

# FIVE FAITHS PROJECT



**Christianity**

**ACKLAND**  
ART MUSEUM

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## Introduction to Christianity

### The Birth of Jesus

*...the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High."*

Luke 2: 30-32

In order to appreciate the Christian tradition, it is important to remember that recorded stories are believed to have taken place two thousand years ago, within the context of a Jewish heritage. The stories unfold in a part of the world that in the future would be called Palestine, during the reign of King Herod. During this time, a young woman, named Mary, gave birth to a baby boy. The stories of his birth are recorded in two infancy narratives within the Christian tradition: one in the Gospel of Luke and the other in the Gospel of Matthew. In these narratives, the Mary calls the boy, Jesus. Christians believe that his birth had been foretold in many Jewish prophecies and visions.

Both Joseph, a direct descendent of the Jewish King David, and his wife, Mary, were faithful Jews. In the stories, angels visit both Mary and Joseph in the months surrounding Jesus' birth. According to the sacred texts, without ever having intercourse, Mary conceived a son and after nine months gave birth in a small village called Bethlehem. Many other people living in Palestine and the surrounding areas were also granted visions and dreams in which they saw the coming of the Son of God. Some of them traveled to see him shortly after his birth. Looking to the night sky for guidance, Magi, sometimes referred to as the Wise Men traveled a great distance to see him. With gifts in hand, they traveled to find and worship the baby boy.

This story of the birth of Jesus is central to the religion now known in the world as Christianity. For Christians, the importance of this story lies in more than the angels' visits, Jesus' miraculous conception, or even the mysterious star which stood in the night sky. This story, derived from the Gospels of Luke and Mark, stands out because it affirms a pivotal time and place in which Christians believe God came to earth and in the person of Jesus, intervened in human history. Christians believe that through this and the subsequent events in the life of Jesus, God made it possible for human beings and their maker to have a relationship transformed by the presence of Jesus in human history. Christians call this activity of God, the coming of God into human form, the Incarnation.

### Stories of Jesus' life and ministry

The events of the life of Jesus and his teachings were recorded in many texts. Most were written over the course of the hundred years or so after the life of Jesus. Many Christians believe that these texts were divinely inspired and are without error. In the sacred stories, readers find a man who was well-known and well-liked by some, especially those who lived on the margins of society, both civil and religious. He spent time alone and he spent time with people from every layer of his society. The stories depict a man who was willing to speak

with a solitary and outcast woman as she drew water from a local well, but also to people in positions of importance and authority. He spoke in public and in private. Large groups of

people gathered on the side of a hill near the Sea of Galilee in order to hear his lengthy sermons on the love of God and the nature of the world. But the Gospels also introduce Jesus as a man who challenged many of the prevailing ideas of his day. Acquainted with Roman law, raised and well-versed in the teachings of the Jewish tradition, and a Jew himself, having been raised in a Jewish household, Jesus engaged the elders of the synagogue, the leaders of the faith communities, and even the political establishment.

Jesus lived in a society which was sharply divided between men and women, Jews and Gentiles, Romans and Palestinians, rich and poor, free men and slaves. These distinctions, along with others, created a culture in which barriers and limitations were familiar. It was in this social climate that Jesus began his ministry. At approximately the age of 30, he left his family and friends and went out into the wilderness. In the stories, Jesus is said to have remained in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. He fasted and prayed for guidance. During that time, he was tempted by the Devil, an evil spirit in the Christian tradition, who works in opposition to the goodness of God. He overcame the temptations and remained obedient to God.

After Jesus' time of prayer and fasting, he returned to the community and gathered a small group of followers, called disciples, to come travel with him as he spread the word of God to men and women throughout Palestine. Together with his disciples and others, some of whom were women, Jesus traveled in the regions of Galilee and Judea and to such places as Jerusalem, Bethany, and Cana. The Christian sacred texts are filled with many stories in which Jesus gave examples of how faithful people ought to live. Many of these stories are called parables, in which Jesus used common, everyday events and activities of his time in order to teach a principle.

The gospels also include stories in which Jesus performed miracles. He healed men, women and children of terrible diseases, restored sight to the blind, cast out evil spirits, fed multitudes who gathered to listen to him teach with only a few loaves of bread and a few fish. He also walked on water, changed water into wine, and appeared to his followers surrounded by light, glowing on a hilltop with the Jewish prophets Moses and Elijah at his right and left hand. He was called Teacher, Friend, Rabbi, and Savior. He is also called the Christ in these texts, which translates to "the anointed one." According to the stories, many people came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah promised by the prophets in several of the Jewish sacred texts.

## **The death and resurrection of Jesus**

The stories describe approximately three years of Jesus' life in some measure of detail. At the end of these years, when Christian tradition holds that Jesus was 33 years old, the government, religious leaders and others in positions of authority had become very worried about Jesus and his teachings. While many Christians believe that Jesus was not advocating political or religious upheaval, many of the leaders of the time thought that he was.

Perceiving Jesus and his followers to be a threat to the government and to the established religious traditions, he was arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. Around the age of 33, Jesus was crucified. This was a common means of execution at the time, in which the guilty was publicly hung on a cross and left until dead.

Based on the stories recorded in the Gospels, even though Jesus performed countless miracles during his lifetime, many Christians believe that only after his death did the greatest miracle occur. The Gospels tell readers that three days after Jesus died and was buried, he was resurrected from the dead and came back to life. The stories teach that God did not allow Jesus to be conquered by death, but rather, Jesus' death opened up a pathway by which all who believed in him might live with him forever. The Gospels include stories of the forty days after his resurrection, when people saw and talked with him. In these stories, Jesus continued to teach how people might live faithful lives and encouraged them to share the good news of the love and forgiveness of God with as many people as they could. He reminded his followers that even though their bodies might die, they, too would be resurrected and have eternal life with God in heaven. The stories of the life of Jesus end, when, at the end of the forty days after his resurrection, while many of his followers were gathered around him and watching, Jesus ascended from earth into heaven. This story is recorded in the opening of the Book of Acts.

It is commonly held among Christians that the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus, is the pivotal moment in human history. Through Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, and through the establishment of a faith community based on his teachings, Jesus fulfilled all the promises of God and made it possible, by faith in him, for all human beings to be in relationship with God.

## **The beginnings of Christianity: The Sacred Texts**

After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, his followers began to organize new communities based on many of the Jewish teachings, but also incorporating the sayings and teachings of Jesus. These new communities were based on what they believed to be the good news of Jesus, intended for the whole world. Within the next century, the Gospels were written, letters to the newly formed churches were circulated among other faith communities, and the growth of the early church recorded. Over time, together with a selection of the sacred texts of Judaism, Christians organized a number of these texts into a new book. The documents which came from the Jewish tradition were named the Old Testament, indicated an on-going understanding of the origins of Christianity in the sacred stories of Judaism, while the Gospels and letters and other documents written after the life of Jesus were called the New Testament. It is within the New Testament that Christians established new ways of understanding the writings of the Old Testament, regarding all that had gone before to be a necessary precursor to the coming of this new faith. The writers of the New Testament, and particularly Paul, one of the early leaders of the new Christian religion, established teachings and instructions for living a Christian life and the establishment of what is now known as the Christian faith. In all, the Old and New Testaments form the Bible, the central text of Christianity. Within the Bible, the text affirms that the teachings are divinely inspired and suitable for instructing the followers of Jesus.

## **The growth of Christianity**

In the nearly 2,000 years since these events were recorded in Christianity's sacred texts, the faith tradition has grown and spread throughout the world. Christians now live in virtually

every country on earth, and it is estimated that there are over 1.5 billion Christians worldwide. As Christianity grew, the Bible remained the most important document for followers of Jesus. While all Christians regard the Bible as a sacred text, certainly inspired by the Spirit of God, there are also additional practices and beliefs. In much the way that the Bible has been translated into the indigenous languages of peoples all over the world, these additional religious beliefs and practices reflect the place, time, and heritage of individual followers and their cultures.

Over time, Christianity grew into a richly diverse tradition, with three main branches: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy, as well as many other smaller sects. Within the Protestant tradition alone, there is a wide range of denominations including Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists and others, each expressing this faith heritage in particular ways. In America, there are more than 2,000 distinct denominations which identify themselves as Christian. What then binds all these groups within the Christian tradition?

## **Christian Beliefs**

First, Christians believe in God. Christians speak of God as a Trinity: one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many believe that the man named Jesus was unique in that he was both the son of Mary and the Son of God, fully human and fully divine. Christians believe that all human beings are invited to recognize the gift which God gave in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to human beings in order to comfort and guide them in their lives as followers of Jesus. Generally, Christians assert that belief in the Trinity is the central tenet of the faith. There is general agreement among Christians that all people must acknowledge their need for God, renounce evil and embrace the teachings of Jesus and the Bible as a whole. Many Christians believe that God continues to intervene in human history by actively helping people who seek God's help, and by providing spiritual gifts and graces to those who model their lives after the love and sacrifice of Jesus.

## **Christian Practices**

Throughout the Christian tradition, certain practices and other beliefs bind individuals and faith communities together. Baptism, a ritual in which individuals are immersed in or sprinkled with water as a symbol of death and resurrection, represents a change in life, a binding to God and the faith community as well as an expression of one's commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus. From its beginnings, Christianity has maintained at least some level of commitment to missionary efforts, spreading the teachings of Jesus throughout the world. Many Christians also place a high value on acts of charity and compassion as expressions of discipleship. Just as God's love for the world was made tangible in the person of his son, so, too, Christian's make love visible by caring for the sick, giving food and clothing to the poor,



caring for widows and children who have lost their parents. The Bible teaches "Love must not be a matter of theory or talk, it must be true love which shows itself in action." The Gospels tell of Jesus' insistence that charity and love must be extended to all people, not just to those with whom there is agreement, or to those with whom there is a certain kinship. According to Christian teaching, love must reach out even to one's enemies.

Prayer is another central feature in the lives of many Christians. Prayer may be loosely defined as time spent talking to and listening to God. It can be either an individual or a corporate practice. Jesus offered specific instructions to his followers on how to pray. Christians may pray privately or as families, or in gatherings both in sacred centers of worship (churches, cathedrals) as well as in secular settings. In the Christian tradition, prayer includes thanksgivings, petitions and intercessions for the needs of others and praise. It is also considered to be a form of worship, in which Christians offer expressions of love and adoration to God.

## The Church Year

In every Christian tradition, rituals, festivals and special celebrations commemorate and reenact important moments in the life of Jesus. Over the course of a year, Christians celebrate at least some, if not all the following cycle of events.

- *Advent*: a season preceding the annual celebration of Christmas in which Christians remember that they live between the first coming of Jesus and his promised second coming at the end of time. It is a time when many Christians reflect on how they are living as Christians in this in-between time.
- *Christmas*: the annual celebration of the birth of Jesus.
- *Epiphany*: an annual celebration centering around the veneration of Jesus by the Wise Men (Magi), non-Jews who recognized something special in this infant. Orthodox Christians see the giving of Christmas gifts as related to the gifts given to Jesus by the Magi.
- *Lent*: a 40-day penitential season preceding Easter during which Christians and those preparing for Baptism at Easter repent of sin and prepare for Easter through acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- *Good Friday*: the remembrance of Jesus death on the cross.
- *Easter*: considered to be the greatest of all the Christian celebrations, Easter commemorates Jesus' victory over death. Many of the prayers and liturgies which are used in Easter celebrations are among the oldest recorded prayers in Christendom.
- *Ascension Day*: the annual commemoration of the day Jesus went to heaven to live for all eternity; traditionally celebrated 40 days after Easter in Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

- *Pentecost*: the annual celebration of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascension upon his earliest followers.

In many of the Christian traditions, the single most important celebration is called the Lord's Supper. Some call it Communion, or Eucharist. Depending on the tradition of the faith community, the Lord's Supper is celebrated daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly. At this celebration, Christians reenact Jesus' final meal with his closest followers and friends before his crucifixion.

## **The Gathering of the Christian Community**

Jesus placed a high value on relationships, especially between himself and God, often calling God his Father in heaven, and through Jesus, between his disciples and his heavenly Father, and finally among his disciples. Following his example, Christians maintain relationships with God, with the people in their lives, and with those people, throughout history, who have lived trustworthy lives of faith.

In many, Christian traditions, though certainly not all, the gathering of the Christian community is a central aspect of faithfulness. In these traditions, the church stands as a unified whole, with its members sharing a common life, practice and belief. Individuals may become members of the church by infant baptism and other childhood rituals, or later, in adult conversion to Christian beliefs and practices. In Christianity, the church is understood as a community of believers who express their relationship with God and others through communal worship, service and community life.

## **The Christian Saints and Other Models of Discipleship**

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions have given special recognition to individuals throughout history who devoted their lives to God and who lived according to that devotion. They are known in the Christian tradition as saints. First among these is Mary, who is revered as the Mother of Jesus, the Christ-bearer. Historically, much of the art of the Christian world focuses on these individuals as reminders and exemplars of discipleship. St. Lucy, St. Bartholomew, St. John the Evangelist are only three of the literally thousands of Christian saints. Many Protestant churches also recognize the importance of the saints, although it is less common for a Protestant church to include images of and prayers to the saints in their regular patterns of prayer and worship. Churches and cathedrals are often named for a particular saint. A church asks for a special remembrance by the saint in heaven by taking the saint's name. In this faith tradition, saints are not worshipped in the same way that God is worshipped, but rather, they are venerated and revered as friends who have gone on to heaven. Some Christian traditions maintain that the saints are helpers who come to the aid of Christians who invoke their name for aid and assistance. Individual Christians may even have a statue or an icon of a beloved saint (such as St. Francis) in their homes.



## The Christian Life of Faith

Whatever the particular practice and belief of Christian individuals, there is a unifying devotion to God, the Creator and to his son, Jesus. Singing, prayer, praise, thanksgiving,

rituals, celebrations and gatherings with other Christians, worship and fellowship, financial offerings to the church community, acts of charity, as well as regular study of the Bible and the writings of Christians throughout history may appear in many combinations to form the devotional life of a Christian. Through these and other practices, diverse and myriad, Christians aspire to live a life in which the truth of God's love and God's intervention in history through the person of Jesus, is made manifest again and again. The daily rhythms of a faith-filled life, the celebrations of the church and private devotions, all fuel the Christian's relationship with Jesus, with God the Father, with the Holy Spirit, and with all of God's creation.

### Further Research & Points for Discussion

- The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as The Acts of the Apostles are the primary sources for stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These books are found in the Bible. There are many standard versions of the Bible. Students may wish to find copies of the Bible in several of these versions: King James Version, Good News Version, Jerusalem Bible, Revised Standard Version and others. Focusing on a passage, for example, the first chapter of the Gospel of John, compare the language used in each. What advantages and disadvantages can students identify in having multiple versions of a given text?
- The Infancy Narratives are found in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. Compare these accounts of the birth of Jesus with the opening chapters of the other two gospels.
- The cross is a widely accepted symbol for Christianity. However, there are several variations on the theme to be found in each of the traditions of Christianity. Students may wish to research the various shapes and dimensions of the crosses. In doing so, they may discover additional branches of Christianity. Ask students to research one or more of these differing traditions.
- Research additional stories of Christian saints. Many churches are named for a saint. Ask students to find the stories behind the names of local churches.
- In the Christian tradition, there are many organizational structures within various denominations. Ask students to research the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox tradition and one or more Protestant denominations. How are the larger groups organized? Is there a central governing body or individual? How much autonomy do individual churches have?
- It is often said that America is a "Christian Nation." Invite students to consider the ramifications of this idea. Ask students to research the history of America, its founders and their beliefs. What evidence supports the idea that this is a Christian nation? What aspects of the founding of this country do not support this notion? The class may wish to discuss whether they perceive America to be Christian. Why? Why not? How does the separation of church and state influence their understanding?
- Christian art allows for innovation in visual expressions of faith, believers, God, Jesus and the saints. Ask students to find Christian images from other parts of the world. Can they identify changes in the imagery based on the country in which it was made? Even within this country, different churches represent Jesus in different ways. Some churches have icons, crosses, statues and stained-glass windows. Others do not. Ask students to consider the benefits of having highly decorated worship spaces. Ask them to consider the benefits of sparsely decorated worship spaces.

- According to a biblical quote: "Love must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action." (1 John 3:18) Ask students to consider ways in which love can be made manifest in works of charity and devotion. Students may wish to research outreach and service projects within local churches.

## **Contemporary Research Options**

- How many different sects and denominations within the Christian tradition are present in your community? In your state? In this country? What examples of differing beliefs can students identify? What unifying beliefs?
- There is on-going debate in America regarding the posting of the Ten Commandments and the motto: "In God We Trust" within public schools and government buildings. Ask students to find recent articles in newspapers and periodicals. Consider the pros and cons of this debate. If students could post a saying in schools and government buildings what saying might they select and why?

**The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints****(Lucy, Sebastian, John the Baptist and Catherine of Alexander), ca. 1490****attributed to Jacopo Sellaio, Italian, Florence, c. 1441-1493****tempera and gold on wood panel, 65 7/8 x 69 1/2 in.**

This altarpiece depicts Mary, Jesus and four saints within a walled garden. Human time is suspended in this image, as the saints gather around for what appears to be a holy conversation. Originally, this piece would have been set in a chapel, above and behind the altar. It would have been a focal point during the commemorative ritual of Jesus' last supper, called the Eucharist. During the ritual, the priest faces the altar and reenacts Jesus' breaking of bread and pouring of wine. Prayers are spoken over the bread and wine, and the priest lifts them up, asking God to bless them, before turning around and distributing the Eucharist to the church congregation.

- Mary and the saints were important figures in art from this period. Catholics often prayed to Mary and the saints for help and aid. While the altar is dedicated to God, it may also be dedicated to a particular saint. In this work, all the saints, as well as Mary and Jesus have human expressions: they look down on believers with love, as though they are ready to help. The saints and martyrs were understood to be reminders of Christian faithfulness. Christian art from the 15-17<sup>th</sup> centuries was designed to teach and to inspire.
- St. Sebastian: Possibly a patron saint of the family who commissioned this piece. The arrows are an attribute of St. Sebastian. The story of St. Sebastian says that even though he was shot with arrows by an evil emperor who wanted to deny his faith, Sebastian survived and continued to preach the gospel.
- Mary and Jesus are seated at the center of the image. Mary symbolizes the Church, giving Jesus to believers. Jesus is seen holding a small orb, which may be a symbol for the earth and all its inhabitants.
- Jesus with a crown of thorns can be seen at the top of the altarpiece: this is a reminder of his death and resurrection.
- John the Baptist is recognizable because of his rough clothing. Sacred stories tell of John's time living in the wilderness before the beginning of Jesus' ministry. (See Matthew 3, the Bible for more information)
- St. Catherine: St. Catherine was a martyr for Christianity. She is said to have had faith so strong that when she was tied to a wagon wheel for refusing to deny Christ, the wagon wheel broke.
- The saints are holding palm leaves as a symbol of everlasting life. Because the death of John the Baptist preceded the death and resurrection of Jesus, he is not holding a palm leaf.





Jacopo del Sellaio, (Italian, Florence, c. 1441-1493); The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Lucy, Sebastian, John the Baptist, and Catherine of Alexandria, ca. 1490; Tempera and gold on wood panel; Panel only: 65 7/8 x 69 1/2 in.; Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 63.18.1

**The Stigmatization of St. Francis, 1610 – 30****Vincente Carducho, Italian, active in Spain, c. 1576 - 1638****oil on canvas, 64 1/4 x 47 in.**

By the 17th century, at least in part as a response to the Renaissance and the Reformation, images of saints took on a more human aspect. In the mid-16th century, recognizing that people remember what they feel, councils of the Catholic Church created a set of guidelines for religious art. They established that this art should be realistic, that is, it should reflect the world as it is, and it should move people to greater devotion. One way of accomplishing these ends was the inclusion of graphic images of martyrdom. Individuals and the church commissioned works in order to educate the community about the life of faith and show the emotional content of that life.

St. Francis (b. 1181/2 - d. 1226) came from a wealthy family but rejected that wealth and established an order of monks (Franciscans) committed to poverty and self-denial as expressions of their dependence on God. St. Francis was dedicated to caring for the poor and is known for his affection for animals. The stories tell us that toward the end of his life, St. Francis wandered in search of a way to understand the mysteries of God. While he was wandering, he had a vision of Jesus, and the wounds inflicted on Jesus' hands and feet at his crucifixion, were transferred to St. Francis. According to the stories, St. Francis bled from these wounds for the remaining two years of his life. These miraculous wounds are called Stigmata. In the image, we see St. Francis in the midst of his vision.

The artist also shows a man in the background, another monk, holding a book. Tradition says that this is St. Leo, a friend of Francis. He did not actually see the vision but perceives it. It is significant that he is holding a book, presumed to be the Bible, because this image reinforces the Christian's ability to "see" Jesus through the stories of the Bible.



- The artist places St. Francis in a naturalistic environment. This reinforces the belief that saints lived in the natural world, while focusing their affections on God and a life of faith. The artist also includes a rock that flows with running water. This is a reference to an Old Testament story and establishes a connection between Christianity and its ancient roots.
- St Francis is the central figure in this painting. He is dressed in simple, plain clothing.
- St. Francis was an ascetic monk, dedicated to living in poverty as an expression of his reliance on God and his affiliation with the poor of the world.
- His face is filled with emotion.
- His hands bear the marks of stigmata.

Brother Leo stands in the background, holding a book and bearing witness to Francis' experience.





Vincente Carducho (Italian, active in Spain, c.1576-1638); The Stigmatization of St. Francis, 1610-1630; Oil on canvas; 64 1/4 x 47 in.; Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 95.3

### **Christ before Caiaphas, early 1630s**

**follower of Matthias Stom, Dutch, active in Italy, 1600-after 1652**

**oil on canvas, 60 1/8 x 80 1/4 in.**

Not all works of art from the Christian tradition were intended for use in religious settings. In the 17th century, it was common for wealthy individuals to commission artists to create large paintings for display in their homes. The pieces were far more dramatic, hyperbolic and emotional than those created in previous centuries. Individuals used these pieces as a way of expressing their own faith, and also as a way of reminding themselves and their families of the stories of the Bible, with a particular focus on the life of Jesus.

These paintings were intended to draw the viewer into the drama and mystery of the life of Christ. By focusing on the life of Jesus, Christians deepened their commitment to the church and their faith.



- The artist depicts the characters in this story in a naturalistic world and in what the artist believed to be the dress of the time and culture in which Jesus lived.
- Candlelight appears to be the only light, but the artist has given the figure of Jesus added luminosity to reinforce his divinity. The candle is central to the image; fire, a natural phenomenon, is used to suggest the spiritual light of the world.
- Note how Caiaphas (in green) is dressed. He is wearing far more elaborate clothing, indicating a higher rank in society. He leans on a book and has papers around him. These objects indicate that he is educated, a man who understands the rules and regulations of his culture.
- The artist establishes Jesus as the central character of this image by dressing him in nearly white garments and by casting the greatest amount of light on his face and body.
- Jesus hands are bound, but relaxed. He appears to be looking directly at the candle.
- The artist is showing a moment within the story, rather than telling it symbolically. The story is recorded in Matthew 26:57-67. Using the text of the story, can you determine who the man in the back might be?







Matthias Stom (Dutch, active in Italy, 1600-after 1652); Christ Before Caiaphas, early 1630s; Oil on canvas; 60 1/8 x 80 1/4 in.; Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund, 79.58.1

## Voices of Faith

### Jesus and the Blind Man

#### Summary

In this story, Jesus heals a man who was born blind. The storyteller describes the blind man's first sights and the response of his community to his healing.

#### Research Option

This story appears in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, ask students to find the story and compare the original text.

#### Discussion Questions

- In this story, what is the message that Jesus is teaching to his followers?
- Some branches of Christianity strongly emphasize individual faith. How does this story reinforce this notion?

Transcript of recorded story: Jesus and the Blind Man

My name is Tonnette McCloud. I'm thirty-three years old. I was born and raised in Pittsboro, North Carolina. I attend Austin Chapel Church in Pittsboro, North Carolina, where I am an associate minister and a Sunday school teacher, and I am a hairstylist by profession.

I am going to tell you a story about a blind man. One day when Jesus and his disciples were traveling throughout the land, they came across a man who had been born blind. And his disciples asked, "Lord, who did sin? This man, or his parents?" And Jesus replied, "Neither have sinned. But this was done that the father in heaven might be glorified."

After speaking these words, he spit upon the ground and formed clay and anointed the man's eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. And when the man went and washed in the pool he began to see immediately. He could see the tall trees with the beautiful green leaves, and he could see the bright blue sky. He not only felt those rays from the sun, but he could also see those beautiful rays.

He began to stroll back into town, and as he neared town, the neighbors began to question among themselves, "Isn't that the man that was begging before?" And one said, "No, it just looks like him." And another said, "No, I believe that is him." The blind man realized that they were debating and questioning about him. And he approached and said, "It is I." And the neighbors asked him, "How is it that you can see now?" He explained how Jesus had spit upon the ground, formed clay and anointed his eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. After washing he was able

to see. And the neighbors asked him, "Well, where is this Jesus now?" He said, "I don't know."

So, the neighbors carried him to the Pharisees. Now the Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who believed in keeping the Sabbath holy. You didn't travel on the Sabbath, you didn't work on the Sabbath, and you didn't heal on the Sabbath because healing was considered work. And they began to explain to the Pharisees what had happened with the blind man. The Pharisees began to debate among themselves. One said, "Well it's obvious that this Jesus is not of God because he doesn't keep the Sabbath holy." And another said, "Well how is it that he could perform such a miracle if he is not of God?"

So, there was a division among the Pharisees. And the Pharisees asked the man that was blind before, "Who do you say that this man is?" And the blind man responded and said, "Oh, he's a prophet." And the Pharisees began to question: "Maybe he wasn't even blind to begin with. Let's call his parents in and see if this is their son?" And they called his parents in, and they asked, "Is this your son?" And they said, "Yes, that is our son." The Pharisees asked the parents, "Was he born blind?" "Yes, we know that he was born blind." The Pharisees asked, "Well, how is it that he can see now?" And his parents looked and said, "Well, that is our son, and he was born blind, but as for how he can see now, we do not know, but he is of age. Ask him, he can respond for himself."

And the Pharisees went back to the blind man and said, "Give God the glory, for we know that this man was a sinner." And the man looked at them and said, "Well, whether he be a sinner or not, I know not, but for whereas I was blind, now I see." And the Pharisees began to ask the man again, "Tell us what happened, explain to us how it is that you are able to see now." By this time the man was getting a little upset and agitated and he said to them, "Well, if I explain again will you hear me now? And...why should I repeat myself? You didn't listen before. Will you become his disciples also?" And the Pharisees were upset with the man and explained to him, "You are his disciple, but we are the disciples of Moses. For we know that God spoke to Moses. But as for this man, we don't know from where he has come." The blind man looked at the Pharisees and said, "How is it that this is a marvelous thing that has been done? And you know not from whence he has come. For we know that God hears not the prayers of a sinner, but if that man is of God, that man he will hear."

And the Pharisees were upset and angry and cast the man out onto the street. Jesus heard that he had been cast into the street. And he came and searched out the land and found the man and asked him, "Do you believe I'm the son of God?" The man looked up at Jesus and said, "Lord, who is he that I may believe?" Jesus responded and said, "It is he that speaks with thee now, and it is he that you have seen." The man answered and said, "Lord, I believe." And he began to worship and praise him.



## Voices of Faith

### The Story of St. Lucy

#### Summary

In this story, students are introduced to the life of St. Lucy.

#### Research Option

Historically, women in the time of St. Lucy were expected to marry. Lucy wants to make another choice, to be single and follow God. Had she lived, she might have become a nun. Students may wish to gather information about Christian monasticism, both as an historical tradition and in contemporary society. Many monastic communities have web sites on the Internet.

There are many stories of saints. Students may wish to find other stories. St. Francis is a saint for whom there are many recorded stories. Using the slide enclosed in these materials, assign students the task of finding stories and other images of St. Francis.

#### Discussion Questions

- How might St. Lucy's death have hastened the growth of Christianity in her community?
- What are the attributes (symbols) that identify St. Lucy?
- Sometimes it is difficult to imagine anything worth dying for. Why might St. Lucy have been willing to die for her faith? Are there other things worth dying for?

Transcript of recorded story: The Story of St. Lucy

My name is Kathleen Williams, and I'm from St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Pittsboro, North Carolina. I work at Duke University in the graduate school. My family and I live in the country outside of Chapel Hill, with our dogs and our cat and our gardens.

The story I'm going to tell is about St. Lucy, who was a martyr of the early Christian Church. She's known as the Virgin Martyr. Her story takes place in the time of the Roman Empire, about three hundred years after the time of Jesus. And in these days the Roman political establishment was very, very worried about the growth of this young church; they worried and felt that Christianity was a threat to the power of Rome. So the emperor in the time of the story that I'm going to tell you, whose name was Diocletian, made it illegal to practice Christianity, and this was his way of trying to control the growth of this religion. That's the background for the story that I'm going to tell you about Lucy.

Now Lucy was a young woman who was the daughter of a wealthy family from Syracuse, in Sicily. She was betrothed to be married, and her dowry arrangements had

been made for the transfer of wealth from her family to her new husband's family. Lucy's future actually looked very bright except for one large sad thing in her life, and that is that her mother was very ill. Her mother actually had been ill with an issue of blood for four years that nobody could cure, and so she had become progressively weaker and sicker, and it looked like she would die soon. And this was very sad for Lucy because she was very devoted to her mother.

Now Lucy had heard the stories that were spreading across the land about the Christian St. Agatha and her healing miracles and that the people were making journeys to the tomb of St. Agatha to pray and to seek healing for their sicknesses. And these stories aroused hope in Lucy, and so she went to her mother and said, "I think we should go to the tomb of St. Agatha. I think we should go and seek a cure for you there." Well Lucy's mother actually thought this idea was frightening because, as I've said, it was illegal to be caught practicing Christianity. And it just seemed like a dangerous thing to do. But Lucy had this conviction about this idea, and she was persuasive, and her mother agreed.

So, they embarked on a journey to the city of Catania where the tomb of St. Agatha was located. And when they arrived, they saw that there was a group of people celebrating a Mass at the tomb. They got there just in time to hear the gospel reading recounting the story of Jesus and his miraculous cure of a woman afflicted with an issue of blood. Lucy heard that story and was really amazed, and so she said to her mother: "Mother, if you believe the story that we've just heard read, then you have to believe that Agatha, who healed in his name, may be able to cure you, and we really have to go down to the tomb and pray."

They waited until the crowd left, and they went on down to the tomb and knelt by it and touched it and started to pray. And after a while Lucy became very sleepy and drifted off to sleep, and she had a dream. And in her dream, St. Agatha appeared to her, and she had a beautiful face, and she was just luminous. She had this light and angels around her. And she addressed Lucy, and she said, "Lucy, my sister. You are a woman of God. Why do you ask me for that which you have the power to do? Awaken and your love and your faith have healed your mother." Well, Lucy bolted awake and turned to her mother and said, "Mother are you well?" And, sure enough, the bleeding had ceased, and the color was returning to her face. She was healed. Lucy said, "This is a miracle. This is just a miracle. Something wondrous and miraculous has happened. We need to find a way to show our gratitude for this. I think we need to share our wealth with the people around here who have less than we do." Lucy's mother said, "Lucy, can't you wait until I've closed my eyes for the last time, and everything is yours and you can do whatever you want with it?" And Lucy said, "Well, mother, I think giving, just because you can't take it with you, it doesn't really count as giving. To really give you have to do it freely in this life." And her mother said, "But Lucy, you're betrothed to be married. This wealth isn't really even ours." And Lucy said, "Mother, I feel that my life belongs to God now. I can't marry. You have to release me

from this espousal." Lucy had such a conviction and a sincerity about her that her mother was persuaded, and so they embarked on a ministry, really, of selling their goods and sharing the wealth.

Well, of course it wasn't long before Lucy had to encounter her fiancé and break off the engagement. And she did her best to explain to him truthfully and simply what had occurred and changed her life so much. But he was very, very angry and very offended about this: for one, that he was rejected by her and for another, that he was losing this wealth that he had already come to consider his. He was so angry that he actually filed a complaint against her with the local magistrate - renouncing her as Christian.

The magistrate, whose name was Paschasius, actually rather liked this kind of case, because it gave him such a nice opportunity to demonstrate the power of Rome and the logic of Roman power. So, he had her brought to the court, which was in a public square and was open to the people to come. He was determined that he would force her to recant. So, he started the proceeding by demanding that she make sacrifice to the idols, which was the custom of the time, the Roman custom of the time. Lucy told him that she wouldn't do that. She said, "The only sacrifice that pleases my God is to give what I have to those that have less than I do. And that's all I can do." Well, the magistrate Paschasius said, "Well, those are fine words for a fool like you. But as for me, who keeps the decree of my master, those words are spoken in vain."

Lucy said to him, "Well, you keep the decrees of your masters and I keep the laws of my God. You fear and want to please your masters, and I fear and want to please God. You, therefore, should do what is useful to you, and I will do what is useful to me." The magistrate said, "You won't speak thus when you feel the lash." And Lucy said to him, "I speak only God's truth." He said, "So, do you pretend to be God?" And she answered him, "Only the handmaiden of him who said to his followers, 'You will be brought before Kings and Governors in my name and when you are called forth have no worry for what or how you will speak for it won't be you speaking, it will be the holy spirit speaking in you.'"

The magistrate had no patience for this, and he said, "Well, so I suppose then that it's the Holy Spirit that keeps you from this marriage that you have promised yourself to? I think we will take care of this Holy Spirit." And he sentenced her there, loudly, in front of the crowd that she should be bound by her hands and feet and tied to a team of oxen and dragged to the brothel and there to be abused until her death. Lucy drew herself up and said to him, "You have the power to do whatever you will to my body, but you can't defile my spirit without my consent, and you'll never have that."

And while the soldiers came and made ready to tie her up and take her off for the sentence, she turned her gaze from that place and fixed it on the far horizon on a tree there, and she began to pray out loud. "Lord, you are my shepherd, I shall not want.

You make me to lie down in green pastures." As she prayed, her faith became like roots of that mighty tree, growing into the ground and anchoring her there. And as the men tried to take her away, she couldn't be moved. So, they brought many more men and more oxen. And she could not be budged from that spot.

Well, the magistrate, Paschasius, was getting angry and anxious at all these people seeing this and so he said, "Well then, we'll just burn her on the spot where she stands, bring the materials for the fire and burn her." Lucy didn't seem to hear this for she still gazed out at the horizon and continued to pray. "You lead me beside the still waters, you restore my soul." And her faith became like a pool of water surrounding her at her feet, and as they tried to build a fire, no fire could be kindled. Well, the magistrate was in a fury by now, and the soldiers seeing this made ready to come run her through with their swords, but Lucy kept praying. "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou art with me." Then Lucy left her body and went to join God on that far horizon, and only then were they able to penetrate her body with their swords. Well, the magistrate, in secret relief, gloated about his victory over Lucy, but actually his victory was a very weak one. For many people that were there that witnessed the miracle of Lucy's courage and faith were so moved by it that they converted and embraced Christianity right then. And, really, Lucy's death only hastened the time, which was not very far down the road, that Rome embraced Christianity.

You can see Lucy depicted in art, often with a sword through her throat as a symbol of the effort to silence her, and she holds a dish with two eyes in it. What I say about that is that Lucy only had eyes for God.

## Voices of Faith

### Remembering an Italian Grandmother

#### Summary

This is a contemporary story, remembering the influence of the storyteller's Italian grandmother.

#### Research Option

Students may wish to find copies of the prayers mentioned in the story. The "Our Father" is sometimes called "The Lord's Prayer. The "Hail Mary" is a prayer often spoken by Catholic Christians as they touch a rosary. The Apostle's Creed is not a prayer, but a statement of core beliefs in Christianity. These three are often taught to young children as introductions to the liturgies of the church. Refer to the Ewald catalogue for images of children learning or reenacting faith stories.

#### Discussion Questions

- How does the storyteller paint a verbal picture of her grandmother? What details does she provide?
- How does the storyteller encourage the listener to have the same affection for the grandmother that she herself has?
- How does this story reinforce the notion that religious sensibilities are handed down within families? Students may wish to explore religious traditions handed down within their families and share examples with classmates.

Transcript of recorded story: Remembering an Italian Grandmother

I'm Marion Enzera Kalbacker, and I live in Chatham County, North Carolina, in a little town called Silk Hope. I attend St. Julia's Catholic Church, which is the only Catholic Church in Chatham County. It's a small church, but it has an interesting population of both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members. I live on a small farm with my husband and two daughters. During the days I'm a pediatric social worker at UNC Medical Center.

The story I'm going to share with you today is about my growing up years in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, often called the city of hills. I was very fortunate to live there, surrounded by my extended family of Italian relatives. I'm going to share with you some special memories of one person, my Italian grandmother.

When I was a little girl growing up, one of my very favorite places in the whole world to visit, to see one of my very favorite people in the world, was to my grandmother's house. When I was about six or seven, I was allowed to walk the three and a half blocks to her house, usually under the watchful eye of my older, ten-year-old sister. Just walking to Grandma's house was an adventure in and of itself. There was a dark tunnel

to scramble through and, on the far side, a wonderful waterfall flowing through the rocks of the hillside that we could splash ourselves in.

My Grandmother's house set down off the main neighborhood street and was one of the original farmhouses in the neighborhood before there was any neighborhood at all. In order to get to her front yard you had to go down a long steep gravel driveway. The usual five-minute walk could take my sister and I fifteen, twenty, or even thirty minutes, as we explored every beautiful rock and stone in that driveway. Our very favorite ones were the smooth crystal green stones that you could almost see through. We called them our lucky stones. We would come up to Grandma on the porch with our hands full of our lucky stones, and she would patiently count them with us, in Italian of course. "Uno, due, tre." If grandma happened to be inside when we arrived, she would say, "Did you poppa bring you in da macheen?" Even though my grandmother came to this country when she was fifteen years old and lived here for the remaining sixty years of her life, she always referred to cars as "macheens."

Each time we came to visit grandma, we always hugged and kissed her and asked her for her blessing in Italian. When we were young it sounded to us as if people were mumbling, "Spinach, Grandma." As we got older our translation turned into "Saba liga gata mia." With maturity and understanding came the correct pronunciation, "Se benedice, cara mia," Bless me, my dear one. Regardless of our pronunciation, Grandma would take our cheeks between her hands, kiss us, and ask the Lord's blessing upon us. To this day, each night at bedtime, I trace the sign of the cross on my daughters' foreheads and ask the Lord to bless them through the night.

One of the very special times that I will always remember is the time that I went to grandma's house all by myself. She and I spent the entire day making homemade ravioli. These are not the kind of ravioli that you find in a can. These were big square mounds - as big as a grown man's hand - stuffed with spinach and cheese and meat. One or two were a complete meal. As Grandma and I mixed the flour, eggs and water and rolled it into a pasta dough on her scrubbed wooden table, Grandma would tell her stories. I'll never forget the one she told when she said she was married at fifteen! "What?" I said, "Why would your parents allow such a thing? I can't believe you got married when you were only fifteen years old." Grandma smiled as her blue eyes - from Northern Italy - twinkled. "Ah, my papa. He picka da man." "What! Your father picked your husband? You married someone you didn't even love? And at fifteen!"

How could this be? Surely she's not talking about my grandfather. After all, even though he passed away when I was only two years old, I had wonderful warm memories of him, from all the great stories everyone had always shared about him. Grandma finally continued, "I tella my papa, I no marry diss man. Finally, my papa say to me. 'Mariana. OK, You no marry him. You justa makea friends.' But I tell him, 'Papa... he's too old. And too short. And he have a bigga nose.' But, my papa, he was a



smarta man, I talk to your Grandpa. I get to know him. And very soon I find out, ah, he's a gooda man. He was a gooda husband and a gooda papa. And I pray to God... someday you find a gooda man like your grandpa too. Your grandpa, he worka so hard. Always he fixxa da shoes. Nobody coulda buy new shoes. So they bringa da old shoes to Grandpa and he makea them like new. If somebody no come for da shoes, then your mamma or your uncle Vincy or your aunta Margaret, then they getta new shoes. "

As my grandmother and I were making ravioli at the kitchen table we could look out the window to the far hill and see the brick fortress of the convent school up above us. Grandma would point to that school and say, "I tell you grandpa, when our girls they getta big, they go to that school." Grandpa say, "How we pay for such a school?" And she'd say, "Well, everybody needa shoes, and everybody needa food. Giuseppi, you fixa da shoes, I senda food from my garden." And so, that was how grandma's four daughters received their education. The sons, they could always learn a trade. One became a shoemaker and repaired shoes for many years until his retirement, like his father. Another became a brick mason. But the girls. For the girls an education was important, so that they could be good teachers to their children.

From a very early age I was taught my prayers. First, the sign of the cross. Then the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostle's Creed. It was very important to learn all of these before making one's first Holy Communion, around the age of seven. My grandmother always had her crystal beaded rosary close at hand, and she would say her Hail Mary's in Italian, and I would repeat in English.

During the month of May we would take fragrant bunches of purple lilacs and decorate them around the statue of Mary on Grandma's diletta, her dresser in her bedroom. This was to honor Mary, during the month of May, in remembrance of her being the mother of Jesus. As the month of May came to an end and my first Communion day came closer my mother, who was a wonderful seamstress, put the finishing touches on my First Communion dress, which she designed herself. She trimmed my veil with white lace and made me look like a little bride. I had white shoes and white gloves and was ready for the big occasion. On the day of my First Communion, all of my relatives came to the church to watch me as I received the white wafer that had been transformed into the body of Christ. This was a very sacred occasion and central to our Catholic faith and to our belief in the son of God. To mark this special time I received a new prayer book, a cross hung on a delicate chain and a crystal, beaded rosary, just like Grandma's. When my own two daughters received their first Holy Communion, it was very important to me to sew their Communion dress and their veils and, especially, to give them crystal rosary beads, like their grandmother.

Holidays at Grandma's, especially Christmas and New Year's Eve, were holidays never to forget. Relatives came from all over: aunts, uncles, first, second, third cousins. From

close by and from as far away as Chicago and even Italy. There was a feast such as you have never seen. In addition to the sweet Italian sausages sautéed in onions and green peppers, and homemade ravioli and manicotti, there were numerous dishes with all kinds of fish hidden in them. There was squid with marinara sauce, pasta con sarde, a pasta dish which I loved - with raisins and pine-nuts and sweet and tangy spices and other mysterious ingredients. I was amazed later when I found out that hidden in this mysterious dish was sardine paste. There were fried doughnut balls with anchovies tucked in the center. Fortunately, some were made plain and rolled in plenty of sugar for us children to enjoy.

On New Year's Eve, everyone would return to Grandma's with food and music and at least ten conversations going at one time. Late at night when the children would get tired, we'd go upstairs to the third floor of that big old farmhouse and find one of the big marshmallow beds to sink into. Since my sister and I were the only girl cousins among ten boy cousins, we got one of those big cloud beds all to ourselves.

One particular New Year's Eve, around one a.m., we all climbed into our cherished beds, after having celebrated the new year with homemade noisemakers and a toast with homemade black berry wine. The children all went to bed, and the adults were all staying up to continue celebrating. The next morning, we all planned to go to church together to ask God's blessing on the New Year. But the next morning when the children woke up, there were squeals of laughter and delight. During the night, two and a half feet of snow had fallen, and no one was going anywhere for quite a long time. That gravel driveway turned into the best sled track around, and snowball fights and snowman-building were captured forever on silent home movies.

To this day the scent of sweet fresh basil and ripe purple grapes instantly transports me back to my grandmother's garden and sitting with her under the grape arbor. She was a woman of great strength in spite of the fact that she was legally blind and paralyzed on her left side from a stroke. Her strong faith in God and her wonderful sense of humor enabled her to get through each day and to find the bright spot in every challenge.

## Voices of Faith

### The Story of Guadalupe

#### Summary

This story tells of a young man named Juan Diego who witnesses the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The story is told in Spanish, with English translation.

#### Research Option

The storyteller refers to "indigenous people." What does this term mean? This story takes place within an historical context. When did the Spanish discover America? When did Spanish missionaries arrive in Mexico?

This story contains many terms and ideas worthy of exploration. For example: how far is a league? What is the literal meaning of "Guadalupe?" There is a church erected at the site mentioned in the story, images may be found in libraries and on the Internet.

#### Discussion Questions

- What strengths does Juan Diego show in his attempts to convince the bishop of his visions?
- How does the storyteller encourage the listener to believe Juan Diego?
- What miracles make it possible for the people to believe that Mary, the mother of Jesus has appeared to the Jan Diego?
- There are many stories of Mary appearing to individuals throughout history. Students may wish to find other stories and compare them with this story. In every case, the stories inspire devotion among believers.

Transcript of recorded story: The Story of Guadalupe

My name is Alejandro Uresti. I am from Cerritos San Luis Potosi. Cerritos - it means "hills." In my neighborhood, I live in a valley in Mexico, and I know several places where the Indians lived a long time ago, and I'm going to tell the story of our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe begins after the conquest of the indigenous people by the Spanish who arrived in the valley of Mexico. When the Spanish discovered America and arrived, the Indians put up little resistance. But problems began when the Spanish began to destroy the temples of the gods the indigenous people had revered. The indigenous people were treated as slaves and were not allowed to live as they had before.

But there were some people who called them their children and who protected them somewhat from the ravages of the colonists. From these people, who were Catholic friars, the indigenous people learned of the story of Jesus Christ and of the story of the

Virgin Mary and of all the Christian religion. And because of this good treatment that they received the indigenous people could easily accept the new religion. They were baptized into the new religion, and they changed their names.

And among these people was one Tonantzín, who changed his name to Juan Diego. Juan Diego lived seven leagues from the place where he went to hear Mass, which was called Tlatelolco. And every day, when he was going to hear Mass, traveling from his house to Tlatelolco, he passed a hill, which was known as Tepeyak. In the Nahuatl language of the indigenous people this name, Tepeyak, means "The hill of the Queen."

The first important date of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe was the ninth of December in 1531. Juan Diego was on his way to Mass one morning when, passing by the hill, he heard divine music and the songs of many birds. He had never heard such a thing before, but he did not feel fear, instead, he felt great happiness and began to walk up the hill.

And what he saw truly amazed him, for he saw a beautiful young woman standing on clouds and enshrouded in brilliant light. Her skin was dark, and she had a shawl that was full of shining stars. He fell to his knees, but he heard a beautiful voice that said the following. "Juan Diego, Juan Diego, my son, I know that you are on the way to Mass, and I won't keep you a while, but I want to show you who I am. I am the Virgin Mary, the mother of God. And I want you to carry a message to Friar Juan de Zumárraga. I am the mother of God, and I want all of you who are my children to feel my protection and to raise for me, on this spot, a church." "My lady," he said, "I am only a poor Indian, I don't think that the bishop is going to listen to me." "Do as I have told you, my son," she said, "Take this message to the bishop, and I will wait here to hear his reply."

Juan Diego went on, first to hear Mass. He went with happiness in his heart because he knew that from this time forward, the lives of the indigenous people would change. When he arrived at Tlatelolco, he did his best to see the bishop Friar Juan de Zumárraga.

When he arrived at the bishop's house he was attended immediately and asked the man who answered the door if he might see the bishop. The servant went to see the bishop and told him that there was a man who brought an important message. The bishop, however, did not think it was that important, and so he told the messenger to wait. That was at seven in the morning. Juan Diego waited all day. The normal activities of the monastery went on. Mass was said. Juan Diego wasn't able to attend it. And it was not until four in the afternoon that they noticed him again and remembered that he was there. The bishop himself was passing by, and Juan Diego said it was he who had brought him the message. And the bishop said, "Well, I don't know what your message is about. I'd forgotten completely that you were there, but here I am, and now I can listen to your message."

Juan Diego told him exactly what had happened to him that morning on the hill on his way to Mass with many details of the appearance of the woman, but the bishop did not believe him. Juan Diego went home very sad because they had not believed him, thinking that it was a story that he had made up. When he got home, he told all this to his uncle, Juan Bernardino, who was the man with whom he lived. Juan Bernardino also thought that the story was quite incredible, but he knew his nephew and thought Juan Diego would not tell a lie. The next day, which was the tenth of December 1531, Juan Diego returned by the same route and passed by the hill to give the message to the lady who was waiting at the top. Everything happened the same as it had the day before. There was the celestial music, the song of the birds and the young woman standing on the clouds. "My lady, I did as you told me," said Juan Diego. "I carried the message to the bishop, but he did not believe me." "Go again my son," she said, "Take this message to the bishop and tell him that I want here to be built a church where all of the needy people of the world may find refuge and peace."

Juan Diego went, and this time the bishop received him a bit earlier than he had the day before, and once again he told him what had been required by the woman who was standing on the clouds. The bishop was skeptical of Juan Diego's tale because he frankly found it hard to believe that the mother of God, that the mother of Jesus Christ, had appeared to this humble Indian boy. So, the bishop said to Juan Diego, "My son, I need you to tell the lady at the top of the hill to send me some kind of proof about who she is and of what you are telling me."

When Juan Diego got home, he found that his uncle, Juan Bernardino, was quite sick. Juan Diego gave his uncle some herb tea of the kind the indigenous people used in these situations and waited to see if he would be better tomorrow. The next day he set out earlier than usual down the road to. This time he took a slightly different route that did not take him by the hill, but, rather, an alternative road. He was hoping that he could avoid seeing the lady standing on the clouds this time. Nevertheless, she appeared before him in the same aspect as on the two previous days, and this is what she said. "Juan Diego, my son," she said, "What is happening? Why are you fleeing me?"

"My lady," said Juan Diego, "I have no time to lose this morning. I have to arrive as soon as possible at Tlatelolco. My uncle is very sick, and I'm going to seek a doctor." The lady said, "Do not worry about your uncle, he will be fine. I promise you that nothing will happen to him. He will get better soon. Go once again and tell the bishop the things that I have asked you to tell him." And Juan Diego said, "No, the bishop won't listen to me, I am only a poor Indian. Send someone more important. Send someone with white skin. Send someone that the bishop will believe." Yesterday I told him your message, and he told me that you must send him some sort of proof of who you are.

And so she said, "Go once again and tell him these things, Juan Diego. Do not worry about your uncle. Tell the bishop that tomorrow I will send him the proof that he has

asked for." And so, Juan Diego went to Tlatelolco and he saw Juan de Zumárraga. And he told him that the following day the lady standing on the clouds would send the proof that he required. So, the bishop said fine, that he would wait until tomorrow to see the proof that would be sent, and Juan Diego then returned to the house of his uncle to see how Juan Bernardino was. And when he got home, he was quite surprised to find his uncle out of bed, singing and quite obviously no longer sick at all. And Juan Diego asked him, "Uncle, what happened? Do you think that the medicine has cured you? You look like you're in such a good mood." "Ah, Juan Diego, my son, if you knew what has happened to me. There appeared to me a lady standing on the clouds with a shawl that was full of bright shining stars. And she climbed down from the clouds and she touched me on the forehead, and she said, "Don't worry any more about sickness but take care of your nephew, for the two of you are very special in my eyes'. And from that very moment I felt completely better, and I know that that sickness will not return to affect me."

Juan Diego was, of course, overjoyed, and he promised himself that the next day he would hurry to see the miraculous lady who had cured his uncle. And just as he had planned, the next morning he arose early and went to the hill of Tepeyak to see the Lady of the Heavens. His heart was light as he strode up the hill to meet the virgin who was waiting at the top. And she said to him, "Juan Diego, I have now the proof to send to the bishop. I have visited your uncle. You do not need to worry any more about his sickness. "That is exactly what I wanted to thank you for," said Juan Diego. "I have explained to my uncle what you have done for him, and I am ready to take the proof that the bishop has asked for." And the lady of the heavens told him, "Juan Diego, go to the highest point of the hill and collect there the roses that you will find growing and put them in this shawl, or tilma."

Because we are speaking of December it should be recalled that, in the valley of Mexico, that is a very cold month. And for the same reason, normally during that month, it would be completely impossible to find roses in any part of the valley of Mexico. Nevertheless, when the Virgin told Juan Diego to go collect roses, he did not hesitate for a moment. He walked up the hill to gather the flowers as she had said. And there he found many roses and collected all that he could, and he gathered in his tilma all he could, and he went down the hill to continue to the bishop's palace.

When he arrived there, he need not even knock on the door because the door was open, and many people had gathered to await him. Many people wanted to see what he was carrying, but he would not let them see. He took the message straight to the bishop. And when he was standing before the bishop he said, "Juan de Zumárraga, here I have the proof that the lady of the heavens has sent." No one had any idea what he might be carrying, but when he let the tilma fall open and the roses spilled to the floor they were truly amazed.



Juan Diego thought that they were amazed because these roses that he brought would not have been found anywhere at that time in the valley of Mexico and that they were so surprised to see them. But that was not the true reason that the people who stood before him were surprised. The roses on the floor were the least of their amazement. The crowd of people fell to their knees and looked with a marveled gaze at Juan Diego, who himself was almost hypnotized, not understanding their reaction. And so the bishop came and took the tilma away from Juan Diego and turned and showed him what was on that garment, and Juan Diego himself, then, was as amazed as the rest and also fell to his knees. And he began to cry, "That's her. That's the lady of the heavens. That is the one who I have seen. That is the one who has sent the messages."

And from that time no one could any longer doubt the truth of all that Juan Diego had said, and from that time the garment on which her image appears has been kept as a relic. And now the Spaniards and the indigenous people joined together to build the great temple that the Virgin had asked to be built on that spot. The rich people gave money, architects designed the plan, and the indigenous people contributed with their labor to the construction of the temple. Because from the moment in which she revealed herself there, the indigenous people of Mexico have felt that they truly did have the protection of a holy mother, and no one could say that she has not done true miracles on their behalf.

## Glossary

### ascension

as recorded in the New Testament (Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:9-13). Christ's post-resurrection ascent into heaven, viewed by his followers.

### baptism

the ritual washing in water as a sign of the remission of sins and symbolic participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ritual practices vary among differing sects and denominations in Christianity. In some traditions that practice is reserved for adults, in others infants are regularly baptized. In the early Christian church, adult baptism was the norm and it was seen as part of a process of instruction and initiation into the faith. Baptism continues to be an almost universal ritual throughout Christianity as a central rite of initiation into the faith.

### Bible

Literally, in Greek, bible means collection of writings, or scrolls. With the addition of "the," and within the confines of Christianity, the term refers to collected texts of the Old and New Testaments. The bible can refer to any collection of bound texts, or any sacred oral or written tradition. The Bible, as the sacred text of Christianity, contains writings from the sacred texts of Judaism, divided slightly differently, and titled the Old Testament, as well as selected writings from the first through fourth centuries CE. The New Testament of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions contains twenty-seven books: four Gospels, twenty-one letters, the book of Acts and the book of Revelation. Other Christian traditions have larger or smaller collections within their New Testaments.

### Christ

(from the Greek, lit. meaning: "the anointed one") Christ was the title given to Jesus in the New Testament. This name points to the belief among his followers that he was in fact the Messiah, or redeemer, whom God promised to send in the Old Testament. Christ is commonly used as another name for Jesus.

### Christianity

the religious tradition of all those who follow and believe the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the writings of the New Testament.

## **denominations**

organized groups of religious congregations, generally used with regard to Protestant denominations: Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, etc.

## **disciples**

persons who subscribe to the teachings of a master or leader and assist in spreading these teachings to others. The term disciple does not only refer to the disciples of Jesus, although one of its offered meanings is a companion of Jesus.

## **incarnation**

(Latin: lit. meaning: "being flesh") Although the term incarnation is not found in the New Testament, the concept is found in John 1: 14, "and the Word became flesh." The Word in this passage is commonly understood to be the Logos, or Word of God. Incarnation is the specific and unique event of the Logos/Word of God becoming human in the person of Jesus.

## **Jesus**

the individual preacher and rabbi, regarded by Christians as the Son of God, but also recognized by Muslims as a prophet, many Jews as a teacher and as an avatar by many Hindus.

## **Mary**

the mother of Jesus. Often referred to as the Blessed Virgin, or the Mother of God, depending on the practice and belief of denominations and major streams of Christianity.

## **miracles**

actions performed by God (with or without human involvement) that break the normal patterns of nature. Miracles are recorded in the sacred texts of virtually all faith traditions. In Christianity, miracles play an important role in the life and ministry of Jesus in as much as they are demonstrations of God's love for the world.

## **prophecies**

inspired statements, utterances and discourses which reveal the will or messages of God.

## **resurrection**

a rising from the dead, a return to life

## **saint**

an individual officially recognized by the Roman Catholic, Orthodox or other Christian church as being worthy of public veneration and as having the ability to intercede in human affairs. Also can refer to any believer who has died and gone to heaven, or to any baptized believer in Jesus as Christ. The uses of this word vary depending on the particular Christian institution or individual employing it.

## **sect**

a group forming a distinct unit within an existing organization based on certain understandings or refinements of commonly held beliefs or practices. Sect can also be applied to a religious body which has broken away from a previously organized denomination or institution.

## **Trinity**

a theological term and doctrine held by Orthodox, Roman Catholic and some Protestant denominations, referring to the nature of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as three persons in one Godhead.

## **visions**

within the context of this material, a vision is a supernatural event in which an individual or group sees that which otherwise could not be seen. It may be described as a mystical experience in which one experiences the sight of a supernatural being or the supernatural realm.