

# Mary, the Mother of God

## Stories and Activities for the 'Month of Mary'

May is the month when we traditionally honor Mary, the Mother of God. From Scripture, we learn that she was a strong woman, a loving mother, and a faithful Jew. In addition, numerous legends and customs contribute to our appreciation of Mary. Here, we will explore some of those Scripture passages, legends (which we will draw from the apocryphal Gospel of James), and customs.

The story of Mary's early life is in four parts, so one can be read for each week of May.

### Mary, the Mother of God

#### A Read-Aloud Story

##### Part 1

Long, long ago, there lived a woman named Anne. She was a good and holy woman who loved God and loved her husband, Joachim. But Anne had one great sadness: she did not have a child.

One day, she was alone, walking in her garden crying, for she so longed for a baby. Then, right before her, an angel appeared! "Anne, your prayers will be answered," the angel said. "You will soon have a daughter, and she will be especially blessed by God. Now, go to the city gate to meet Joachim there."

While Anne was happily hurrying to the gate, Joachim was in the hills praying. Suddenly, a bril-

liant angel appeared before him, too. "Joachim, God knows your sadness at not having a child," the angel told him. "Your prayers have been answered. You will have a daughter. Hurry to the city gates now, where Anne is waiting for you!"

How excited they were when they met and found that the other had seen an angel, too! And how joyful they were when the angels' message came true and a baby girl was born to them. They named her Mary.

##### Part 2

When Mary turned three years old, Anne and Joachim brought her to the Temple. There they would "present"

her to God.

The Temple was built on a hill, and there were 15 steps to climb to go inside. When the family arrived there, Joachim set his tiny daughter down on the bottom step. Happily, and without help, she climbed up all the steps by herself! There the high priest kissed her and said, "Mary, God loves you, and you shall do great things for all people. And forever after, people will know of you and love you."

And the child danced with joy.

##### Part 3

Now, time had passed, and Mary was old enough to get married. In

those days, parents or a priest chose the person a girl was to marry. The high priest, Zechariah, was to decide on Mary's husband. He knew that Mary had been sent by God for a special reason, so he prayed, asking God to help him make the right choice for Mary.

An angel came to Zechariah and said, "Call all the men that you can choose from, to come to the Temple. Tell each one to bring his walking stick. God will use the sticks to give you the sign of which man can be the husband of Mary."

So all the men arrived with their walking sticks and left them there. Among the men was a good person named Joseph, who was a carpen-



ter.

In the morning, all the walking sticks were still lined up, but one had blossomed during the night with beautiful flowers! Zechariah the high priest knew then that Joseph was the man God had chosen.

#### Part 4

Before Mary and Joseph lived together as a married couple, Mary was at her home one day when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Mary! God wants you to be the mother of His Son, Jesus."

Mary said, "I will do what God asks of me."

And so, God made Mary a mother, and she was expecting Jesus. Soon Joseph took Mary into his home as his wife.

It was near the time for the baby

to be born when Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem. Joseph searched for a good place for them to stay, where Jesus could be born. But the town was so crowded, he could only find a stable. And there, the Son of God was born, celebrated by shepherds, angels, and kings.

Because Mary is Jesus' mother, she is the Mother of God. And because she loves all of God's children, she is a mother to us all.

## Activities

### Mary Cloth

There are many beautiful symbols for Mary that come from Scripture or folk traditions. Expose the children to these by making a "Mary Cloth." This can be used for your prayer table or May altar. Here are suggestions for

making this cloth along with the symbols.

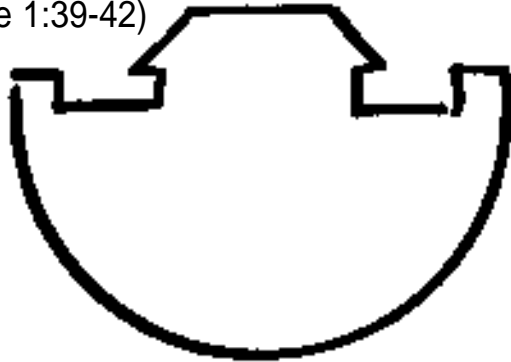
- Enlarge the symbols, and cut them out to use as patterns. Trace around these patterns with a pencil onto a white cloth. You can do this as a border or in a more scattered way. Give the children fabric crayons or markers to color in the symbols.

- Enlarge the symbols, and use them as you would a clothing pattern. Cut out the paper symbols, pin them to white felt, and then cut out the felt symbols. Older children can do this cutting. Have the children glue the felt symbols onto a dark blue cloth.

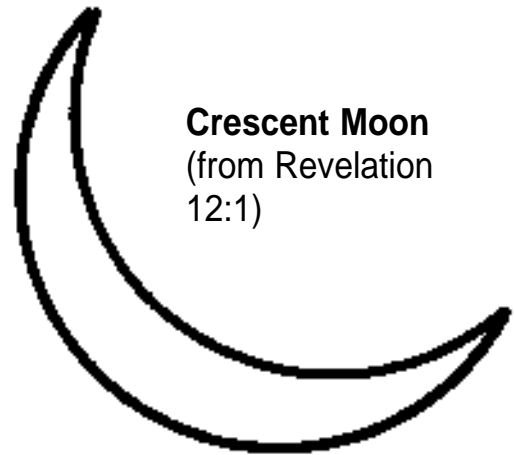
The size of the fabric and number of symbols used depends on the size you need for your prayer table or altar.

### Ark

(a vessel that carries life; from Luke 1:39-42)

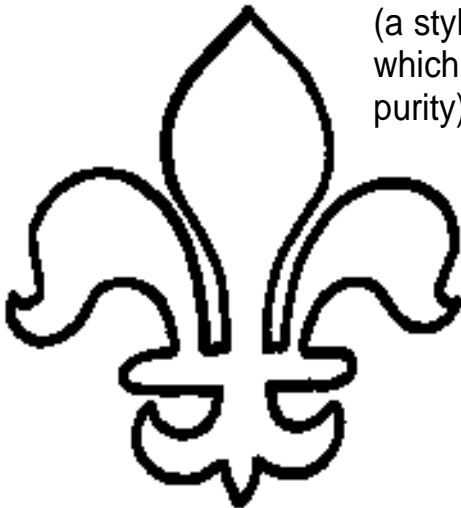


**Crescent Moon**  
(from Revelation 12:1)



### Fleur-de-lis

(a stylized lily, which stands for purity)



**Crown With 12 Stars**  
(from Revelation 12:1)



Here are the symbols:

### May Altar

A sweet folk custom is the May altar. Early in May, place a statue of Mary in a prominent place on a pretty cloth, and place fresh flowers there throughout the month. It is simply a way of recognizing that Mary is special to us.

### Why Does Mary Wear Blue?

Here's the answer if the children ask you — or just in case you yourself have been wondering! Most often, you will see portrayals of Mary wearing the color blue, the result of symbol and legend.

Particularly when the clothing is a deep blue, it means she is wrapped and waiting in the deepest of night, like Advent, which is also a waiting

period in much darkness. The dark blue works well with the symbols of the moon and stars often associated with her because of the book of Revelation (12:1).

The French expression "*Sacré bleu!*" means "Holy blue," and originally meant the mantle, or cloak, worn by Mary. After the Middle Ages, her mantle was most often portrayed as sky blue. This is to show that Mary is the mother and protector of us all. This symbol became a custom long before the Middle Ages, when putting a baby or other vulnerable person under one's mantle was a sign of protection. Thus, the mantle of the Mother of us all became a symbol of protection. In order for artists to show this, they chose blue, the color of the sky, which hovers over the whole earth.

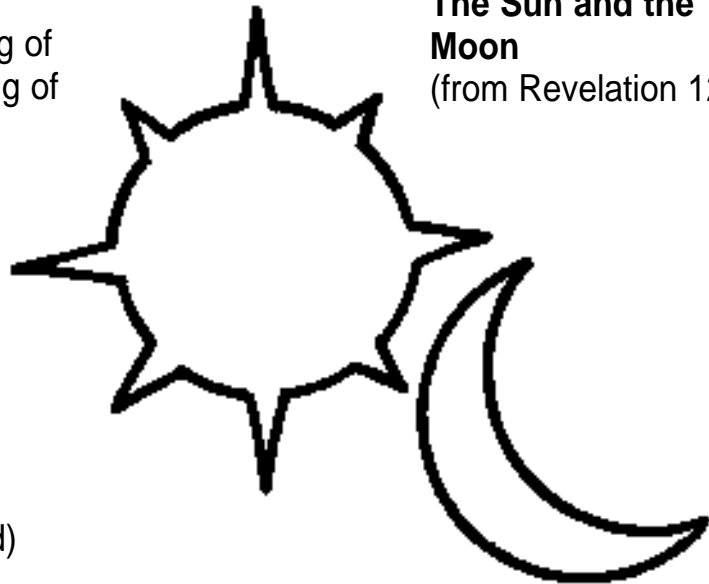
There is a lovely legend that Mary spread her mantle to dry over a rosemary bush, and it forever after bloomed blue flowers.

### Images of Mary

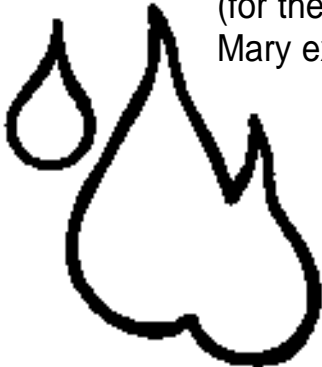
In introducing children to Mary, bring in a variety of images of her, such as those from art books, statues, and children's books. There are different portrayals, such as how she appeared to St. Bernadette in France and to St. Juan Diego in Mexico. (See pages 107 and 108 for pictures of Mary). Explain to the children that while these images may have differences, what we are reminded of by each of them is that Mary is Jesus' mother, and that she loves and protects all of us as a mother. (Be sensitive to any children who may not have a mother figure in their homes.)



**Rose**  
(from the Song of Solomon [Song of Songs] 2:1)



**The Sun and the Moon**  
(from Revelation 12:1)



**Tear Drops**  
(for the sorrows Mary experienced)



**Forget-me-nots**  
(these flowers are sometimes called "Mary's Eyes" in France)





