

Drawn in  
BIBLE STUDY

# Mary

*Seeing God through the Eyes of a Mother*

EUGENE H. PETERSON



FEATURING  
THE MESSAGE

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**BIBLE STUDY**

*Eugene H. Peterson*

**THE MESSAGE®**

**NAV PRESS** 

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*Mary: Seeing God through the Eyes of a Mother*

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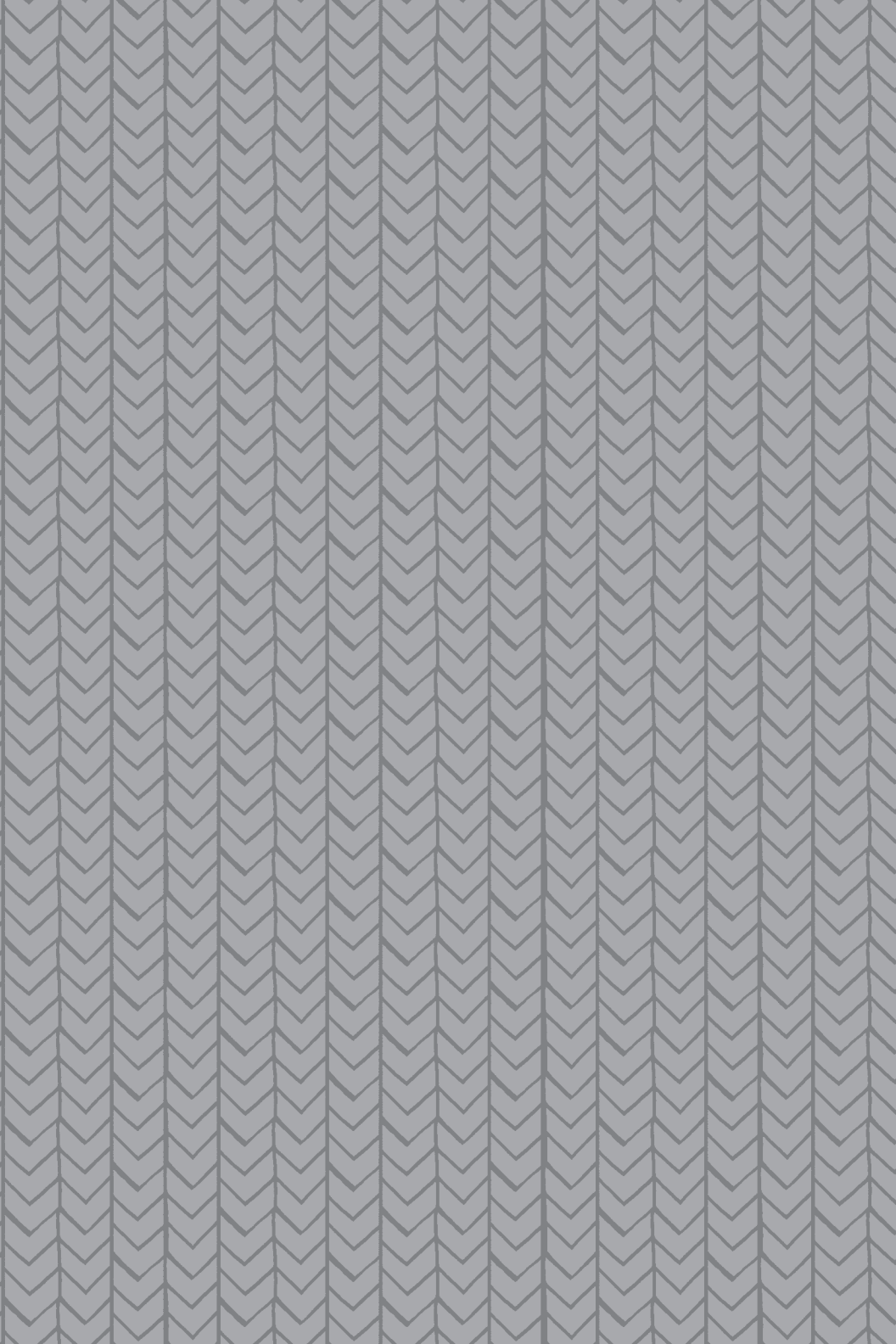
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# introduction

*Eugene H. Peterson*



READING IS THE FIRST THING, just reading the Bible. As we read, we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

I didn't start out as a pastor. I began my vocational life as a teacher and for several years taught the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek in a theological seminary. I expected to live the rest of my life as a professor and scholar, teaching and writing and studying. But then my life took a sudden vocational turn to pastoring a congregation.

I was now plunged into quite a different world. The first noticeable difference was that nobody seemed to care much about the Bible, which so recently people had been paying me to teach them. Many of the people I now worked with knew virtually nothing about it, had never read it, and weren't interested in learning. Many others had spent

years reading it, but for them it had gone flat through familiarity, reduced to clichés. Bored, they dropped it. And there weren't many people in between. Very few were interested in what I considered my primary work: getting the words of the Bible into their heads and hearts, getting the message lived. They found newspapers and magazines, videos and pulp fiction more to their taste.

Meanwhile I had taken on as my life work the responsibility for getting these very people to listen—really listen—to the message in this book. I knew I had my work cut out for me.

I lived in two language worlds, the world of the Bible and the world of today. I had always assumed they were the same world. But these people didn't see it that way. So out of necessity I became a “translator” (although I wouldn't have called it that then), daily standing on the border between two worlds, getting the language of the Bible that God uses to create and save us, heal and bless us, judge and rule over us, into the language of today that we use to gossip and tell stories, give directions and do business, sing songs and talk to our children.

My intent is simply to get people reading the Bible who don't know that the Bible is readable at all, at least by them, and to get people who long ago lost interest in the Bible to read it again. Read in order to live, praying as you read, “God, let it be with me just as you say.”

## INTRODUCTION TO MARY

Scattered throughout the accounts of the life of Jesus known as the Gospels are occasional, brief glimpses of Mary, Jesus' mother. So brief are these passages that we may wonder at the attention and reverence shown to Mary throughout Christian history. How could so few words about her engender so much veneration?

Except, of course, that she's the mother of Jesus. As his mother, she had a unique contribution, a unique vantage point, in his earthly life and ministry. She is the woman who raised Jesus in the way of the people of God, the woman who took him to the Temple for a blessing, the woman who chastised him for lingering at the Temple when he should have been keeping up with the family. Jesus would have watched Mary practice the Jewish rituals that recalled God's saving action in Egypt, God's provision in the harvest, God's abiding presence in creation. To the extent that Jesus *learned* God in his childhood, he *learned* a great deal about him from Mary.

Jesus' mother was a woman in a time when women were undervalued. Not by God, however. Throughout Scripture, God gave women a place of value. The first named people we meet in the story of the Exodus—God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, which established so much of Jewish faith and practice—are Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives from the lowest social and economic strata of

that society (Exodus 1:15-16). These two women set in motion the chain of events that would result in the salvation of the Hebrew people.

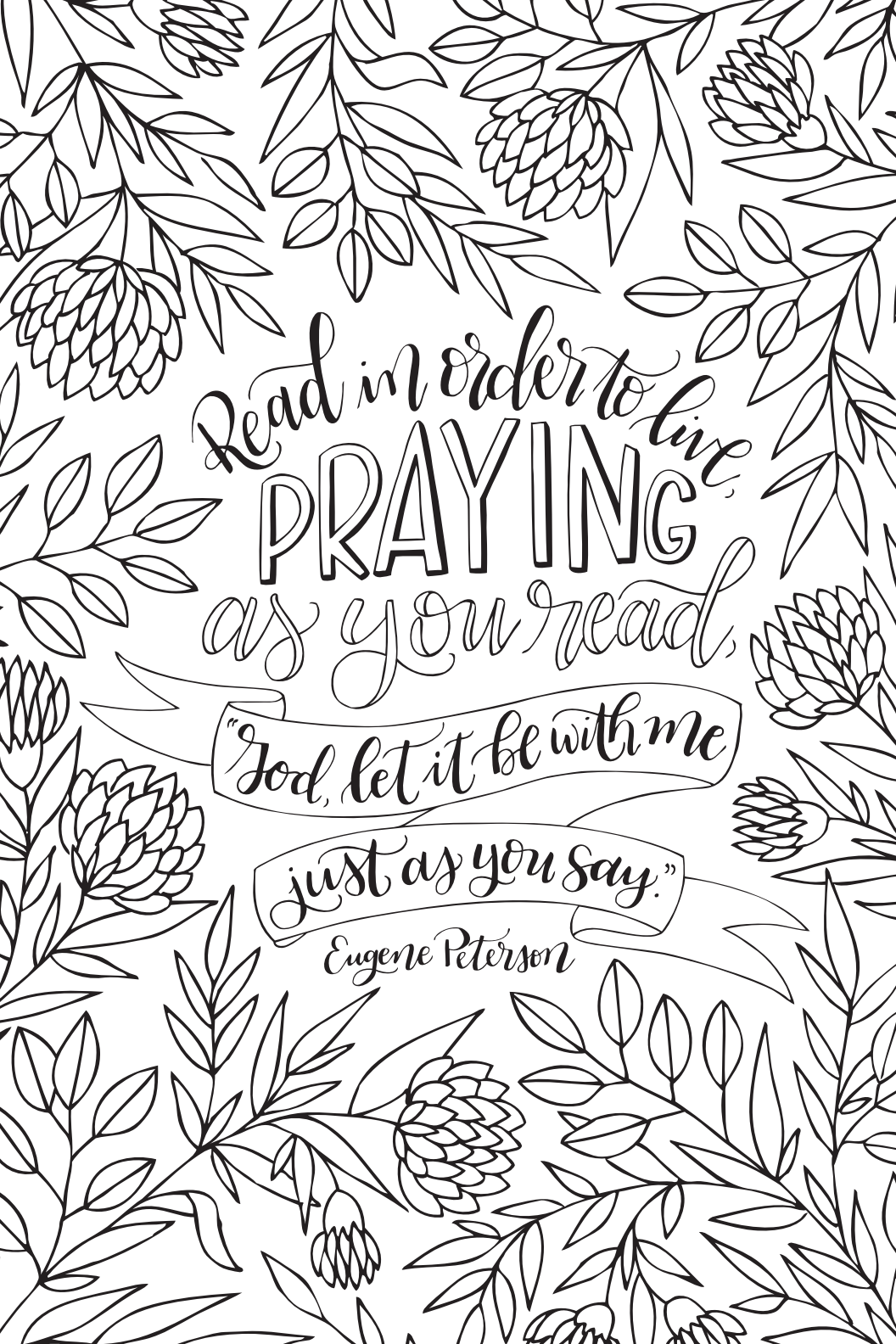
World leaders are minor players in the biblical way of writing and participating in history. In contrast, people like Shiphrah and Puah—and, as we'll see, Mary the mother of Jesus—play decisive roles in God's story. Only when we understand this and embrace it will we be in a position to participate wholeheartedly in the work of God's salvation.

Nevertheless, salvation is *God's* work, not ours. Our sight is limited, our steps tentative. That is how we best traverse the landscape of faith—humbly rather than capably.

That humility is exemplified by Mary in her prayer accepting the vocation of mother of God; it is perhaps also exemplified by her willingness to fade into the background of Jesus' story, to participate in God's salvation without losing sight of the fact that this salvation is God's work—for her, and for all of us.







Read in order to *live*  
**PRAYING**  
as you read.

"God, let it be with me

just as you say."

Eugene Peterson



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF

# Mary

*It takes more than bread  
to stay alive. It takes a steady  
stream of words from God's mouth.*

MATTHEW 4:4

MANY PEOPLE APPROACH READING the Bible as a religious duty or a way to get in good with God. Worse still, some believe God will send a horrible punishment if they don't dedicate at least a half hour each day to dutiful study of his Word. Coming to the Bible with so much religious baggage takes all the fun out of reading it.

Reading the Bible isn't simply a fact-finding mission. You don't come just to collect bits of trivia about God. From the moment you read the first line of the Bible, you will discover that this book isn't about you. It's about God. God gave his Word as the place where you meet him face-to-face.

In order to read the Scriptures adequately and

accurately, it's necessary at the same time to live them—to live them *as* we read them. This kind of reading has been named by our ancestors as *lectio divina*, often translated “spiritual reading.” It means not only reading the text but also meditating on the text, praying the text, and living the text. It is reading that enters our souls the way food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and transforms us. Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we feed on it. Words spoken and listened to, written and read are intended to do something in us, to give us health and wholeness, vitality and holiness, wisdom and hope.

The Scriptures not only reveal everything of who God is but also everything of who we are. And this revelation is done in such a way as to invite participation on both sides, of author and reader.

This may be the single most important thing to know as we come to read and study and believe these Holy Scriptures: this rich, alive, personally revealing God as experienced in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, personally addressing us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, at whatever age we are, in whatever state we are. Christian reading is participatory reading, receiving the words in such a way that they become interior to our lives, the rhythms and images becoming practices of prayer, acts of obedience, ways of love. We submit our lives to this text so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

One of the characteristic marks of the biblical storytellers is a certain reticence. They don't tell us too much. They leave a lot of blanks in the narration, an implicit invitation to enter the story ourselves, just as we are, and to discover for ourselves how to fit in. There are, of course, always moral, theological, and historical elements in these stories that need to be studied, but never in dismissal of the story that is being told.

When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we're being led not to see God in our stories but to see our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.

The Bible is God's Word. He spoke it into existence, and he continues to speak through it as you read. He doesn't just share words on a page. He shares himself. As you meet God in this conversation, you won't just learn *about* him; you will *experience* him more deeply and more personally than you ever thought possible.

## DRAWN IN BIBLE STUDIES

We all lead busy lives, and even when we step away from our activities for spiritual rest and renewal, our activities don't necessarily step away from us. *Drawn in* Bible Studies are designed to temporarily relieve you of distractions so you can enjoy the story of God more fully. This happens in a variety of ways:

## The Coloring

For people of all ages, coloring offers a structured activity that fosters creative thinking. Tricia McCary Rhodes, author of *The Wired Soul*, is not surprised by the appeal of coloring among adults today:

Brain scans of people involved in activities like coloring reveal that as we focus, our heart rate slows and our brain waves enter a more relaxed state. Over time, by engaging in Scripture or prayer art-journaling, it may become easier for us to focus and pay attention in other areas of our lives as well. It is no wonder we are so drawn to this activity.

As you work through a study, read the appropriate Bible passage and question, and mull over your response as you color. Some art has been provided for you, but feel free to draw in the open space as well. The act of coloring will help your “orienting response,” the brain function that allows you to filter out background distractions and attend to the matter at hand. That’s one reason so many people doodle as they read or study. Ironically, by coloring as you engage in this Bible study, you’ll be more attentive to what the Scriptures have to teach you.

## *The Message*

For many people, the Bible has become so familiar that it loses some of its resonance. They've memorized so many Scriptures, or heard so many sermons, that they think they've figured a passage out. For others, the Bible has never not been intimidating—its names and contexts separated from us by millennia, its story shrouded by memories of bad church experiences or negative impressions of people who claim it as their authority. While you can read any Bible translation you like alongside the *Drawn in* Bible Studies, included in the studies themselves are passages from *The Message*, a rendering of the Bible in contemporary language that matches the tone and informality of the original ancient language. You will often be surprised by the way *The Message* translates something you may have read or heard many times before. And in that surprise, you'll be more receptive for what God might have for you today.

## *The Questions*

When we sit down just to read the Bible, we can feel a bit disoriented. The questions in the *Drawn in* Bible Studies are designed to help you stay connected to your own lived experience even as you enter into the lived experience of the people and places the Scriptures introduce us to. You'll grow in your understanding of the Bible, but

you'll also grow in your understanding of yourself. These questions are also good for discussion—get together with a group of friends, and enjoy coloring and talking together.

### *The Commentary*

Included in this *Drawn in* Bible Study are occasional comments from renowned Bible teacher Eugene Peterson. You'll see his name following his comments. He helps clarify more confusing passages and offers insight into what's behind what you're reading. He'll help keep you from getting stuck.

### *Leader's Notes*

In the section "How to Lead a *Drawn in* Bible Study" you'll find general guidelines for leading people through this study, along with notes specific to each session. These can inform and enhance your experience, so even if you are going through this study on your own, or if you are not the leader of a group discussion of this study, read through the notes as preparation for each session. Nevertheless, don't feel pressure to be an expert; the main purpose of this study is to provide an opportunity for fun and fellowship as people encounter God's Word and consider how it touches their lives.





# Mary

—SESSION ONE—

## *You're Beautiful with God's Beauty*

LUKE 1:26-56



MOST OF US, most of the time, feel left out. We don't belong. "Insiders" know the ropes; they're in a club from which we are excluded. But with God there are no outsiders. Jesus includes those who typically were treated as outsiders: women, common laborers, the radically different, the poor. He will not countenance religion as a club.

—EUGENE

## 2 . Mary

1. *Reflect on a time when you were left out. How did it feel? Were you angry? Sad? Anxious? Why?*

2. *The story of Jesus begins in a hard place: a forgotten village in a powerless country under the thumb of a world superpower. Why do you think God might want to start here?*



---

IN THE SIXTH month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!  
You're beautiful with God's beauty,  
Beautiful inside and out!  
God be with you.

She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will

become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

He will be great,  
 be called 'Son of the Highest.'  
 The Lord God will give him  
 the throne of his father David;  
 He will rule Jacob's house forever—  
 no end, ever, to his kingdom."

LUKE 1:26-33 \_\_\_\_\_

3. *You wake up, and an angel is standing in front of you, saying, "Good morning!" What do you do? How do you feel?*
  
4. *Mary was "thoroughly shaken," but the angel reassures Mary, "You have nothing to fear." What is it about an encounter with God (or, in Mary's case, an angel of God) that can be so overwhelming?*





**"YOU'RE**  
*Beautiful*  
**WITH GOD'S BEAUTY,**

*Beautiful*


*inside and out!*

**GOD BE WITH YOU."**

*from Luke 1,  
THE MESSAGE*

*If you found yourself in such a situation, what do you think would be the proper response to God?*

5. *Mary's life prospects are not great, but the angel assures her that this child God is giving her will be a king. Why should she believe him?*

\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_

MARY SAID TO the angel, "But how?  
I've never slept with a man."  
The angel answered,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
the power of the Highest hover over you;  
Therefore, the child you bring to birth  
will be called Holy, Son of God.

"And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."



## 6 . Mary

And Mary said,

Yes, I see it all now:

I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.

Let it be with me

just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

LUKE 1:34-38 \_\_\_\_\_

6. *There's the promise, and then there's the path. What is unique about this pregnancy God is promising to Mary?*

*When has God taken you down an unexpected path toward something he's crafted for your life?*

7. *This pregnancy will clearly be miraculous. How might Mary be reassured by the angel's comments about her cousin Elizabeth?*

8. *“Nothing, you see, is impossible with God.” Do you believe that? What makes it hard to believe?*

9. *Mary agrees to the angel’s proposition. What does that tell you about her?*

*Do you find it easy or hard to believe God’s promises?  
Why?*

10. *How would you respond to the angel’s offer?  
What would make it hard to accept?  
What would make you want to accept it?*





MARY DIDN'T WASTE a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

You're so blessed among women,  
and the babe in your womb, also blessed!  
And why am I so blessed that  
the mother of my Lord visits me?  
The moment the sound of your  
greeting entered my ears,  
The babe in my womb  
skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.  
Blessed woman, who believed what God said,  
believed every word would come true!

LUKE 1:39-45

11. *Why do you think Mary is in such a hurry to visit Elizabeth?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. *What is it about Mary that causes Elizabeth to call her "so blessed among women"?*





AND MARY SAID,

I'm bursting with God-news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.

God took one good look at me, and look what  
happened—

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,  
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from  
all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave  
on those who are in awe before him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength,  
scattered the bluffing braggarts.

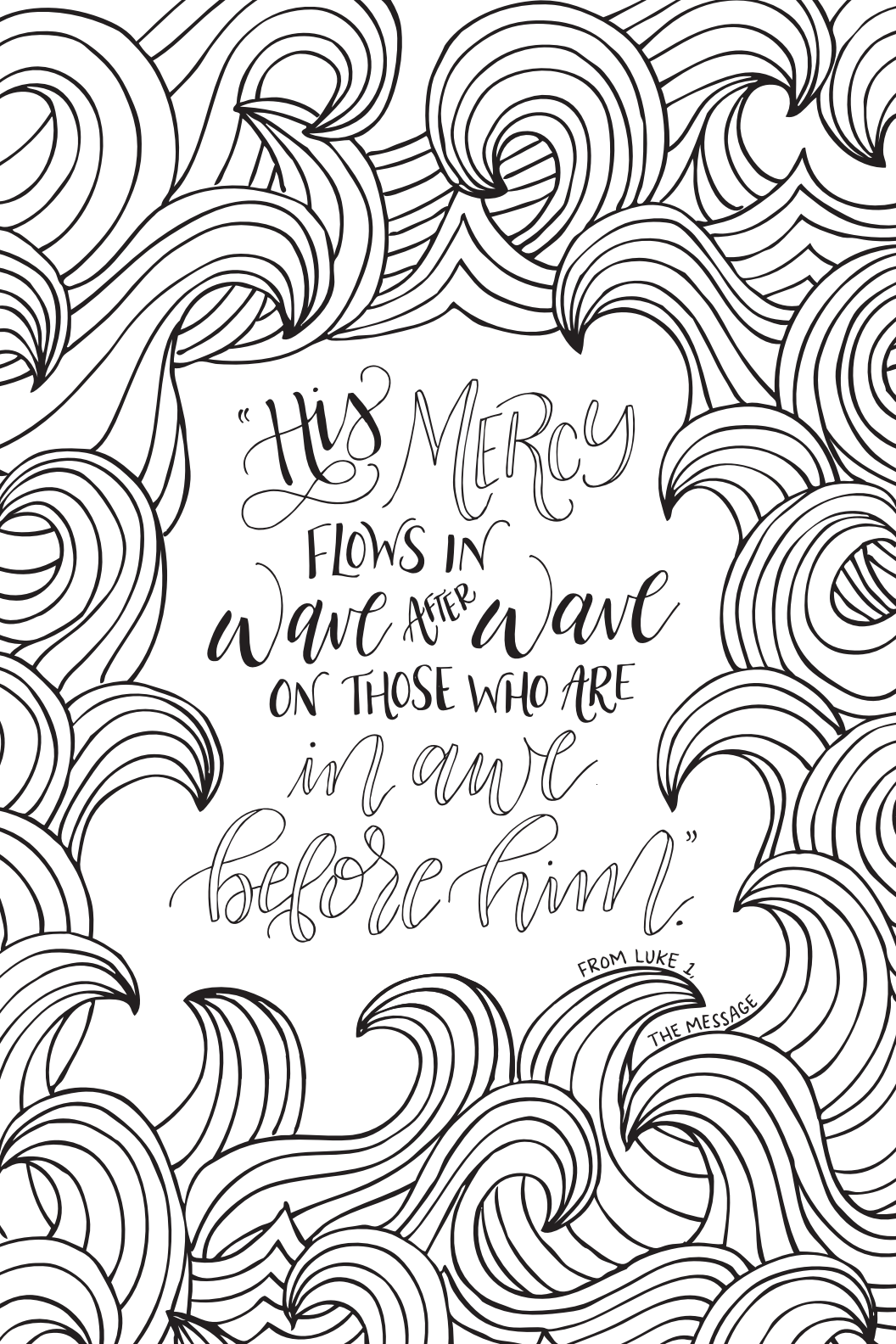
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,  
pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet;  
the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel;  
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled  
them high.

It's exactly what he promised,  
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then  
went back to her own home.



"HIS MERCY  
FLOWS IN  
wave <sup>AFTER</sup> wave  
ON THOSE WHO ARE  
in awe  
before him."

FROM LUKE 1

THE MESSAGE

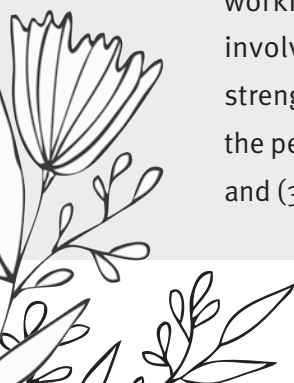
13. *A pregnant, unmarried young woman might be considered scandalous in Mary's culture, but here she declares herself "the most fortunate woman on earth." Why does she consider herself so fortunate?*

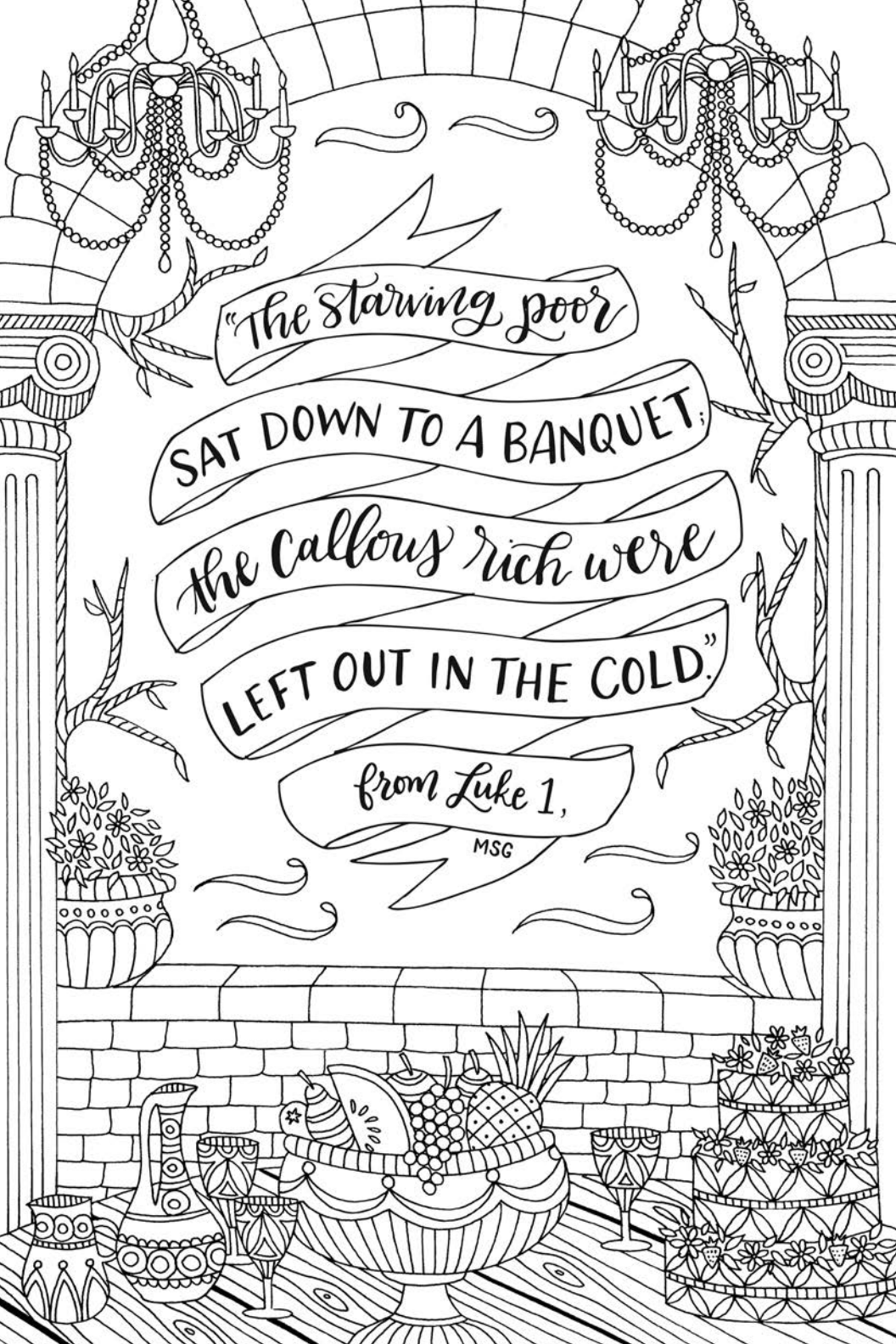
14. *Mary's song moves quickly from celebrating her pregnancy to celebrating God. What do you find most compelling among all the things she sings about him?*



A NOTE  
FROM  
EUGENE

BEFORE MARY PRAYED a half-dozen words, we realize that this girl knew her family story—the Holy Scriptures—which tells the ways that God has been speaking and working among his people. The heart of Mary's prayer involves three great reversals: (1) God establishes his strength and disestablishes the proud; (2) God puts down the people at the top and lifts up the people at the bottom; and (3) God fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty.





*"The starving poor*

*SAT DOWN TO A BANQUET;*

*the callous rich were*

*LEFT OUT IN THE COLD."*

*from Luke 1,*

MSG



15. *Mary declares that everything she sings about—including her pregnancy—is “exactly what [God] promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now.” What promises do you think she’s talking about?*

*What promises has God made to you?*

*Until we meet again*

**REFLECT** *on your own life story. When can you recall that God “piled on the mercies, piled them high”?*

*When can you recall that God “showed his strength”?*

*This passage of Scripture is a celebration of this special calling given to Mary. But Mary will face challenges as well. How does God's presence in your life make facing such challenges easier for you?*

## Prayer

*God, the world you have made for us  
is pregnant with potential.  
It's easy to feel small in such a world.  
But we are ourselves expanded by your promise.  
Enlarge our imaginations, God.  
Make us grateful, joyful participants  
in what is yet to come.  
Help us to bear your hope, your confidence,  
your blessing for the world around us.*

