mary was going to be the mother of God's Son.

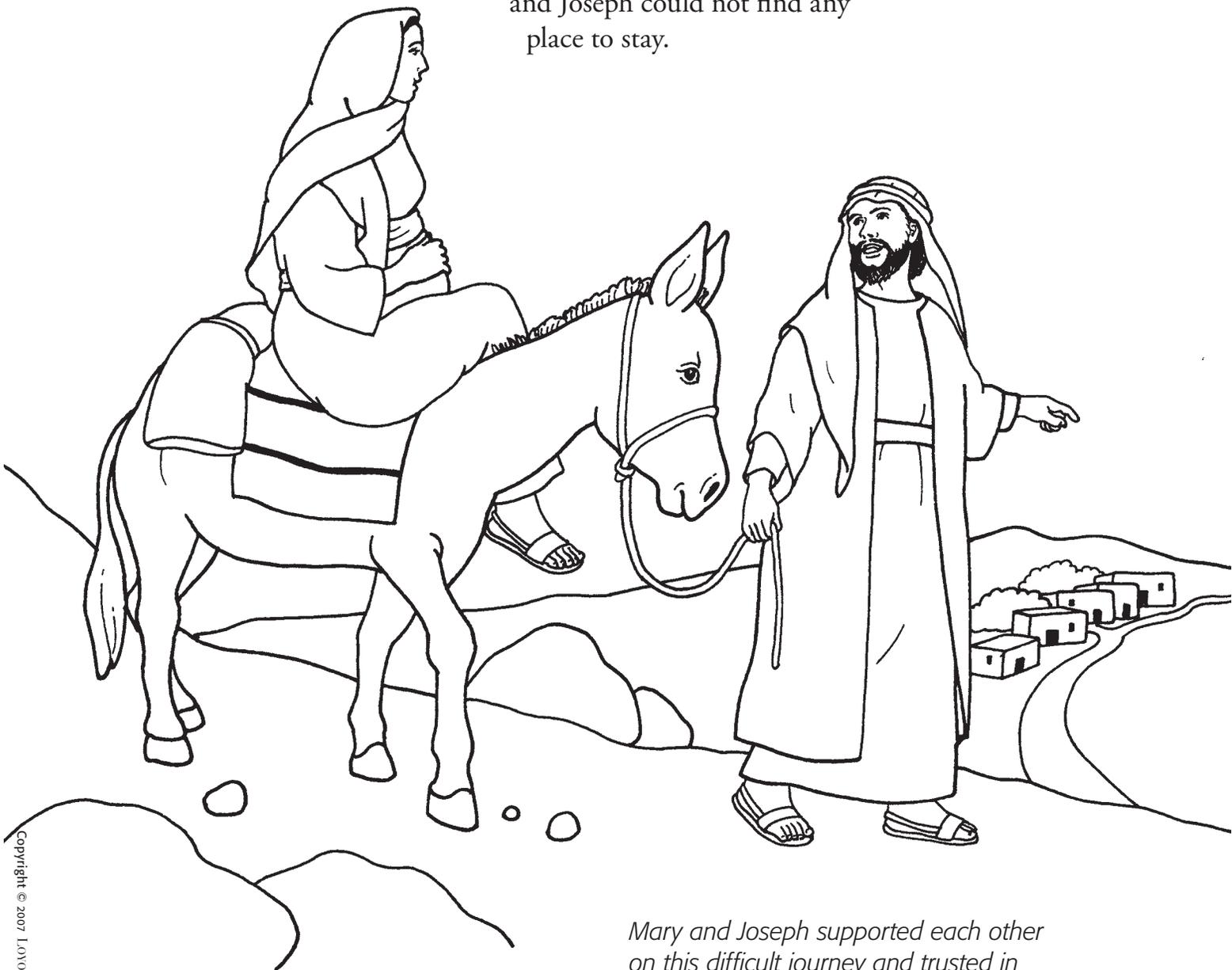


Though Mary's life is about to change dramatically, she still takes the time to celebrate with and help her dear friend Elizabeth. Jesus, help us to be as loving and generous as Mary is.

Journey to Bethlehem

Scripture Verses: Luke 2:1–5

When Mary was close to giving birth, she and Joseph had to go on a journey to Bethlehem. The government required every family to return to their hometown to be counted for a census. Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because it was the home of Joseph's ancestors, the family of David. When Mary and Joseph finally got to Bethlehem, the city was so crowded with people that Mary and Joseph could not find any place to stay.

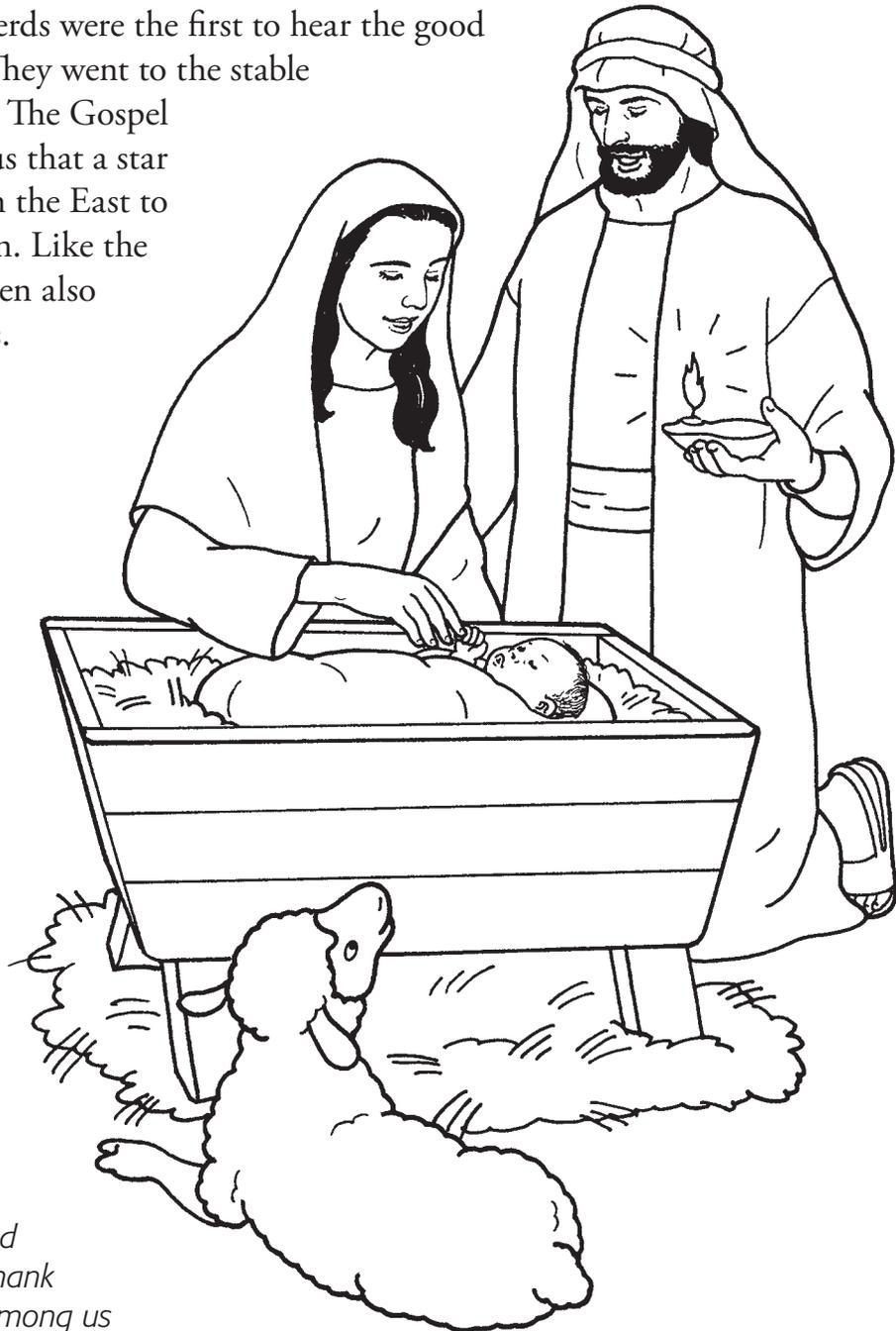


Mary and Joseph supported each other on this difficult journey and trusted in God that all would be well. Jesus, help us to support each other as a family even when things are tough.

Birth of Jesus

Scripture Verses: Luke 2:6–20, Matthew 2:1–12

Mary and Joseph found a humble stable to stay in. There, Jesus was born. Mary wrapped him in warm clothes and laid him in a manger. The Gospel writer Luke tells us that not far away there were shepherds keeping watch over their sheep. An angel came to them and told them that the Savior had been born! The shepherds were the first to hear the good news of Jesus' birth. They went to the stable to worship the Savior. The Gospel writer Matthew tells us that a star guided wise men from the East to Jesus after he was born. Like the shepherds, the wise men also came to worship Jesus.



The good news of the Savior's birth was announced to humble shepherds and respected wise men alike. Jesus, thank you for coming to live among us and for teaching us that you came to redeem all people and all of creation.

Flight into Egypt

Scripture Verse: Matthew 2:1–23

From the Magi, King Herod heard that a child had been born to a Jewish couple from the family of David. Herod wanted to get rid of the child because the child was the newborn king of the Jews. Herod was worried that this new king would challenge his authority. Because Herod couldn't find Jesus, he ordered that all boys two years old and younger be killed. An angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him of what was happening. The Holy Family escaped to Egypt and stayed there until Herod died. Then they returned to



Nazareth.

Mary and Joseph became refugees so that they could protect their son. Jesus, thank you for all the parents and people who sacrifice to protect and provide for us.

Finding Jesus in the Temple

Scripture Verse: Luke 2:41–52

When Jesus was 12 years old, Mary and Joseph traveled with him to the holy city of Jerusalem for Passover. On their way back to Nazareth they discovered that he was missing. They returned to Jerusalem to look for him, and after three days they found him in the Temple. There, he was sitting with the teachers, who were amazed at his answers to difficult questions. Mary said, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” Jesus responded, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Then he returned to Nazareth with them, “was obedient to them” and grew “in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”

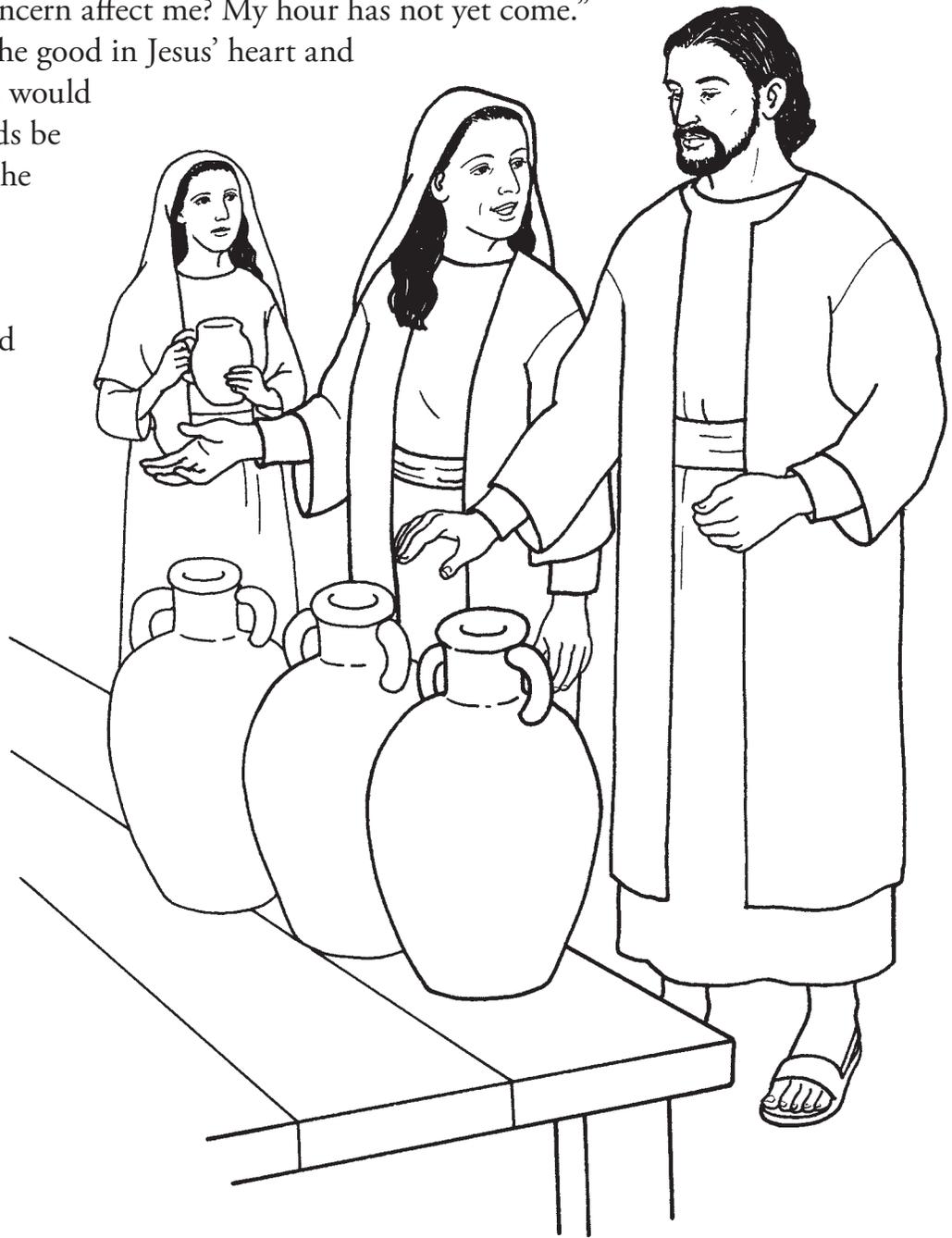


Following the path that God has set for us and for our loved ones can lead to separation, but separation can never break the bonds of our love for each other and for God. Jesus, may I always know how much I am loved.

Wedding Feast at Cana

Scripture Verse: John 2:1–12

Jesus' public ministry begins with a miracle at the wedding of friends. In the course of the celebration, the hosts began to run out of wine. Mary, knowing the hosts would be embarrassed in front of their guests, tells Jesus, "They have no wine." Jesus says "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." But Mary knew the good in Jesus' heart and his love for others would not let their friends be embarrassed. So she told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus asked for jars filled with water and then changed the water into wine. The disciples saw this and began to believe in him.



Mary encouraged Jesus to begin his public service to others. Jesus, help us to serve and encourage others.

Crucifixion

Scripture Verse: John 19:25–27

John's gospel tells us that Mary was at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified and died. Before he died, Jesus saw his mother with the disciple John, whom he loved. He asked Mary to watch over John as a mother. Then Jesus asked the disciple to take care of his mother, and "from that hour the disciple took her into his home."

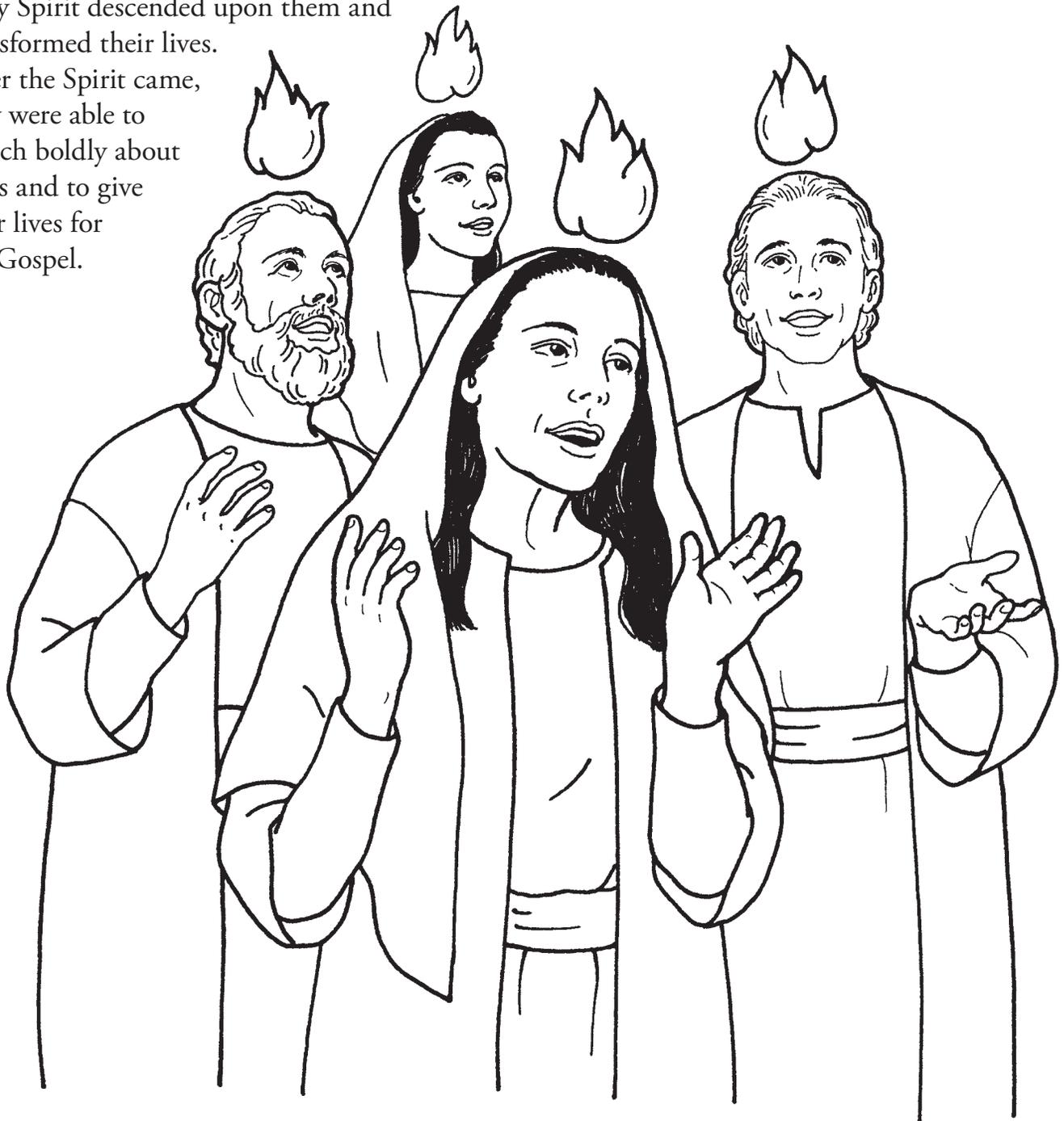


*Mary stood by her Son's side till the end,
and Jesus cared for his mother till the
end. Jesus, help us always to stand by
those whom we love through times of
joy and times of sadness.*

Pentecost

Scripture Verse: Acts 2:1–4

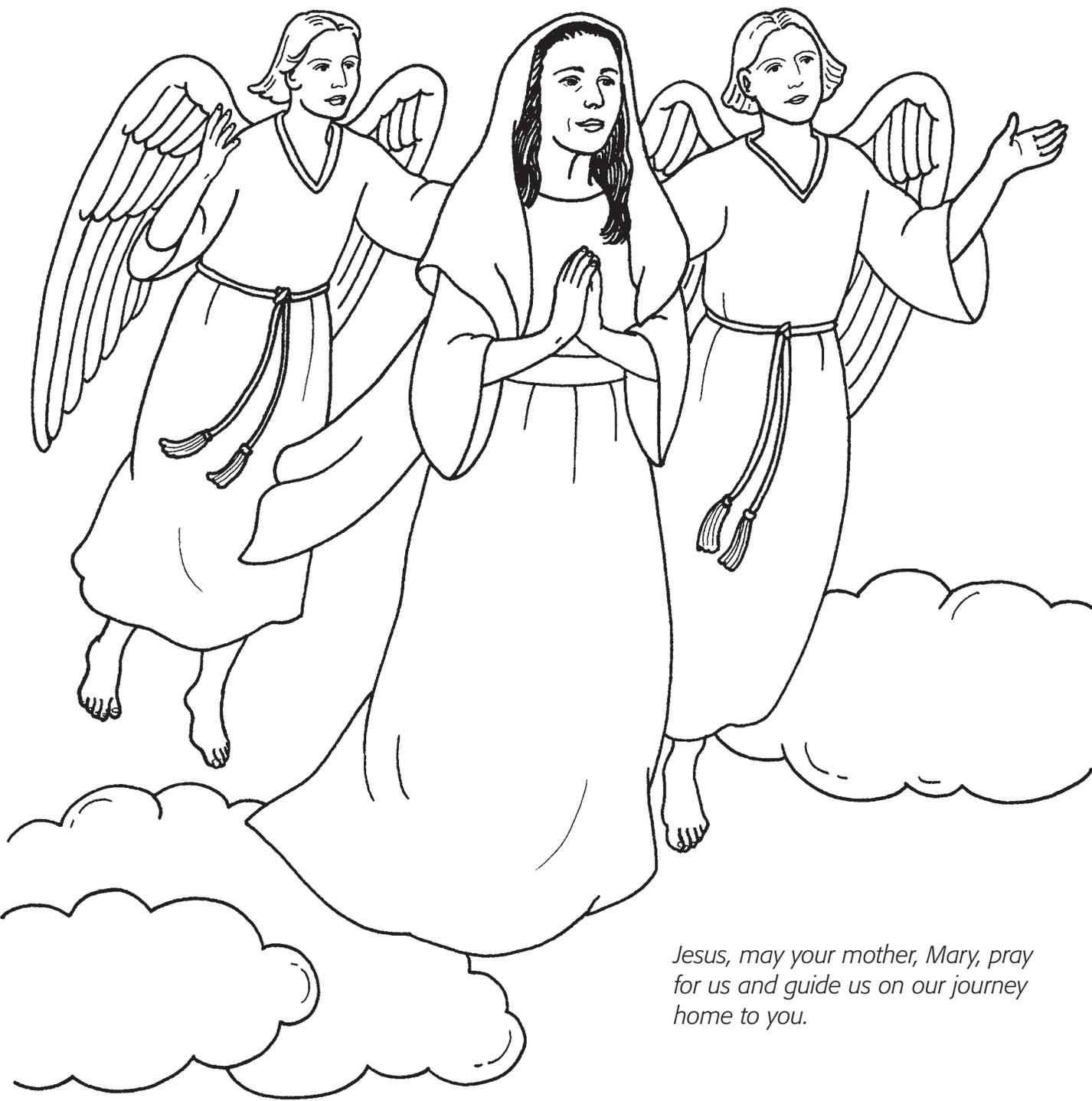
After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, Mary and the disciples continued to pray together and take care of one another. On the day of Pentecost, Mary was there with the disciples when the Holy Spirit descended upon them and transformed their lives. After the Spirit came, they were able to preach boldly about Jesus and to give their lives for the Gospel.



Once again, Mary said yes to God's call. Just as she brought Jesus into the world, so she continued to bring Jesus' message to the world. Jesus, may we always say yes to you and preach your word.

Assumption

Through Church tradition, we believe that when Mary's life on earth was complete, she was assumed, or taken, body and soul into heaven. Though this event is not found in scripture, it is a teaching of the Church defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Mary is given the gift of the fullness of life—body and soul—in the Risen Lord. Her lifelong trust and faith in God was rewarded. Mary anticipates our own ultimate union with God.



Jesus, may your mother, Mary, pray for us and guide us on our journey home to you.