

The
Easter
Story

Jesus the King

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 21, VERSES 1-11

"Hurry! Hurry!" shouted the woman to her husband.

"What's the rush? What's happening? Where is everyone going?" he called.

Everywhere, people who had come to celebrate the Passover feast were running to the dusty road that led from Bethany to Jerusalem. A crowd was gathering, a good-natured crowd. People were jostling to see what was going on, but there was no trouble, no angry shouts, no violent gestures.

"What's happening?" shouted someone, who like many others, had been carried along in the excitement.

"Jesus is coming!"

"Jesus is coming as a King! He is riding on a donkey. He is coming, just like the prophets said he would. He has come to save us!"

"Then let's welcome him as King!" cried a voice above all the others.

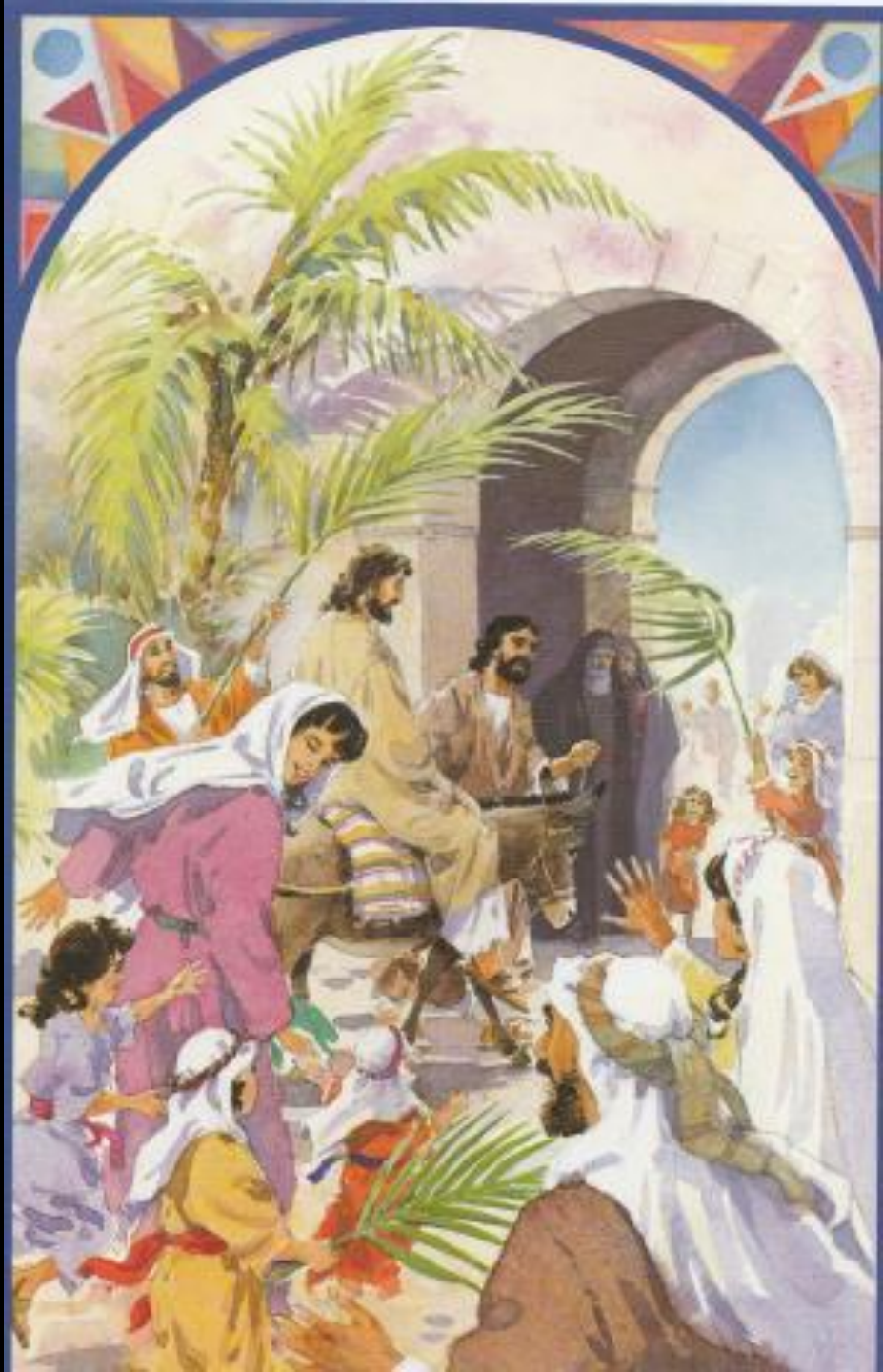
The crowd cheered with approval. Some pulled off their cloaks and flung them onto the dusty ground, while others cut branches from the trees and waved them high in the air.

For a moment the crowd fell silent as they saw the small figure of Jesus, riding a donkey in the distance. Then the crowd began to cheer and shout; words of triumph, words of victory, words of celebration. The crowd welcomed Jesus as a conquering hero.

"Hurrah! King Jesus!"

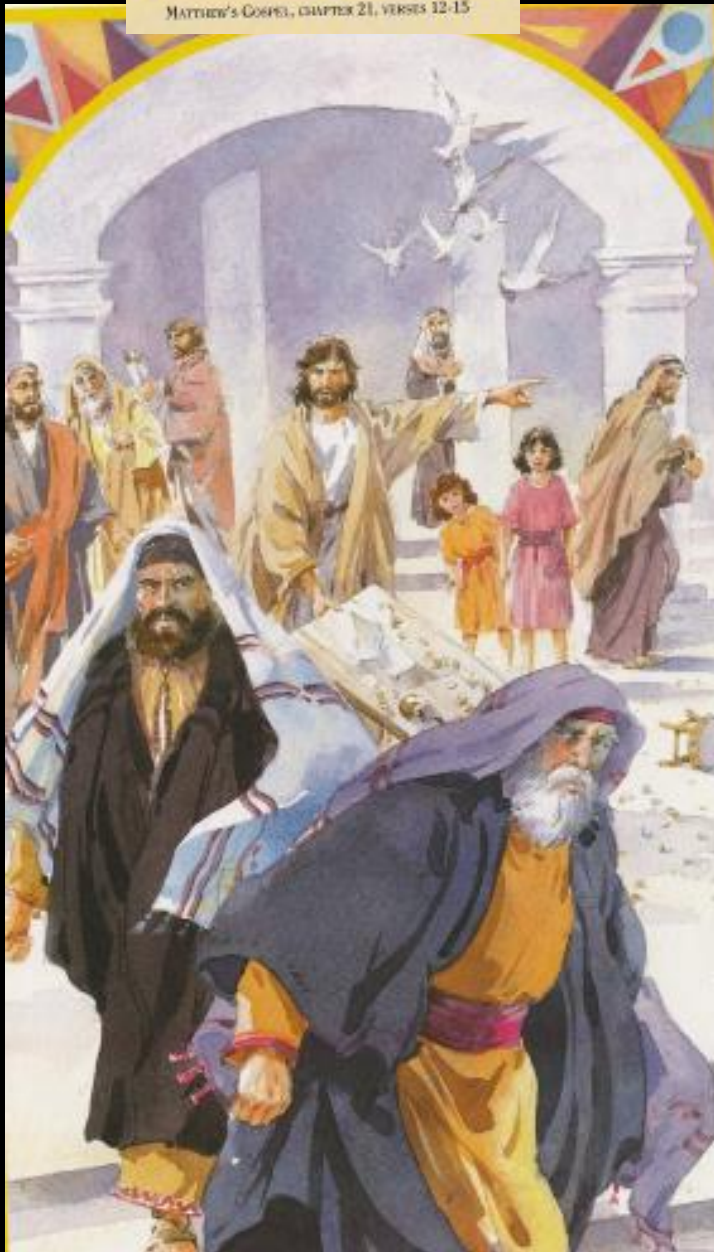
"Hosanna! God bless the King who has come to save us!"

"Long live King Jesus!"



Jesus Goes to the Temple

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 21, VERSES 12-15



By the time Jesus reached Jerusalem everyone knew that he had arrived. Those who had never heard of him before, now heard snatches about him. He was a teacher said some, a healer said others, a troublemaker said a few more.

The crowd followed Jesus as he made his way to the temple. The temple courtyard was busy, more like a busy street market than a place of prayer. The stall-holders were trying to sell animals and birds for the traditional Jewish Passover sacrifice. The money-changers were hoping to make high profits.

But Jesus had come to God's house to pray. He looked around at all that was going on. He knew that the money changers were cheating the people. He knew that the stall holders were more concerned with money than forgiveness. He knew that this was not what God his Father wanted.

With one movement, Jesus threw over a table, sending showers of coins high into the air. He made his way through the temple area overturning one table after another.

"God's house is supposed to be a house of prayer," he shouted, "but you have turned it into a den for thieves!"

Some slunk out of the temple courts, furious with him for what he had done.

"Who does he think he is?" they growled.

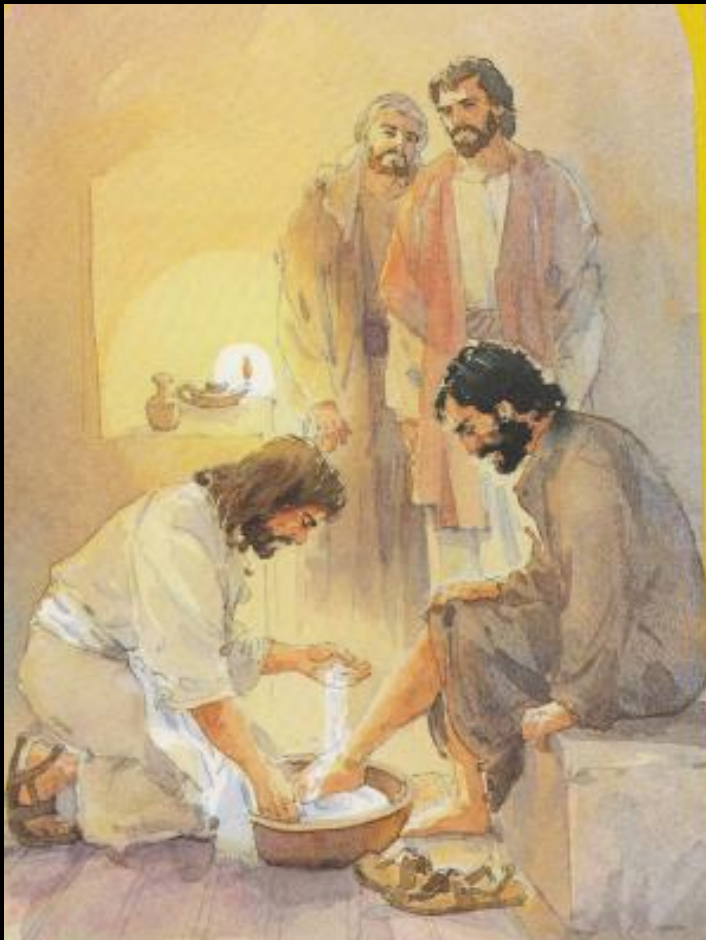
But there were many beggars at the entrance to the temple, as well as those who were blind and lame. They came to Jesus and he made them well. Those who had been blind saw the temple for the very first time, and those who had been lame ran and danced about the temple courts, praising God that they had been healed. The children joined in the celebration and shouted:

"Hurrah! God has come to save us! Hosanna!"

There were some people in the temple who did not join in the celebration. Instead they stood in the shadows whispering and plotting against Jesus.

The Servant King

JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 13, VERSES 1-20



A few days later, Jesus asked his disciples to make all the preparations to celebrate the Passover meal. They met in an upstairs room, excited that they could be together. Even Judas joined them for the occasion, still watching, still waiting for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

When everyone had arrived, Jesus took off his cloak and wrapped a towel around his waist, just like a servant.

“Whatever is he doing?” wondered the disciples.

They watched as Jesus poured water into a basin. They stared as he knelt before each of them in turn and began to wash their dirty, dusty, tired feet. They remained silent as he carried out his task, wondering why their master was doing the job of a servant.

At last Jesus came to Peter, and started to wash his feet. But Peter was shocked. He leapt up.

“Why are you doing this, Master?” he cried. “You shouldn’t be doing this to us. I won’t let you wash my feet!”

“You don’t realize what I am doing now, Peter, but one day you will. You must understand that if you do not let me wash you, you cannot be my friend.”

Instantly Peter responded, “Then don’t just wash my feet, Lord, wash my head and hands as well!”

“There is no need,” replied Jesus. “I have washed you, so you are clean – although not everyone here is.”

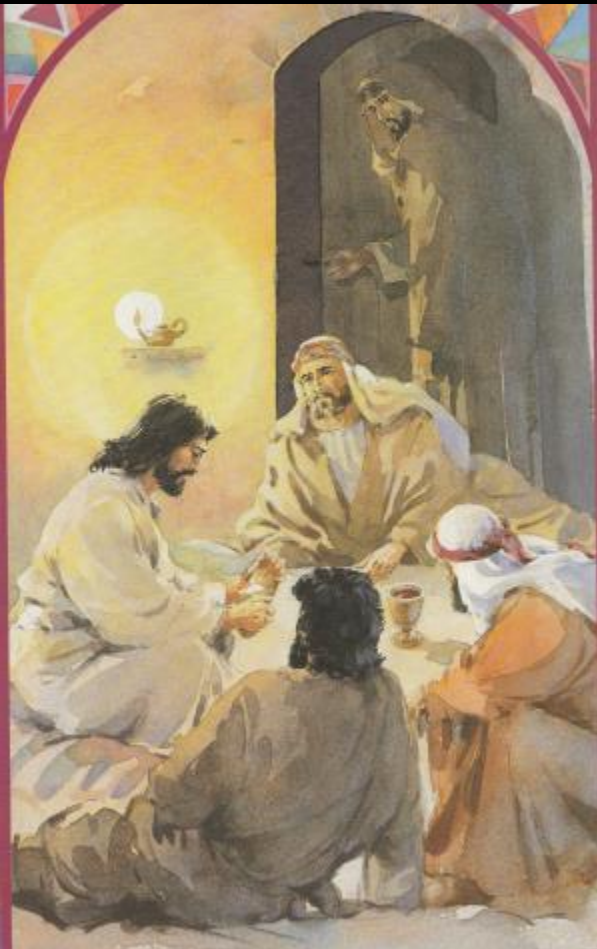
Judas squirmed. He knew that the moment he had been waiting for had almost come.

“I have just done a servant’s job,” continued Jesus. “If you want to follow me you must learn to serve each other.”

Judas knew that he must leave the Passover meal as soon as he could.

The Last Supper

JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 13, VERSES 21-30 AND LUKE'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 22, VERSES 14-23



As Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal, Jesus made a surprising announcement.

“One of you, one of my friends, is going to betray me to my enemies.”

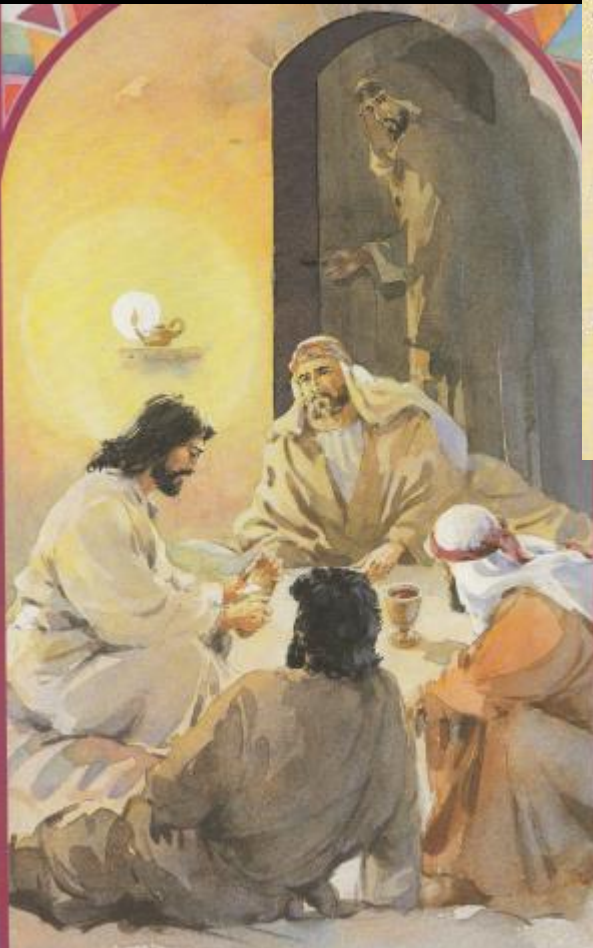
The disciples were horrified, and looked at one another in alarm. Meanwhile Judas slipped out, unnoticed, and made his escape into the night.

When he had gone, Jesus reached across the table and picked up the loaf of unleavened bread. Holding it in both hands, he raised it up and thanked God for it. Then he pulled the bread apart and gave a piece to each of his friends.

“Eat the bread I have given you. Soon my body will be broken, just like this bread. Remember what I have just done, and when you meet again for a meal, remember me.”

The Last Supper

JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 13, VERSES 21-30 AND LUKE'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 22, VERSES 14-23



When they had finished eating, Jesus took a cup of wine and once again thanked God for it. Then he passed it around his friends, and they all drank from the cup.

“Drink this,” he said. “This wine is a sign of God’s new agreement to save you, an agreement which has to be sealed with my blood. I know that I must die, and that this is all part of God’s plan to save you.”

The disciples looked at the broken loaf of bread and the deep red remains of the wine. They wondered what it all meant.

Jesus Alone

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 26, VERSES 31-56

The night air felt cold as Jesus and his disciples walked towards the Mount of Olives. The Passover celebration had frightened and confused them. Only days ago Jesus was being hailed as a King; now he was talking of dying.

“All of you will leave me,” said Jesus. “But when I have risen, I will meet up with you in Galilee.”

“I won't ever leave you!” cried Peter. “I will always stand by you.”

“No, you won't, Peter,” replied Jesus. “Before morning you will say that you do not know me three times.”

They made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

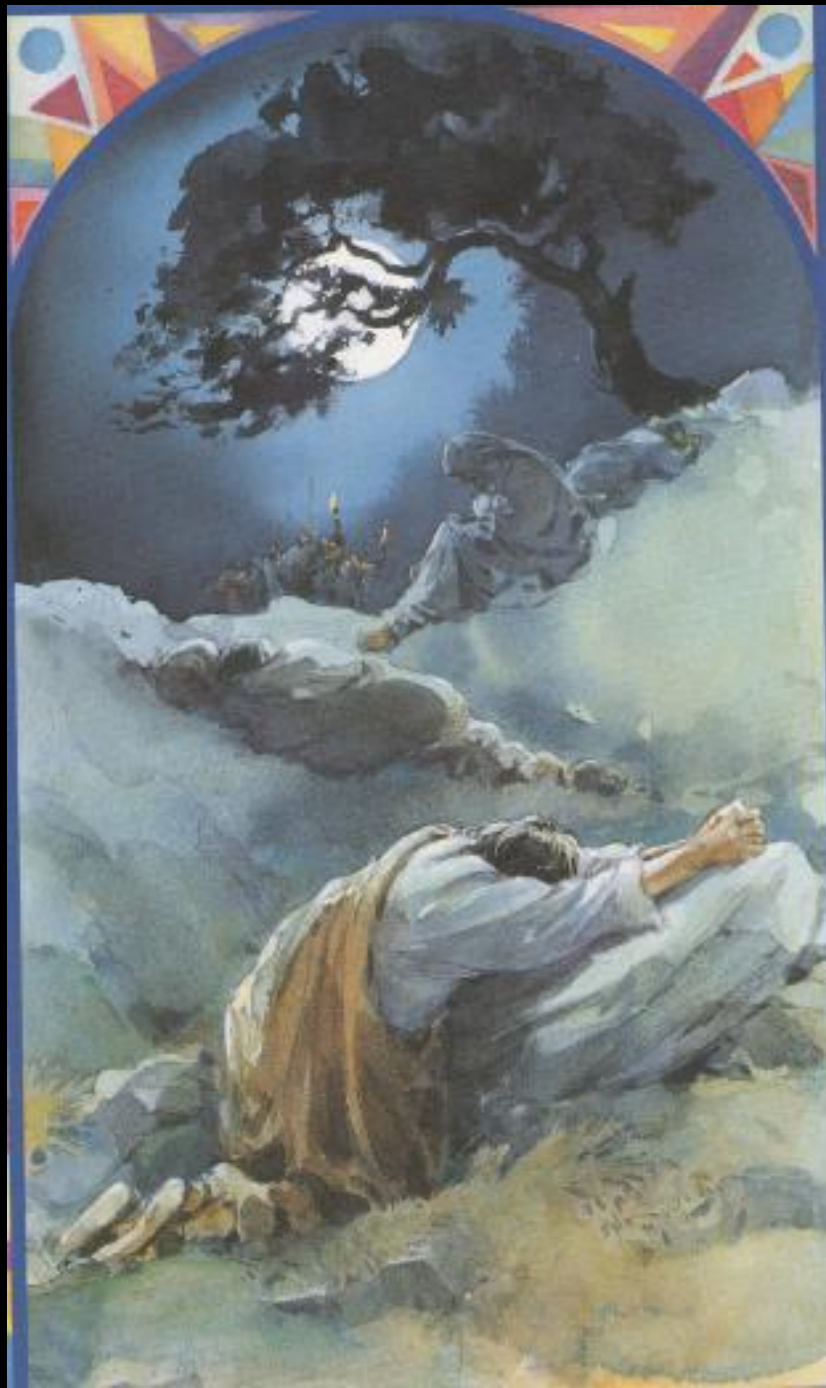
“Sit down and wait for me, while I go and pray,” Jesus said.

They sat in silence, and watched while Jesus walked deeper into the garden, with Peter, James and John as companions.

“Stay and keep awake with me,” Jesus asked his friends.

Jesus went still further into the garden. He cried out to his Father, “Please save me from all the suffering that lies ahead. But if that is not possible, do what must be done, because more than anything else, I want what pleases you.”

Feeling deep sorrow, Jesus went back to his friends. But he found that they had fallen asleep. “Couldn’t you stay awake with me for one hour?” he asked. Jesus went away for a second time to pray, and then a third. Each time he returned to find the disciples fast asleep.



Then through the darkness came the flickering light of torches. The disciples, terrified, stumbled to their feet with their hearts pounding. Jesus stood waiting for the men who were armed with clubs and swords. At the head of the crowd was Judas Iscariot.

Judas walked straight up to Jesus. "Greetings, Rabbi," he said as he kissed his cheek.

The signal had been given. The men rushed forward and seized Jesus. He made no move to escape. The disciples fled into the darkness.

Jesus the Prisoner

LUKE'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 22, VERSES 54-62

The arrest was quickly carried out. The prisoner did not protest in any way as they led him to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest.

The disciples had vanished, but Peter followed the crowd at a safe distance, right up to Caiaphas' house. Pulling his cloak over his head, Peter entered the courtyard and sat down with some of the soldiers, hoping to learn anything he could about Jesus.

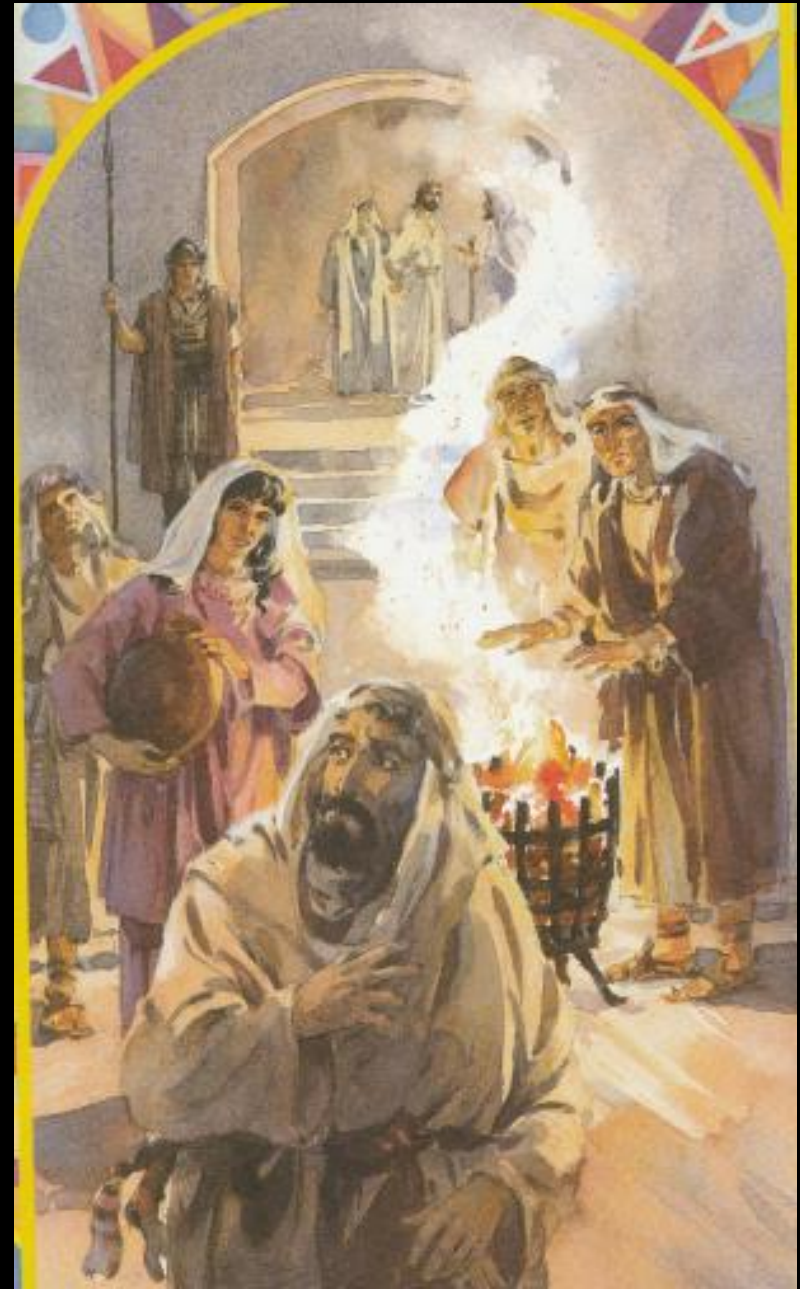
He sat and listened. He watched and listened. Jesus was on trial... the chief priests wanted to have him killed. They could find no evidence against Jesus... he had done nothing wrong.

Straining to hear any information he could, Peter failed to notice a servant girl looking at him. He jumped when she spoke.

"You know Jesus, don't you? You were with him!"

The soldiers stationed in the courtyard stopped talking as they waited for Peter's answer.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said, and stood up to leave the courtyard, pulling his cloak tightly around his face.





“He was with Jesus,” shouted another girl, pointing her finger at him accusingly.

“I don’t know anyone by that name,” shouted Peter, trying to stifle the feelings of panic and fear growing inside him.

“You must be one of Jesus’ friends. You speak with a Galilean accent. You must know him!” said someone else.

Peter turned and faced his accuser and shrieked with anger.

“You don’t know what you are talking about! I don’t know this man Jesus. I’ve never known Jesus! Don’t you understand?”

He backed off, ready to make his escape. Somewhere a cock crowed. A new day had begun. Peter remembered what Jesus had said. He had betrayed his friend.

The Crown of Thorns

JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 19, VERSES 1-17

Meanwhile there had been an unsatisfactory trial at Caiaphas' house. Unable to find any real evidence against Jesus, the high priest had accused him of blasphemy and had become so angry that he had ripped his clothes in fury. So, the elders decided to hand Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman Governor. Perhaps he would be able to deal with him.

It was the last thing Pilate wanted to do. The chief priests and leaders were out to get Jesus. No amount of reason would calm them down. It was also the Passover Festival. Pilate knew he could have a riot on his hands. He didn't want that.

Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate questioned him. Jesus remained silent. Pilate was amazed. He went to the crowd.

"It is your custom to free a prisoner at Passover. Do you want me to release Jesus, the King of the Jews?"

The chief priests and the elders acted swiftly. They whipped up the crowd into a frenzy.

"Crucify him! Crucify him!" they screamed.

The chief priests were delighted. Frightened of the crowd's reaction, Pilate gave in. He handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The soldiers jumped into action. They dressed Jesus in a purple robe, just like a king, and to complete the job they twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.

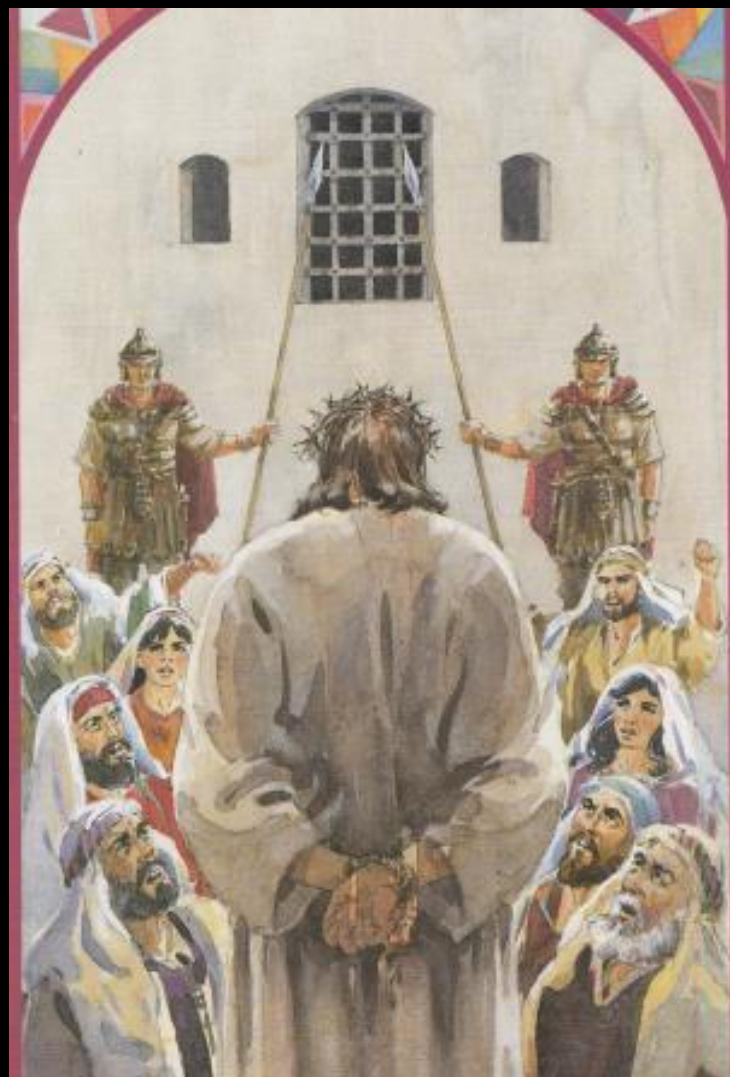
Then they amused themselves by jeering at him.

"Your Majesty!" they sneered. "King of the Jews!"

They knelt before him in mock respect. They spat in his face.

They laughed and sniggered.

When they had had enough, they made him carry a wooden crossbeam on his back, and led him up the hill called Calvary to die.



Crosses on a Hillside

LUKE'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 23, VERSES 32-43 AND JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 19, VERSES 25-30

A small crowd followed as Jesus was led out with two other men. Both of them had committed crimes punishable by death.

When they reached the top of the hill, each prisoner was nailed to his crossbeam. The crossbeams were then hoisted up into the air and attached to the poles already sunk in the ground. Jesus was in the middle, with one criminal on either side.

The people who stood at the foot of the cross were there for different reasons. Some were there to mourn; some to jeer and laugh. Jesus looked at the crowd, some of whom had nailed him to the cross.

"Father, forgive these people," Jesus said. "They don't know what they have done."

"I know who you are," shouted one of the criminals hanging next to him. "You are that man called Jesus. You said you were God's Son. Well, prove that you are by saving yourself now!"

"Be quiet!" said the other criminal. "You and I deserve to die for what we have done. But this man is innocent. He has done nothing wrong." He strained his head towards Jesus. "Remember me when you reign as King."

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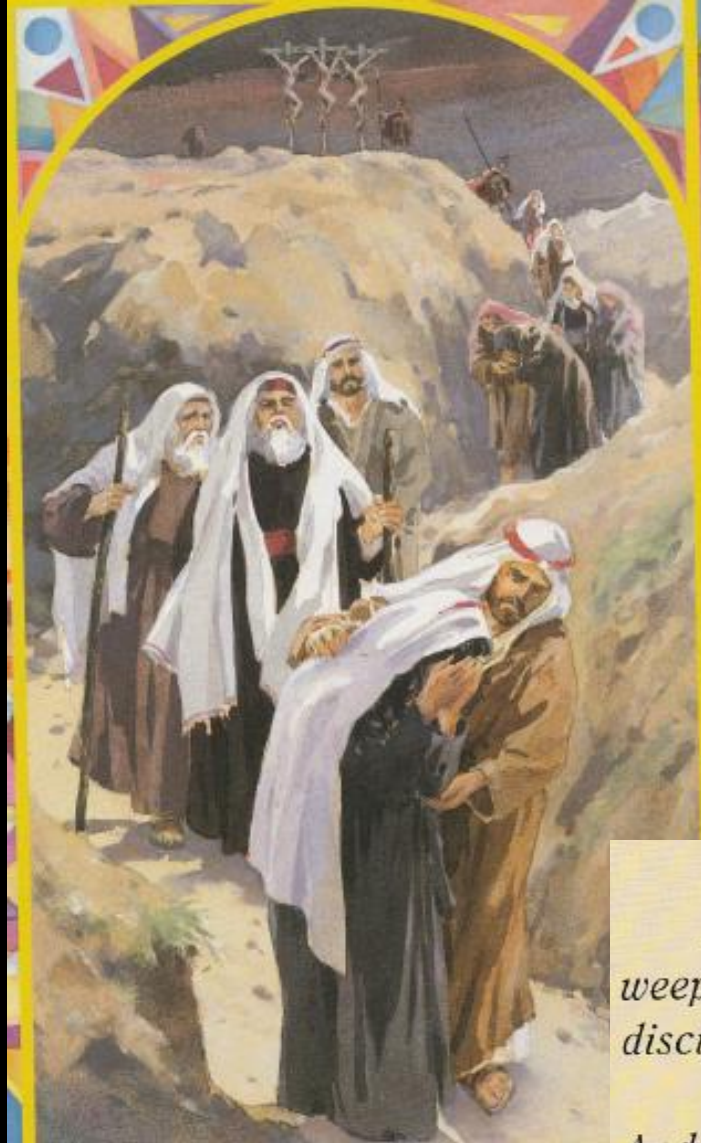
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“When I reign as King, you will be with me,” promised Jesus. Near the foot of the cross stood a group of women, quietly weeping. One of them was Jesus’ mother, Mary. John, one of Jesus’ disciples, was also nearby.

Jesus called out to his mother, “Think of John as your son.” And to John he said, “Treat Mary as your mother.”

At last Jesus knew that he was ready to die. With one final breath he called out to God, “Father, it is over! I have done what you wanted!”

At that moment the sky turned black. Jesus was dead.

Jesus is Alive!

JOHN'S GOSPEL, CHAPTER 20, VERSES 1, 11-16

It was a good and faithful man called Joseph, from a town called Arimathea, who saw that Jesus was buried. He gave Jesus the rock tomb he had bought for himself.

On the first day of the week, after the Passover holiday, Mary Magdalene went to the garden where the tomb was. She wanted to prepare Jesus' body for burial according to the Jewish custom. Mary was unsure how she would get to the body because a large rock had been placed across the entrance of the tomb.

The garden was still and empty as she walked towards the tomb.

Mary stopped. The rock which had stood at the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. The tomb was empty! Jesus' body had gone! Someone must have stolen it, she thought.

Mary slumped down on the ground and tears started to fall down her cheeks. Then she saw something gleaming from within the tomb. Cautiously she looked inside. Sitting where Jesus' body had been were two angels. "Why are you crying?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away the body of my friend Jesus, and I don't know where they have put him," she wept.

She heard a noise behind her and turned round. A man was standing there. Mary thought he must be the gardener.

"Where have you put his body?" she asked.

The man looked into her eyes, and spoke her name. "Mary."

Mary recognised the voice immediately. The man was Jesus! He was not dead, he was alive, walking and talking to her in the garden! She stretched out her arms to greet him. "Master!" she cried in amazement.

