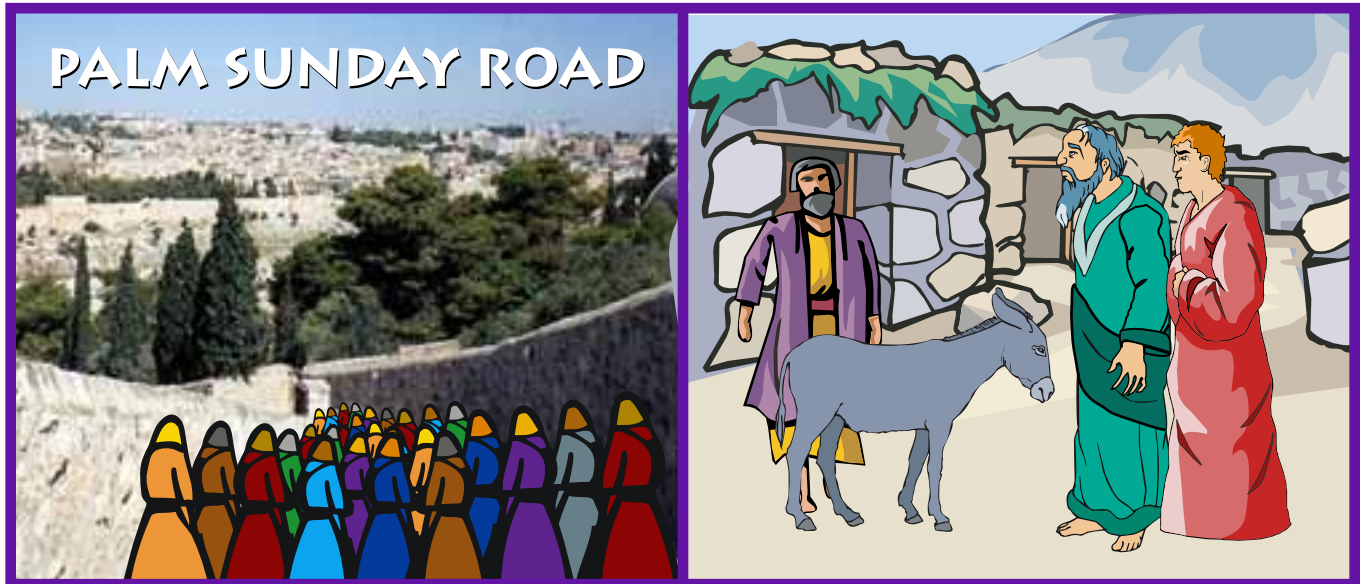


Tour of the Holy Lands - The Passion Week



It was Sunday – “Palm Sunday” we call it today – when Jesus and his disciples arrived here on the Mount of Olives. This was a very dramatic moment for Jesus. He was about to announce that he was the Messiah. He didn’t make his announcement using words. Instead, he acted it out.

It was the beginning of Passover, an annual event which usually attracted a couple hundred thousand pilgrims who wanted to commemorate the release of the Children of Israel from Egypt. On this occasion, over two million pilgrims flocked to Jerusalem. They were curious to see if Jesus would show up since the high priest had “wanted” posters out for him.

Jesus was famous already. Everyone wanted to see the man who raised Lazarus from the dead.

First, he sent two disciples to a nearby village to borrow a donkey that had never been ridden. How odd. Jesus never owned a donkey. But the people were expecting a king, so he had to ride into the city as King Solomon did on King David’s donkey – his father’s royal donkey. He would ride like Solomon, the son of David.



Before Jesus mounted the donkey, the disciples threw their colorful robes on its back. Then the crowd threw their robes on the path as a carpet for the donkey. Others pulled down palm fronds and spread them as a welcome mat to symbolize victory and liberty.

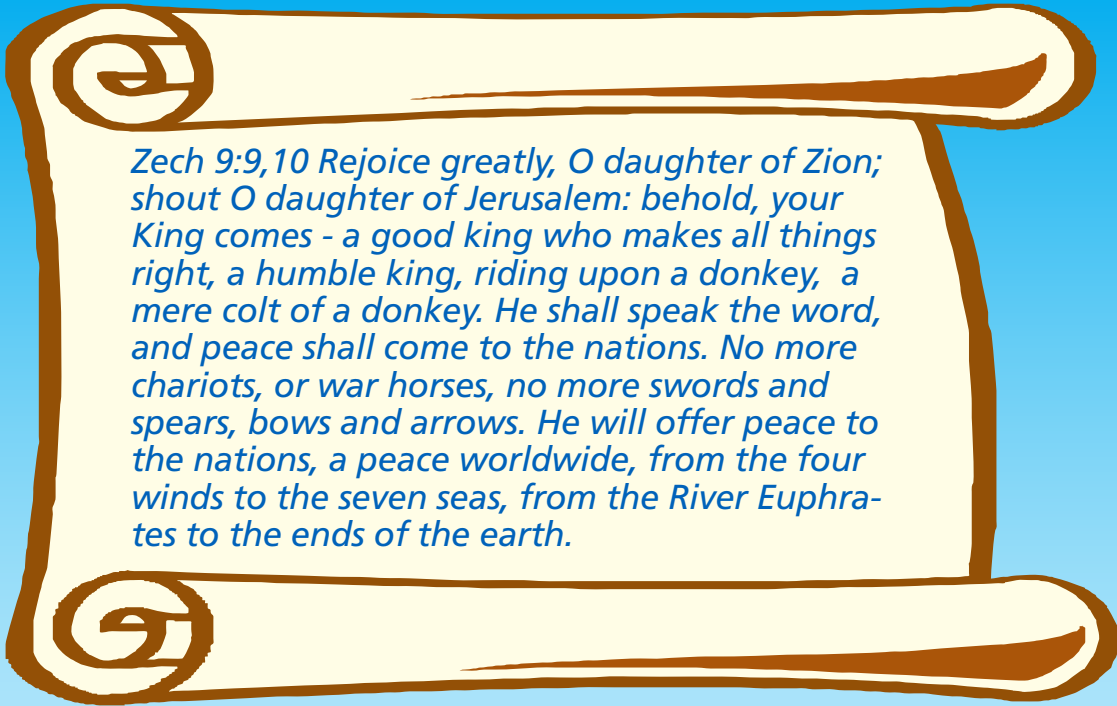
The disciples began shouting praise for their Master. The crowds joined them, singing, "Hosanna, to the Son of David." "Help us, O Son of David. Bless him who comes in the name of the Lord. Hail to the King of the universe, the rightful king, sent from God." Crowds once shouted the same things to the new King Solomon.



His disciples were so excited. They had waited for this day. Now everyone would know their Messiah. If only he would use his powers, grab the crown, set up his kingdom as Solomon had done, and deliver them from their enemy, the Romans.

Some Pharisees said to Jesus: "Get your disciples under control. Calm them down."

But Jesus answered, "If they don't shout, the stones along the road will do it for them." In other words, Truth would not remain silent. In this way, Jesus entered Jerusalem.



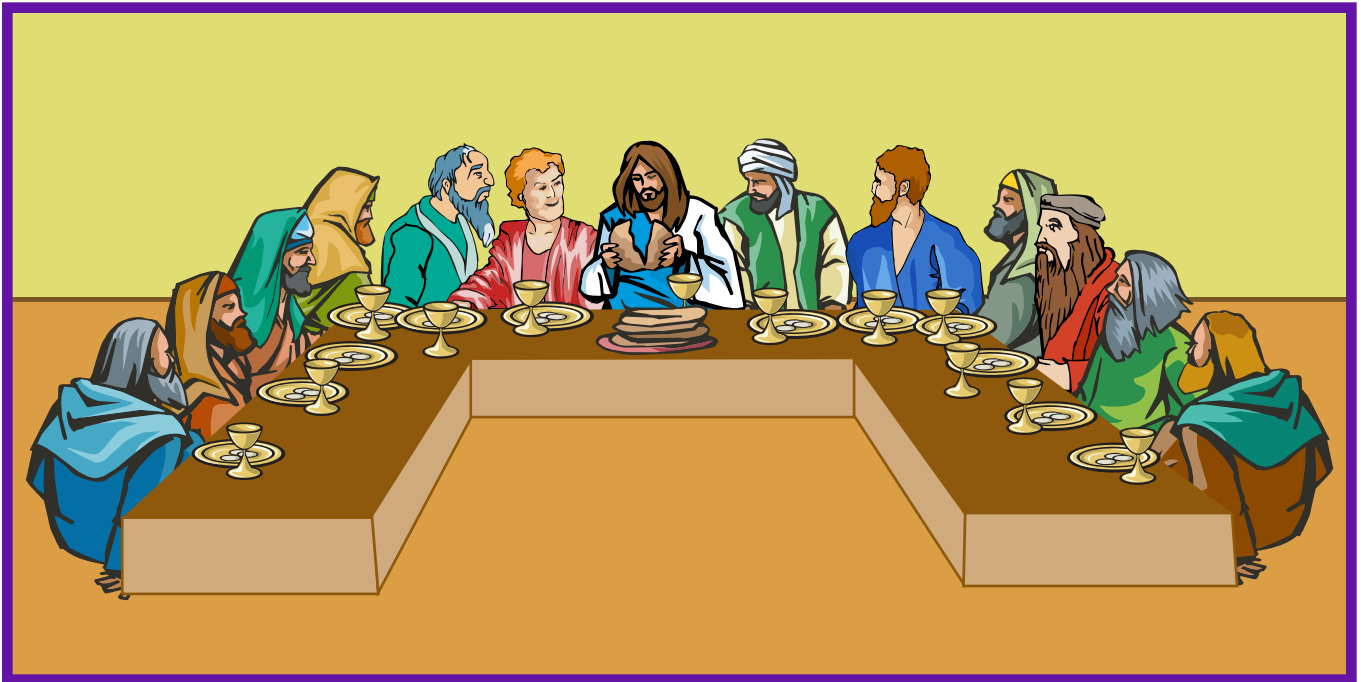
Zech 9:9,10 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes - a good king who makes all things right, a humble king, riding upon a donkey, a mere colt of a donkey. He shall speak the word, and peace shall come to the nations. No more chariots, or war horses, no more swords and spears, bows and arrows. He will offer peace to the nations, a peace worldwide, from the four winds to the seven seas, from the River Euphrates to the ends of the earth.

There was wild excitement. "Who is this?," the crowds asked. "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth up in Galilee!"

But Jesus was a disappointment to his disciples. Not only did he not set up his kingdom, but he was arrested and killed. His followers fled. Only later, when the Comforter descended on them, did the disciples figure out what this day was all about. He was acting out Scriptural prophecy in Zechariah, which described the true Messiah.

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(From KJV, MSG AMP)



Before he was killed, however, Jesus and his disciples shared the Passover meal, he washed their feet, and he prayed for them. Judas left the room. Jesus knew what would happen later that night, and he knew the disciples would deny him. Even so, Jesus and his disciples left the meal singing.





At Passover time, Jews always sang Psalms 113-118. The words are about courage.

re: Ps 118:6,9,14,16-19,22,24,29

6 The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

9 It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

14 The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.

16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.

17 I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

18 The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

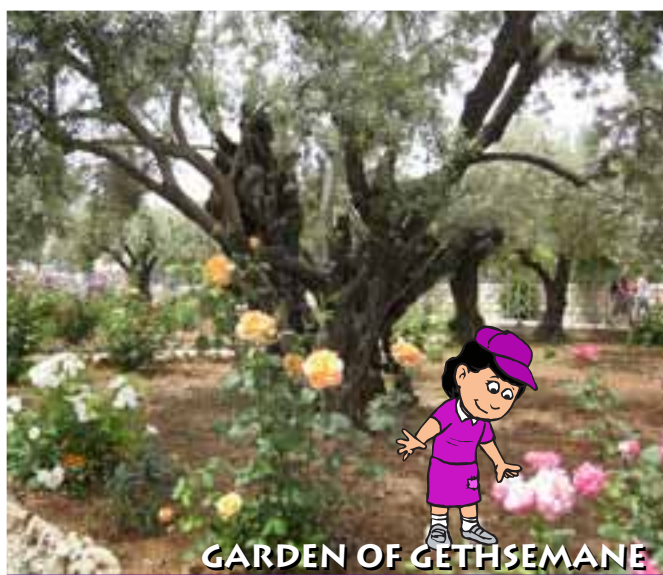
24 This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

29 O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.



Usually the leader would sing one line of the Psalm, and the followers would sing the word, "Hallelujah." Jesus knew how meaningful these psalms were on this night. His disciples would not know that until much later.

And so, in the full moon of Passover, the little band of 11 disciples and Jesus began walking to the Mount of Olives, singing. They often slept out on the hillside, as many Passover pilgrims did. But this time Jesus wouldn't sleep.



When Jesus and his 11 disciples left the upper room where they had eaten, they went out of the house and headed eastward out of the city, down the Kidron Valley, a deep ravine, up the other side to the Mount of Olives, and into the Garden of Gethsemane, where we are standing today.

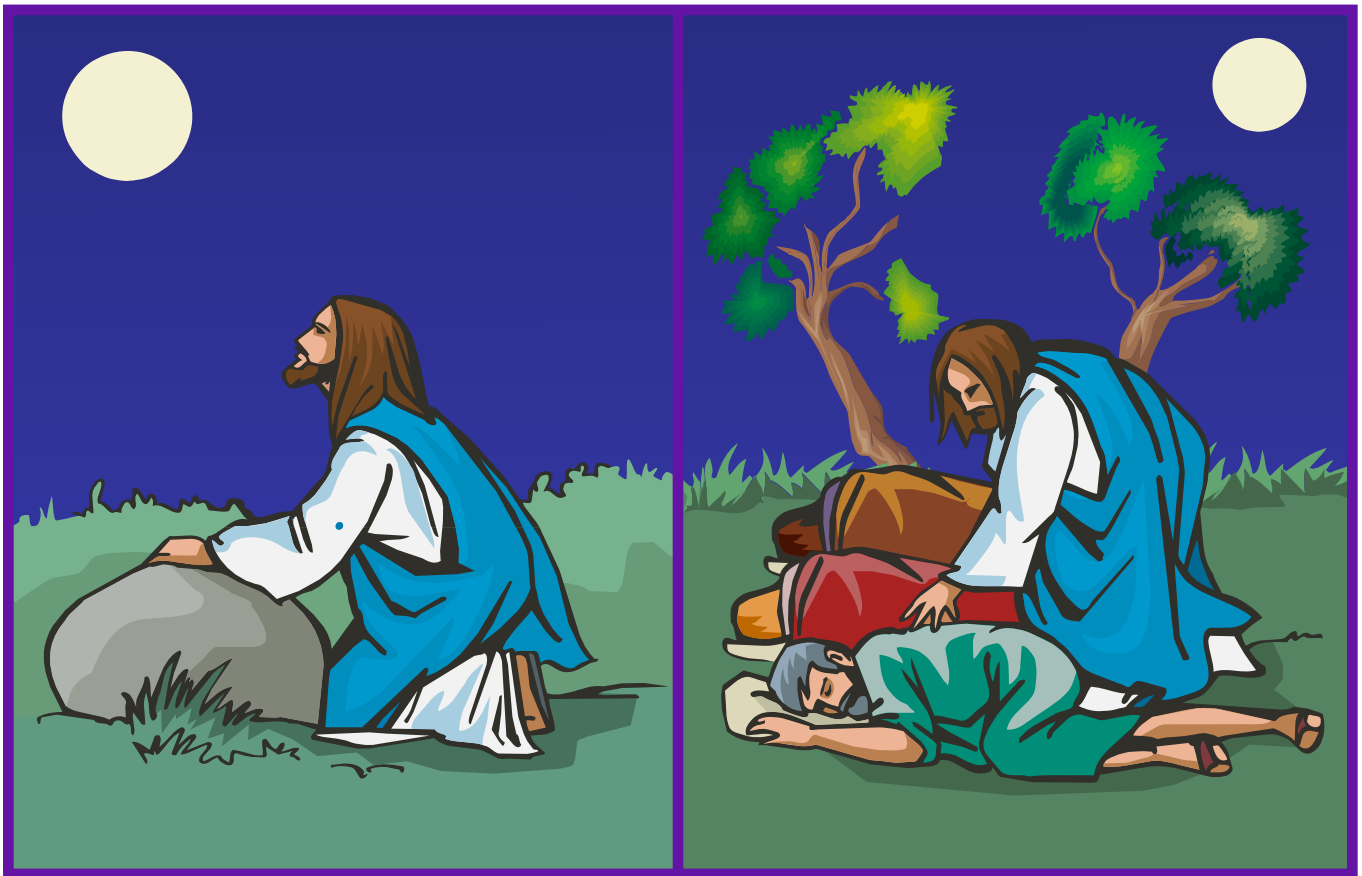
Notice the word, "Gethsemane," and what it means: "oil press." Jesus was about to be bruised, as olives are, in order that fresh oil might flow to the world.



When they reached the garden, he said, "You sit here, while I go and pray over there." He left 8 disciples near the entrance to the garden and took with him Peter, James and John. He expected more from them than from the others. He walked as far as a stone's throw, and kneeled down.

He said to the three, "I'm so sad, I feel like I'm being crushed."

Then he asked, "Could you keep awake to give me strength and friendship in this difficult hour?"



He went forward a little and fell on the ground, and prayed, "If it's possible, I would rather not face this." Then he said, "Abba, Father." Abba is a lovely Aramaic word for Father, more like "Dad," showing how close he was with his Father.

After asking to be free of this experience, he said, "However, it is not what I want, but what you want." He would obey his Father, and his Father would give him all the strength he needed to face this hour.

After midnight, he returned to his favorite disciples, expecting to receive some comfort. But there was none. They had said they would be there for him, but, in the end, sleep was stronger than their promise.



So, Jesus went away the second time, and prayed, saying, "O my father, if I must face this hour, so be it."

And when he returned, he found his disciples asleep again. Their eyes were so heavy, they didn't know where they were. This time he left without disturbing them.

He prayed the third time and went back to them. But they had slept too long. It was trial time and he must face it alone. The crucifixion was to be his own experience.



At that very moment, the high priest's servants, temple guards and some of the Roman cohort swarmed into the quiet garden under the full moon with lanterns and torches and a great noise. Their swords and clubs were raised against the unarmed Jesus. They were led by Judas, one of his own disciples, who had healed and cast out devils, and who had eaten bread with him just an hour or two earlier. Judas walked over to Jesus and kissed him. Jesus said unto him, "Judas, are you betraying the son of man with a kiss?"





When the other disciples saw what was about to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we use the sword?” Before Jesus could answer, Peter cut off the right ear of the high priest’s servant.

Jesus said, “Enough of this.”

With love rather than hate, Jesus touched the place where the man’s ear had been and restored it.

Jesus gave his life that night; no man took it. They tied Jesus up to prevent his escape, but how silly to try to tie up a power that had just shown it was all-powerful. Meanwhile, his disciples fled.



They arrested Jesus and hurried him south of Zion Gate to the house of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas.

The Jewish leaders had been planning the arrest for two days. They accused Jesus of threatening to destroy the Temple, claiming he was the Messiah and possessing divine powers.



Peter followed them, snuck in, and sat with the servants in the shadows of the courtyard. A servant girl who watched the door said, "You were with Jesus of Galilee. What are you doing here?"

Peter was surprised. He was tired, and wasn't prepared. He was among enemies. And he didn't realize the power of the crowd. Jesus wasn't there to protect him. Peter began to think more and more of himself and his own safety, and less and less about Jesus – about supporting his teacher.

Peter replied to the servant girl: "I don't know what you're saying."

She wasn't a judge, or an officer accusing him of being with Jesus; she was a simple maid. He didn't even have to answer her.



When he tried to leave, another maid said, "You're one of them, too."

This time Peter's words were stronger. "I don't know the man." One lie led to another. Peter used to be bold. But now he didn't want anyone to know that he knew Jesus.

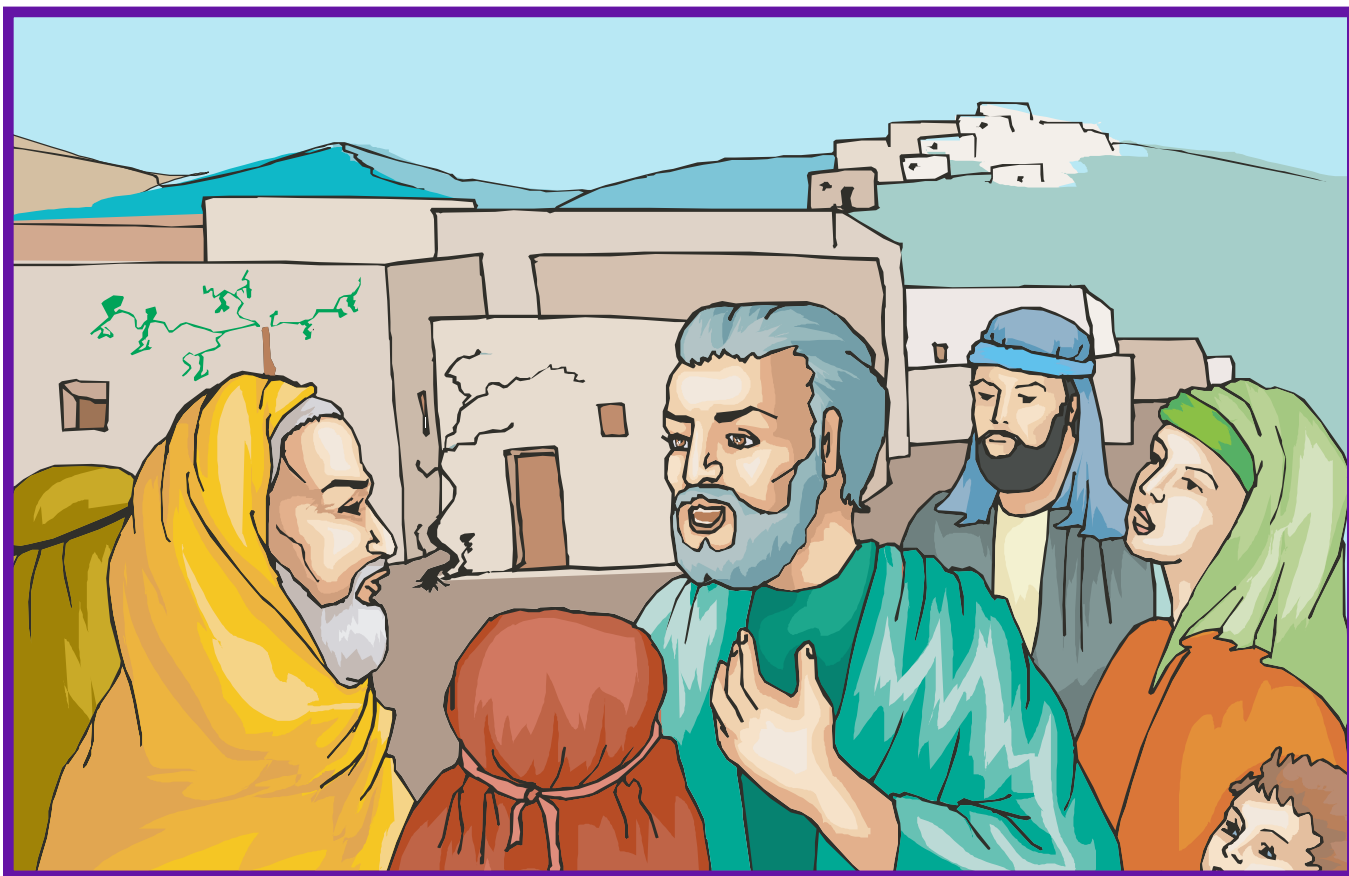
When Jesus was loved and followed by crowds, Peter was happy to be associated with him; but now that Jesus is deserted and hated, Peter is ashamed of him.

Jesus had told them that they must take up their own crosses, and follow him; but Peter is so afraid of suffering, he will do anything to avoid it.



After a while, a man came up to Peter and said, "There's no doubt you were with Jesus. The way you speak gives you away." It was Peter's Galilean accent. If only Peter had not opened his mouth to the servant girl!

Now he said, "I swear I'm telling the truth. May God punish me if I'm not. I've never even heard of him." Poor Peter. He was so afraid, that he lied over and over. Then he heard a rooster crow. It startled him and Peter remembered Jesus' warning. Peter had promised Jesus that he would never deny him. He rushed outside as fast as he could and burst into tears. How ashamed he was for betraying his Master. Peter was wiser than Judas; he wept, admitted his guilt, and found peace.



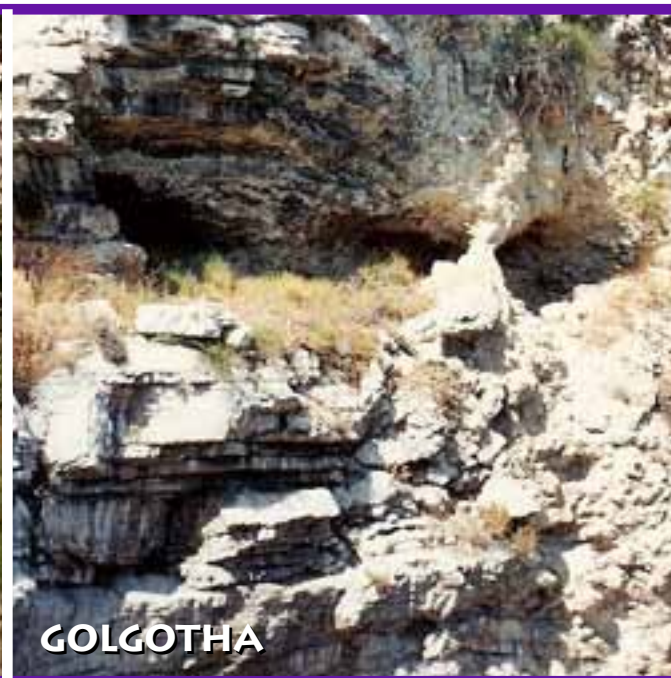
Once he learned his lesson, Peter never denied Jesus again. Instead, he spoke of him often and openly, even in the middle of danger. He finally became as strong as a rock; in fact, this same man, who had cowered before a question from a servant girl, faced a mob without fear after Pentecost.



It is now Friday afternoon. We are at the Garden Tomb, and close by we can see Golgotha or Skull Hill, where the crucifixion took place.



TO SKULL HILL

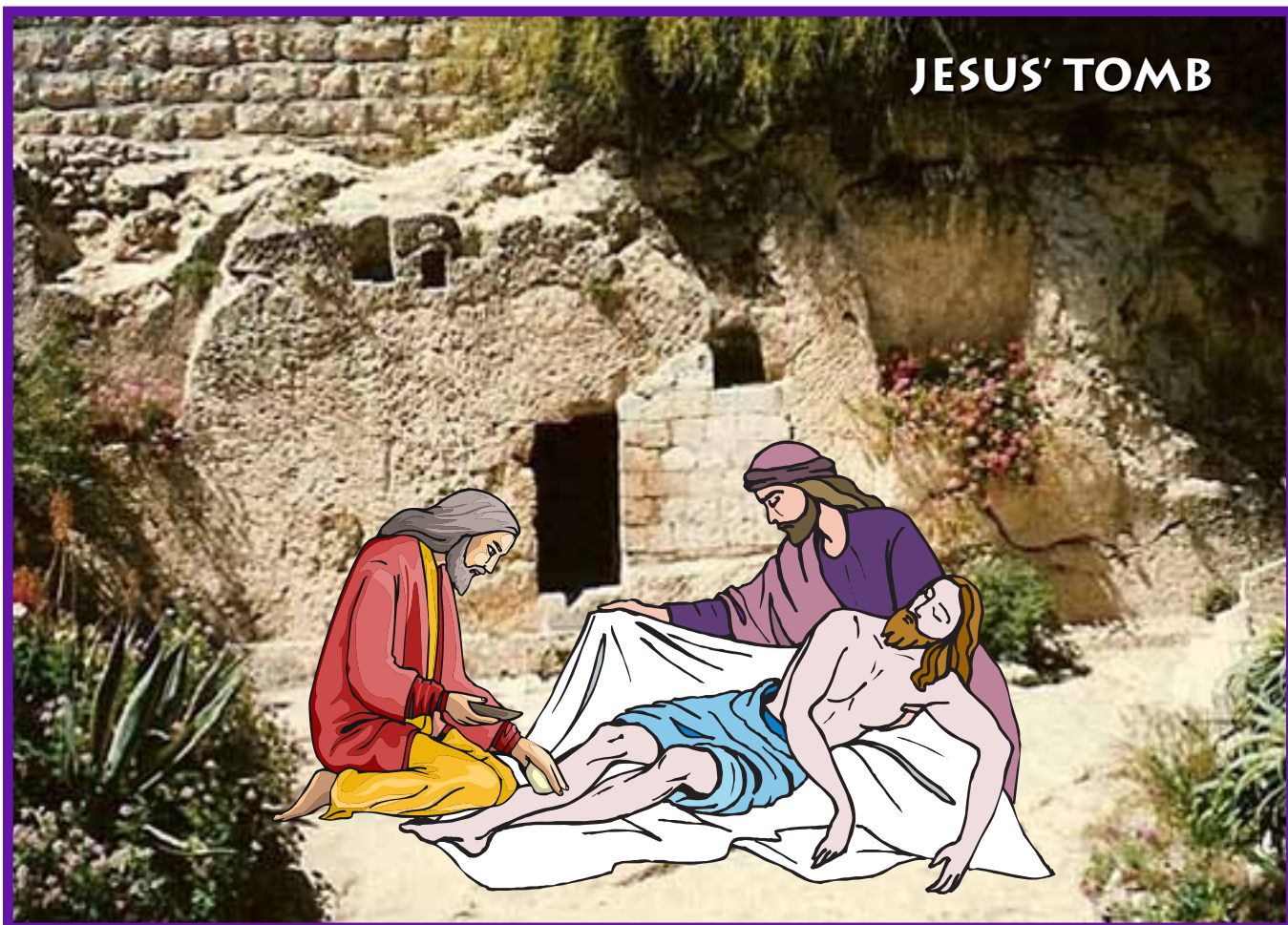


GOLGOTHA



Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man and respected member of the Sanhedrin, was a disciple of Jesus in secret for fear of the Jewish leaders. But now he spoke out, and asked Pontius Pilate for Jesus' body in order to give it a proper burial.

Nicodemus, another rich man who came to Jesus by night (in secret) with an important question, joined Joseph of Arimathaea. These two timid men went on a brave mission for their Master.



These wealthy men brought a huge amount of ointments – 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes enough for a king – to help dry out the body and give it a sweet fragrance.

They wrapped the body in a long linen cloth soaked with gummy spices between the folds. Then they laid the body in a new burial cave that Joseph had made for himself. They were in a hurry to get the body in before sundown because that's when the Sabbath started, and all work had to stop.

ROADSIDE TOMB WITH ROLLING STONE



The men kicked away the wedge holding the stone door in its upper channel, and the great circle rolled down its track, shutting the sepulchre. The Temple police placed a cord across the rock, sealing the ends with clay. No one could steal the body.



The women who were Jesus' friends – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and her sister, Salome – waited all day on Saturday. They, too, were observing the Fourth Commandment.

Finally, on Sunday, they returned to the garden to finish burying the body properly.

Immediately, Mary Magdalene saw that the stone was out of place. She knew it would have taken many men to move it uphill.

She ran into the city to tell Peter and John, the leaders of the little band of men. She told them that someone had stolen the body.



Peter and John ran to the tomb. Mary came, too. John was the fastest. He didn't go inside, but he saw the linen cloths lying there. Peter didn't even pause; he went straight inside.

Then John went in. The cloth for the head and the body wrap had become a rigid casing, left exactly in place. The body of Jesus had simply vanished, passing through the fabric. John knew Jesus had risen from the dead.



Then Peter and John went home, but Mary stood weeping. She looked into the sepulchre, searching for some clue.

Suddenly, she saw something the two disciples had not seen—two angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the body had been.

They said, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She said, “Someone has taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they put him.”



Then she glanced over her shoulder. Someone was standing behind her in the light of dawn.

The person asked, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. She didn't answer his question, but came straight to the point.

"Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where and I'll come get him."

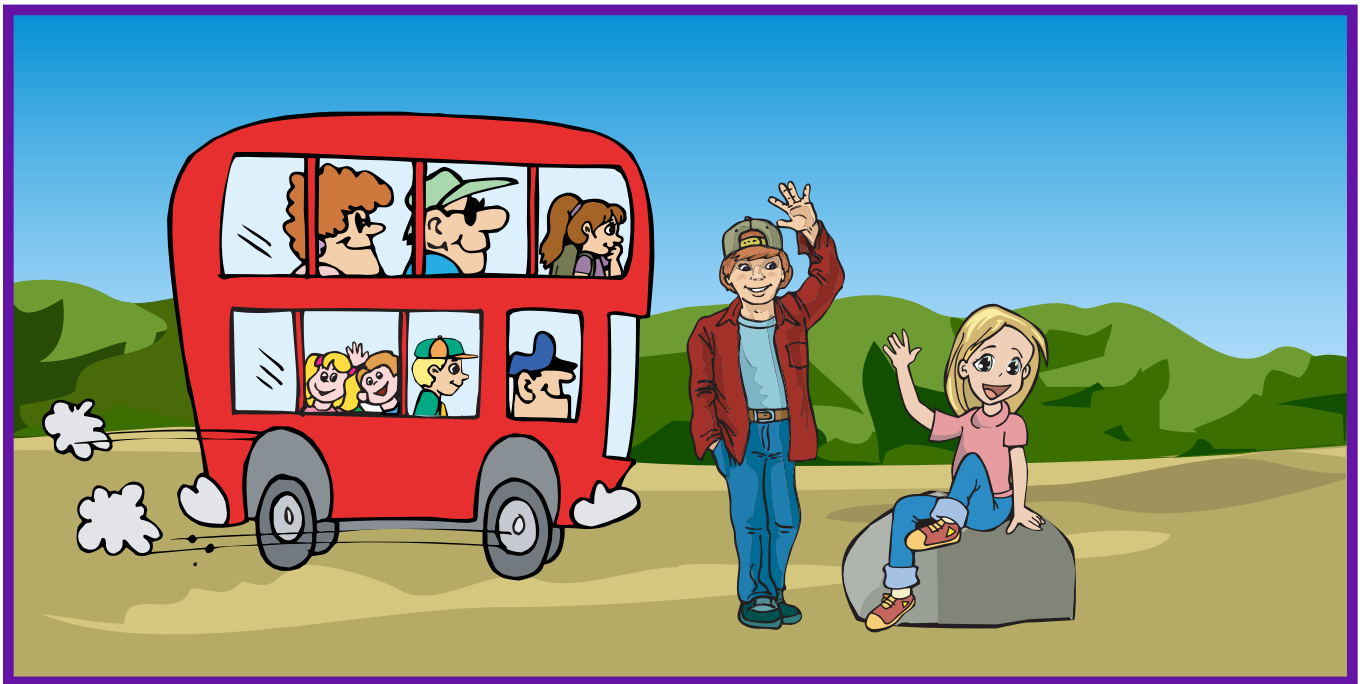


Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned to him, and said, "Rabboni," meaning "Master."

It shook her to hear her name spoken by that familiar voice. She reached down to grab his feet.

Jesus said, "Don't cling to me. I haven't finished ascending to my Father. I want you to go to my brothers and tell them that's what I'm doing."

He had overcome death and was rising. The women reported this very important message. It was very hard to believe, but we know it's true, don't we?



We've spent three summers in this land of the Bible, watching it come to life as we have run and climbed through the countryside. This summer, we watched baby Jesus wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes asleep in a manger in a cave, surrounded by shepherds and sheep. We saw Jesus as a boy in the Temple, getting very good grades from his teachers. We saw his mother scold him for not coming home on time. We wondered if he ever took time out to play in Hezekiah's Tunnel, as we did, or if he ever ran around the tops of city walls with his friends. We stood by two pools as he must have, where he brought two men back to their normal perfection - walking and seeing. We watched as he chased people who shouldn't have been there out of the Temple. We saw him ride on a colorful robe-covered donkey, wash his disciples' feet, sing psalms, pray in the moonlight under ancient olive trees, and be betrayed by a kiss in a garden. We walked on the same ancient stone steps as Jesus did. We watched sadly as one of Jesus' best friends denied he ever knew him. We were there where he was crucified, buried, and resurrected. Perhaps the best part was seeing his disciples carry on his healing work. That's what we can do, too.