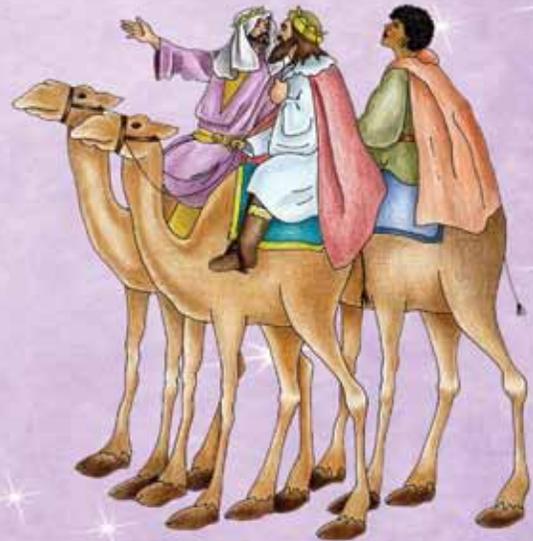




The First Christmas

**as retold by Janice D. Green
illustrated by Violet Vandor**



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Bible references in this book are not quotations, but are paraphrases written by the author to help children understand the Biblical account of the first Christmas.

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Messiah... This word had been whispered for hundreds of years. The people of Judea were waiting for Messiah, the promised king of God's chosen people. When the Jewish people worshiped God faithfully they became a mighty nation. But they became weak when they forgot about God.

Messiah came quietly as a tiny baby while the Roman government ruled over Judea. Roman soldiers bossed the Jewish people around. The Jewish people hoped Messiah would come and make the Romans leave Judea.

How do you feel when someone bosses you around too much? What kind of king do you think God will send to his people?



Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth were waiting for Messiah. Zachariah served as a priest in God's Temple. One day God sent an angel named Gabriel to tell him some great news. Gabriel said that Elizabeth was going to have a son! Gabriel also said God wanted them to name their son John. "When John grows up," the angel said, "he will help the people get ready for the Messiah."

Zachariah couldn't believe Gabriel's message. He knew Elizabeth wanted a baby for years, yet she remained childless. She was surely too old to have a baby now. Zachariah asked Gabriel to prove his message was true.

Gabriel said that because Zachariah didn't believe God's message, he wouldn't be able to say another word until after baby John was born.

If someone told you a very old lady was going to have a baby, would you believe it? How do you think Zechariah told his wife about the angel's message without talking?

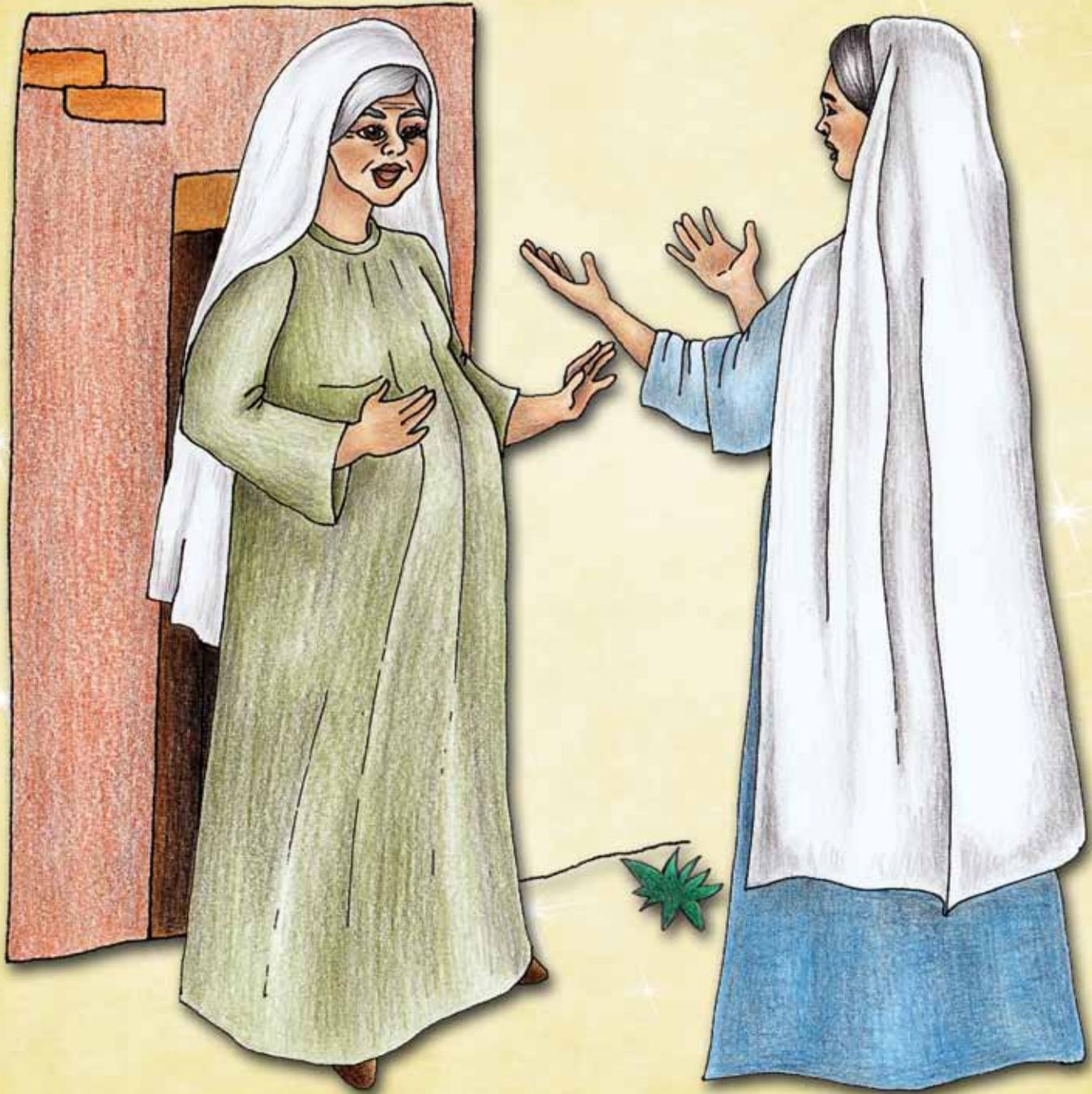


Elizabeth had a teenage cousin named Mary. Six months after Gabriel visited Zachariah, God sent his angel back to earth with a message for Mary.

Mary lived in the town of Nazareth. She was engaged to a man named Joseph. Gabriel told Mary that God would give her a baby boy and that her baby would be the Messiah!

Mary asked, "How can I have a baby when I'm not yet married?" But Gabriel said God's Spirit would give her the baby. Mary was happy to know she would be the mother of God's baby king.

Have you ever been chosen to do a special job? How did it make you feel?



Gabriel told Mary that God was also giving her older cousin Elizabeth a special baby. So Mary went right away to visit her cousin.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, her baby leaped inside her! Elizabeth said, "Blessed are you among women! Why have you, the mother of my Lord, blessed me with a visit? Bless you for believing the Lord's message to you."

In what ways were Mary and Elizabeth alike? How were they different? Why do you think Mary went to see Elizabeth? Who do you want to see when you have special news to share?



Mary stayed three months with Elizabeth. All this time baby Jesus was growing inside her. When she returned to Nazareth, people could see that she was going to have a baby. They knew Mary was not married. Joseph did not understand. Should he still marry her?

Were you ever scolded when you hadn't done anything wrong? How did you feel? How do you think Mary felt when people looked at her and whispered to each other?