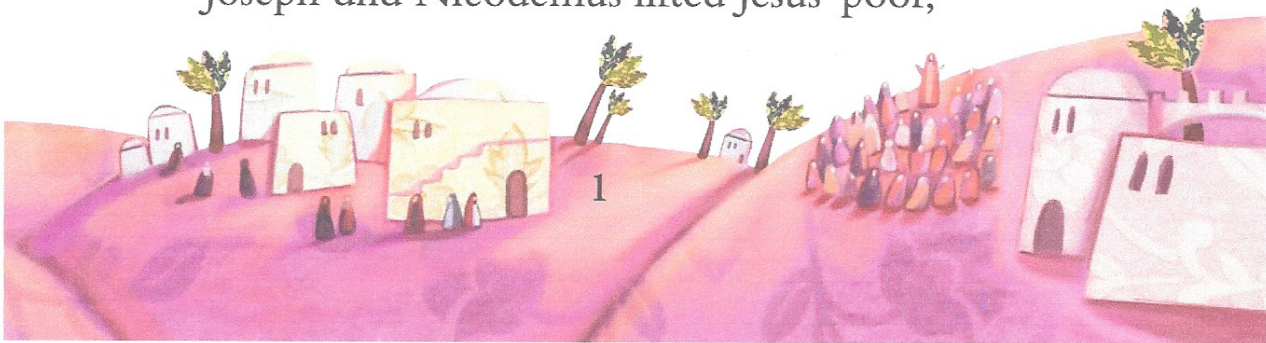




The First Easter

The evening after Jesus had been put to death, a wealthy Jew called Joseph of Arimathea begged Pontius Pilate to allow him to bury Jesus' body. Pilate agreed. So Joseph went with his friend, Nicodemus, back to Golgotha, where women were still weeping at the foot of His cross. Gently, Joseph and Nicodemus lifted Jesus' poor,

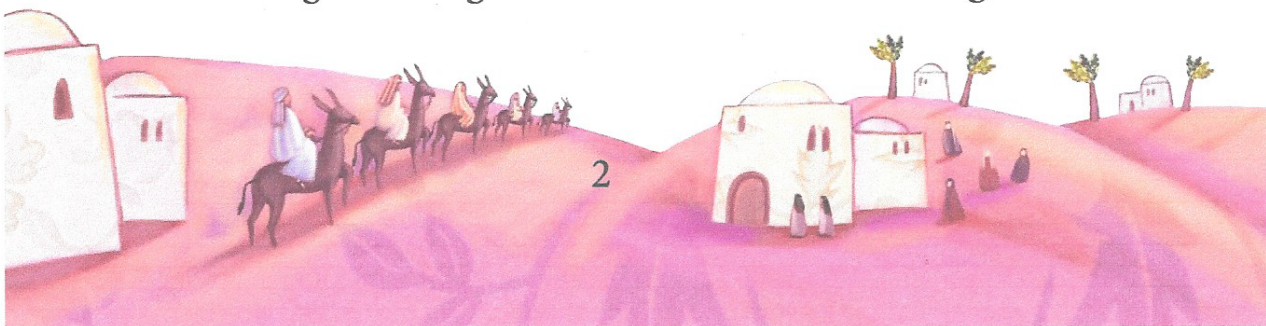




bleeding body down. They wrapped Him in a linen shroud with burial spices and, accompanied by the sobbing women, took Him to a nearby cemetery. There the two men laid Jesus in a small, cave-like tomb that Joseph had already paid for, and rolled a heavy stone across the entrance. Full of grief and with nothing else to do, they left.

Meanwhile, some Jewish officials had been to see Pilate. "Jesus of Nazareth said He would rise up again after three days," they told the Roman governor. "Have soldiers guard His tomb so no one can steal the body, then tell everyone that He's miraculously come back to life." Pilate nodded and sent the men away.

Pilate's guards sat outside Jesus' tomb through the night of that first Good Friday

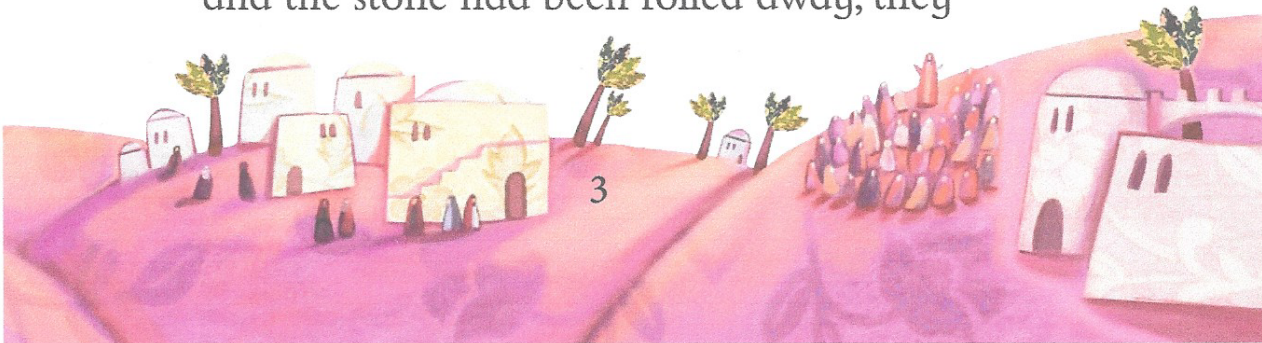




— nothing happened. They kept watch all the next day and again nobody came. But as dawn broke on the Sabbath, the third day, the earth suddenly shook so violently that it knocked the soldiers off their feet. A white light blazed out of the sky and shone over the tomb. Through the glare, the terrified soldiers watched the glowing figure of a man roll away the massive stone from the tomb entrance. The soldiers were scared by what they saw and fled for their lives.

Not long afterwards a group of grieving women arrived at the cemetery to pay their respects at the tomb. They included Jesus' friends Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and John, Salome and Joanna.

When they saw that the soldiers were gone and the stone had been rolled away, they





screamed in horror. Someone must have stolen Jesus' body!

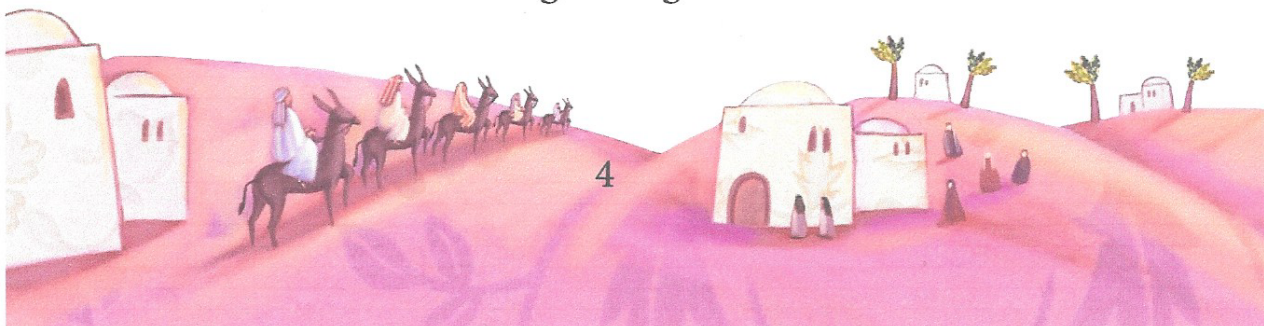
Inside the tomb where Jesus' body should have been, two shining men were sitting.



"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" the men said.

"Don't you remember that the Son of Man said He would rise on the third day?"

Mary Magdalene raced to fetch the disciples Peter and John. When the two men saw the empty tomb they were full of anger. They went off to try to find out who had taken the body. Mary sank down





outside the tomb, sobbing. Then suddenly she sensed someone behind her. Mary spun around and through her tears she saw a blurry figure whom she thought must be the cemetery gardener. "Why are you weeping?" the man asked.

"If you moved the body," she begged, "please tell me where to."

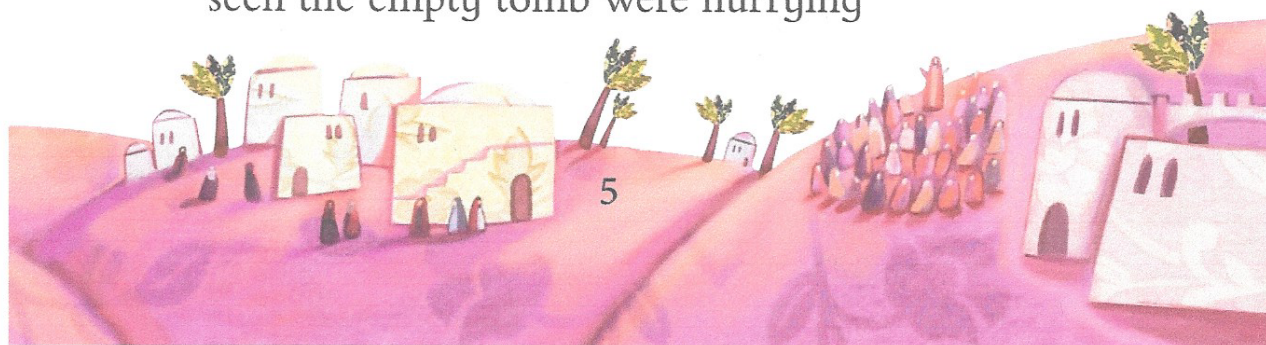
The man said just one word.

"Mary."

Mary's heart stood still. Suddenly, she recognized the man – it was Jesus!

"Go now," Jesus said softly, as Mary fell at His feet, gazing up at Him in wonder. "Find the disciples and tell them that I will soon be returning to my Father."

Meanwhile, the other women who had seen the empty tomb were hurrying





homewards when all at once, a man appeared out of nowhere on the road in front of them. “Good morning,” He said.

The women were amazed and couldn’t believe who they were hearing and seeing.

“Don’t be afraid,” Jesus said. “Go and tell my disciples to travel to Galilee and I will meet them there soon.”

Matthew chapters 27, 28; Mark chapter 16; Luke chapters 23, 24; John chapters 19, 20

