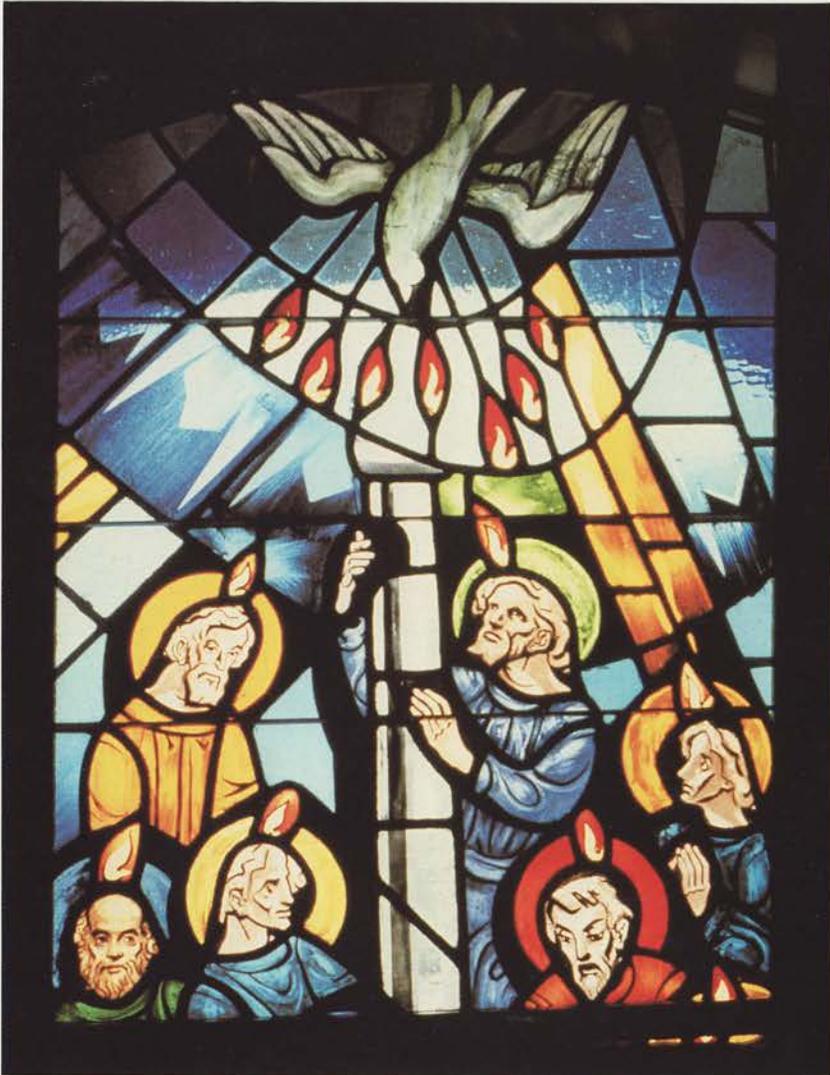


THE CHURCH BEGINS

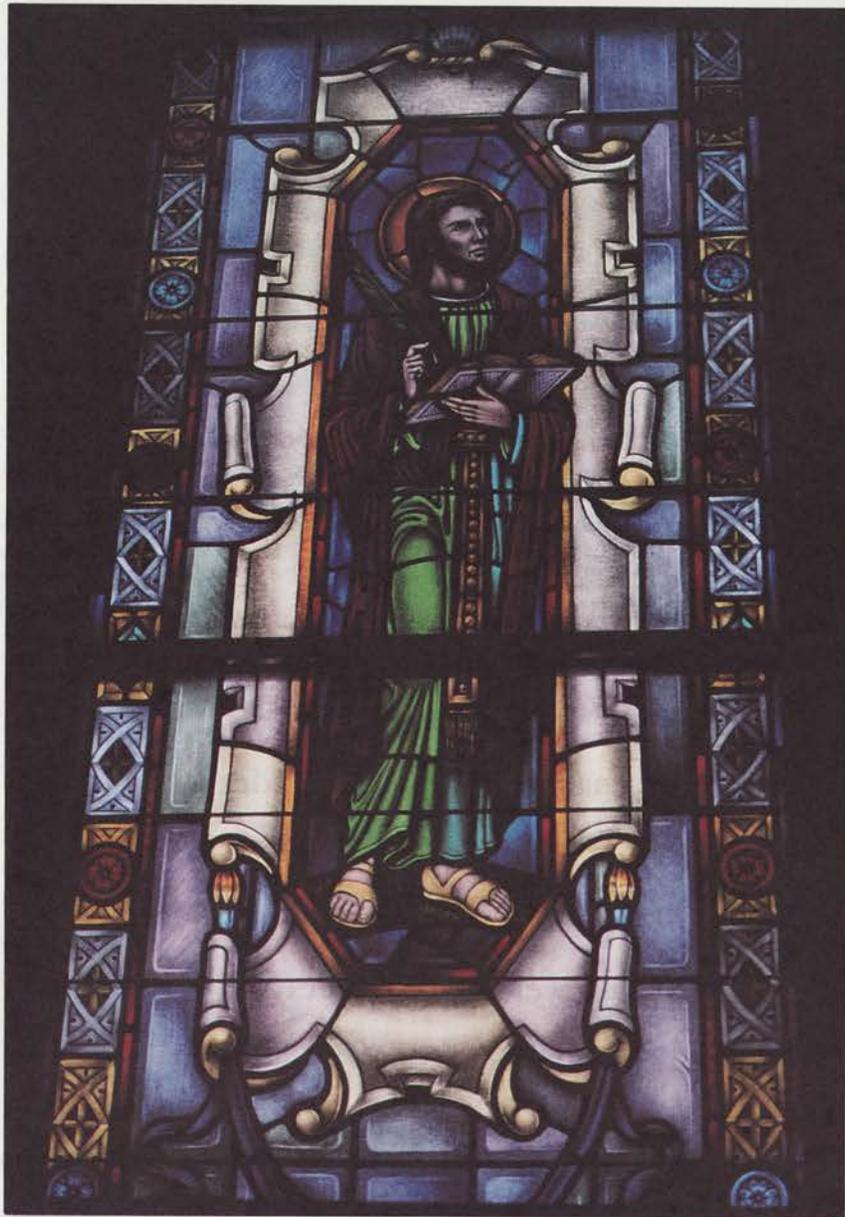


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Shell Year—Primary, Unit IV
Text by ECC editors

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Luke wrote stories about Jesus and the Church.

CHAPTER 1

Luke, the Christian Writer

Luke wrote down things he saw and heard. It helped him to remember.

Luke was a Christian. He had not seen Jesus with his own eyes, but many others had told him about Jesus. Luke heard about the great deeds of Jesus. He heard about what Jesus taught. He knew Jesus was the Son of God who had risen from the dead.

One day Luke said to his friend, Theophilus, "We are growing older. I am afraid people will forget the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. It should be written again and saved so that all people may read and know of our joy!"

Theophilus replied, "Luke, you are the one to do that. You write well. Tell the story just as you have heard it."

"I will," Luke answered. "I will write more than others have, and it will be like a letter to you."

Luke unrolled a scroll and dipped his pen in ink. For

many days he worked. Then he said, "It is done." We call his first book *The Gospel According to Luke*.

Days and weeks and years went by. Luke gave thanks to God for all that had happened in his life. He had clear memories and so many other stories to share!

"I must write another book," he said. "It will be like a second letter to Theophilus. This time I will share stories of my friend, Paul, and tell of his travels and teaching. The Church would not have been so strong in so many places if it had not been for Paul!"

Luke said, "I will tell more about Peter, the fisherman who became a bishop of the Church.

"I will tell about the first helpers of the apostles—especially good Stephen, who died for his faith.

"I will tell new stories of Barnabas and John Mark, Dorcas and Lydia, and many more."

So Luke filled another scroll. In our Bibles it is called *The Acts of the Apostles*.

CHAPTER 2

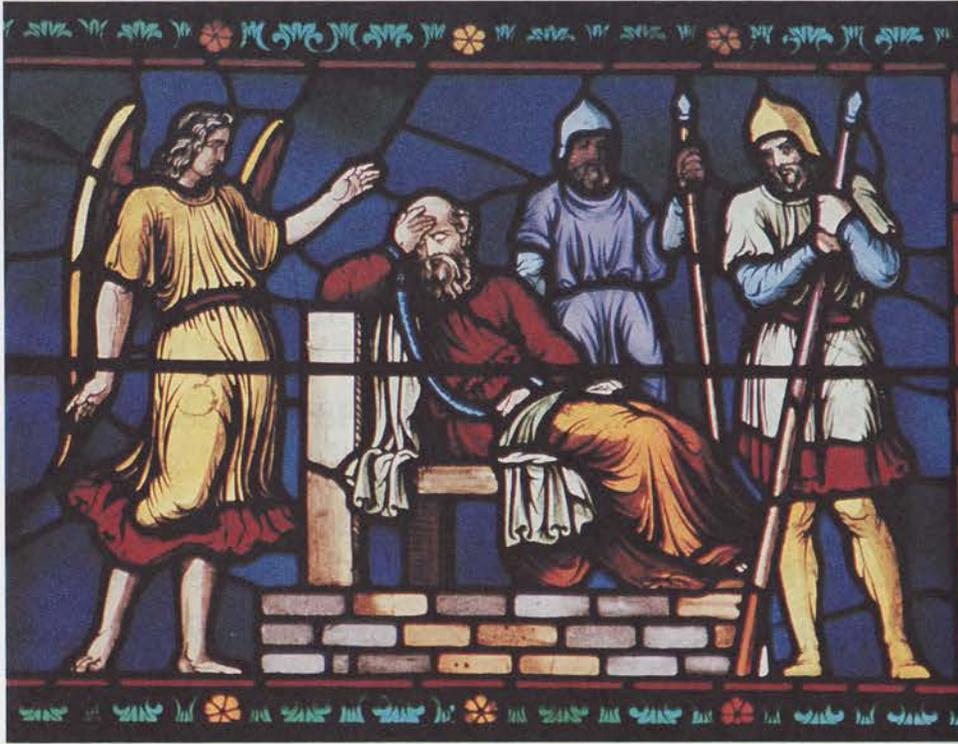
Peter, the Apostle

Peter, a fisherman and brother of Andrew, was one of the first men Jesus called to be his disciples. For three years, he was close to Jesus. He promised to be faithful forever.

But when Jesus was arrested and brought to trial falsely, Peter grew afraid. He said, "I was never with this man Jesus!" As soon as he spoke these words, Peter knew he had done a terrible thing. He had broken his promise. He had lied. He had denied his Lord.

After that first Easter, when the disciples learned that Jesus was alive again, Peter knew in his heart what he must do. He would tell everyone who Jesus was and why God had sent a Son into the world. He would explain how life is new and different for Christ's people.

Peter preached sermons that made people listen. All who heard him were amazed. How could a simple



Peter was a fisherman.
He was a disciple of Jesus.

man like Peter—with hands made rough from handling fish, boats, and ropes—speak with so much power?

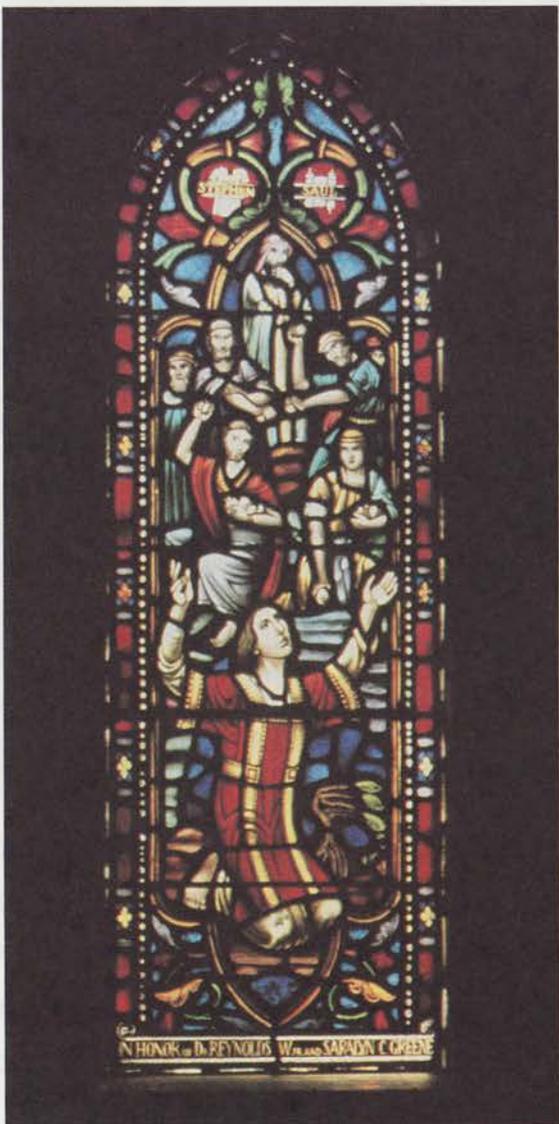
Because of Peter's preaching, many people believed in Jesus. Peter became a well-known leader of Christians. Sometimes he was able to heal others. He had important dreams and visions.

Peter came to see that the good news of Jesus Christ was meant for all people. He said that everyone who believed could be baptized. The Church began to grow.

There arose another king named Herod who began to arrest and kill Christians. He decided to put Peter into prison. The news spread quickly, and people in the Church prayed for him day and night.

On the very night when Peter was in greatest danger, he was sleeping in chains between two soldiers, with other men guarding the door. And then a miracle happened! An angel of God set him free and led him into the city. Peter was so surprised that he thought he was dreaming! But it was real.

His friends rejoiced that their prayers were answered. Luke told Peter's story in *The Acts of the Apostles*.



Stephen was full of faith in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3

Stephen, Faithful Servant

After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, it was up to his followers to share this good news in all the world. The twelve apostles were the first to do so. (Eleven had been with Jesus from the beginning. When Judas died, Matthias was elected to take his place.)

The apostles found themselves working very hard. They taught and preached. They baptized many, many new followers. They had to oversee the daily sharing of food and to care for people's needs.

"This is too much for us to do," they said. "We must choose some helpers."

The apostles asked God to help them choose wisely. Seven were elected and set apart to wait on tables and serve the poor. The apostles laid their hands on these seven and prayed.

One of the new helpers was Stephen, who was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," and a man of "grace

and power.” He was able to do “great wonders and signs.”

Before long, a group of angry men opposed Stephen. They stirred up others and brought him to trial before a council, charging him with false teaching.

But Stephen was not afraid. The members of the council saw “his face was like the face of an angel.”

Bravely, Stephen stood and preached. He told the full story of how God’s own people had turned away from what God wanted them to hear and to do. He shared the good news of Jesus once more.

Those who heard him were furious. They took him outside the city and stoned him to death. But before his last breath, Stephen forgave his enemies. He cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

One who stood by as Stephen was killed was a man named Saul.

We can read Stephen’s story in Luke’s book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapters 6-7.

CHAPTER 4

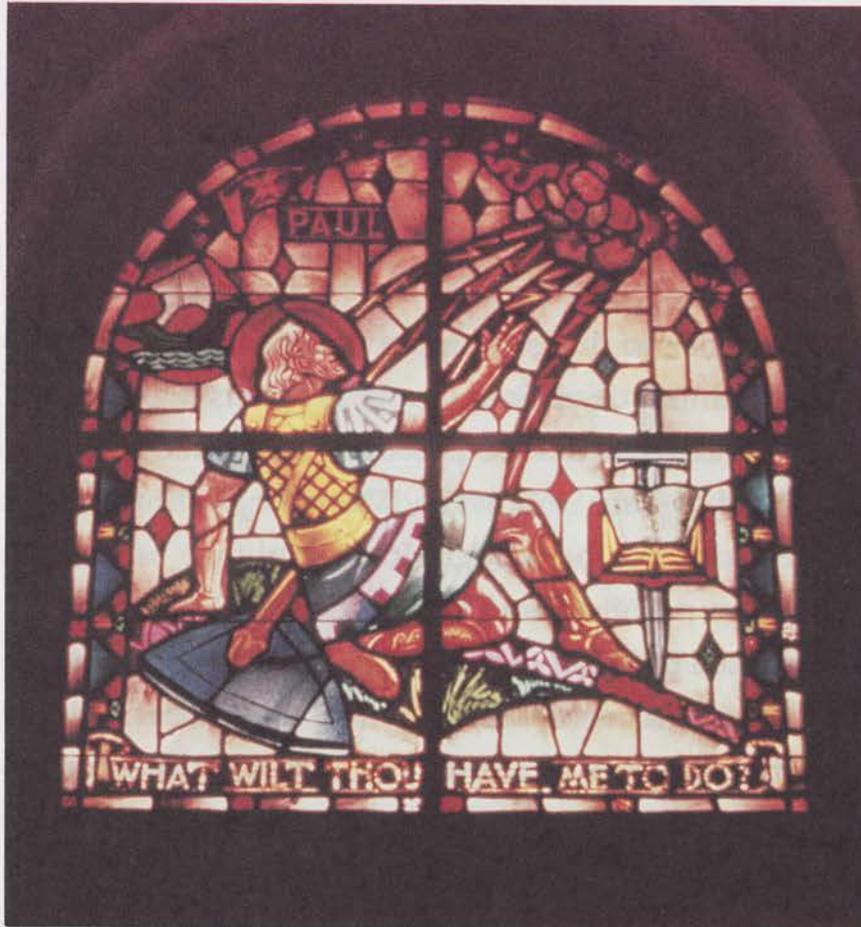
Paul’s Life Was Changed

In the years after the first Easter, many people did not understand the good news that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead. Saul, a very religious man, was sure the Christians were mistaken. He joined in trying to get rid of Jesus’ followers. When Stephen was stoned to death, he thought it was right.

Saul got permission to search for Jesus’ followers. He wanted to arrest them and tie them with ropes. He would take them to Jerusalem for punishment. With this plan in mind, he started on a trip to Damascus.

As he traveled, Saul suddenly saw a great light. He heard a voice! It was Jesus. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” the voice asked.

Saul fell to the roadside. The men who were with him did not understand what was happening. When Saul stood up and opened his eyes, he was blind. For three days he could see nothing. He was so shaken by what had happened that he could not eat or drink.



Paul traveled to many places.
He started new churches.

Then a disciple of Christ who lived in Damascus, a man named Ananias, came to visit Saul and touched him with his hands. At once, Saul could see again! Now he believed in Jesus with all his heart. He was baptized and received the Holy Spirit.

Saul later became known as Paul, an apostle. He began to speak in the synagogues of Damascus, preaching that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

It was hard for the Christians to believe that this man who had been so cruel was now a believer in Jesus. Only after three years were they sure Paul deserved to be a leader in the Church.

Soon Paul was traveling and preaching in many places. He made tents to earn money for his needs.

Many people joined the followers of Jesus after they heard Paul. He started churches and wrote letters to them. Some of his letters are in the New Testament. Luke wrote in *The Acts of the Apostles* about many of the things Paul said and did.

CHAPTER 5

Barnabas, a Christian Leader

Barnabas lived in Cyprus. He wanted to be with others who shared his faith, so he went to Jerusalem. There he met the followers of the risen Jesus. He listened as they spoke of their Lord. He saw how they cared for one another. Barnabas believed in Jesus and was baptized.

Many of Jesus' followers were poor. They needed money and food. "I must do something to help," Barnabas told himself.

He sold a field of land and gave the money to the Christians. The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement." He was true to his name, for he believed in others.

When Paul was brought before a council in Jerusalem, Barnabas spoke out. He said, "I believe in this man." He and Paul became friends.

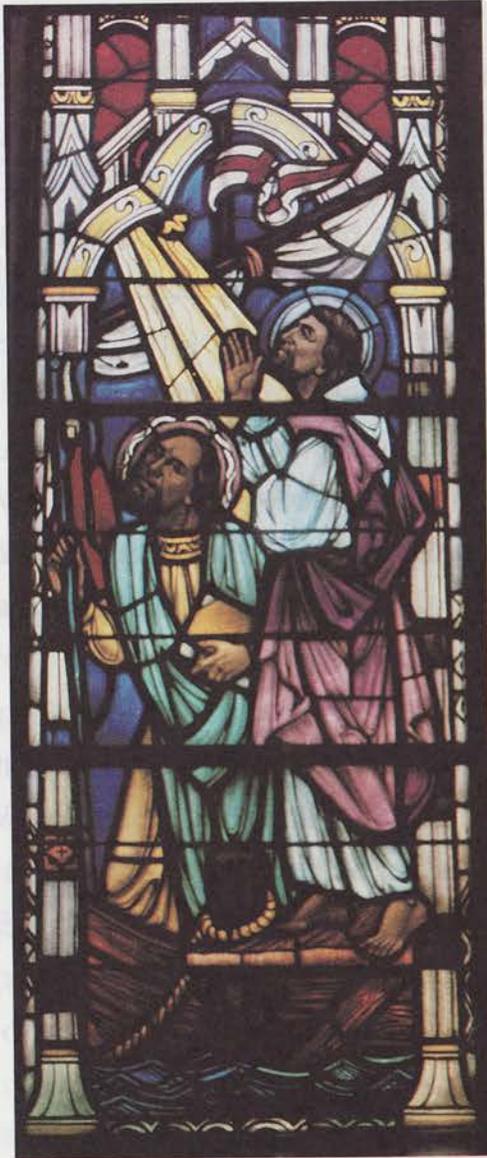
As a leader in the Church, Barnabas went to the city of Antioch. Here the followers of Jesus were first

called "Christians." Antioch was a home base for Barnabas and Paul. They went out to share their faith in other places.

When the people of Antioch heard about the needs of the poor in Judea, Barnabas and Paul urged them to give money. Together they took the people's gift to Jerusalem and presented it to the Church's elders.

Like many kind followers who served Christ and the Church's people, Barnabas worked hard. We know very little about him. But Luke, writer of *The Acts of the Apostles*, makes it clear that Barnabas was both gentle and strong.

The apostle Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about young John Mark who wanted to join them on one of their long trips. Paul had doubts about John Mark, but Barnabas believed in him. Paul went in one direction. Barnabas took John Mark and went to another place.



Barnabas was Paul's friend.
He cared for the poor.



Dorcas made clothes for other people.
Her friends loved her.

CHAPTER 6

Dorcas, 'Full of Good Works'

In Joppa, a city by the sea, there lived a good woman named Tabitha. That was her Hebrew name. In the Greek language, her name was Dorcas.

Dorcas did many kind things for the poor. Her neighbors loved her very much. They treasured the special clothes she made for them with her own hands.

One day, sad news traveled quickly through the streets of Joppa. "Dear Dorcas has died!" Her neighbors wept and wept.

The apostle Peter was not far away, so Dorcas' friends sent for him. "Come at once!" they said. "We need to have you with us in this time of grief."

When Peter arrived, he found widows whom Dorcas had helped. They were crying as they showed him the clothes Dorcas had made. "We have never had such a wonderful neighbor," they said. "Oh, if only she had not died! We are heartbroken."

Peter asked to be alone in the room where Dorcas was lying. He prayed for a long time. Then he laid his hands on Dorcas and said, "Tabitha, rise."

Peter's prayers were answered. Dorcas rose.

Everyone who heard of this great deed of power rejoiced in what God had done.

"How is it possible that Peter could bring our friend back to life?" they asked. The followers of Jesus knew the answer. It was Peter's faith in Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, that gave him the power to raise Dorcas.

Many more persons believed in Jesus because of what had happened in Joppa. Luke heard this story from others, and he put it in *The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9*.

Many churches have honored the good deeds of Dorcas in groups that are named for her. These groups serve needy persons by sharing clothing and helping them to find food and shelter.

CHAPTER 7

John Mark, a Young Christian

The apostle Peter once said that John Mark was like “a son” to him. The story of their friendship began on the night Peter was freed from jail.

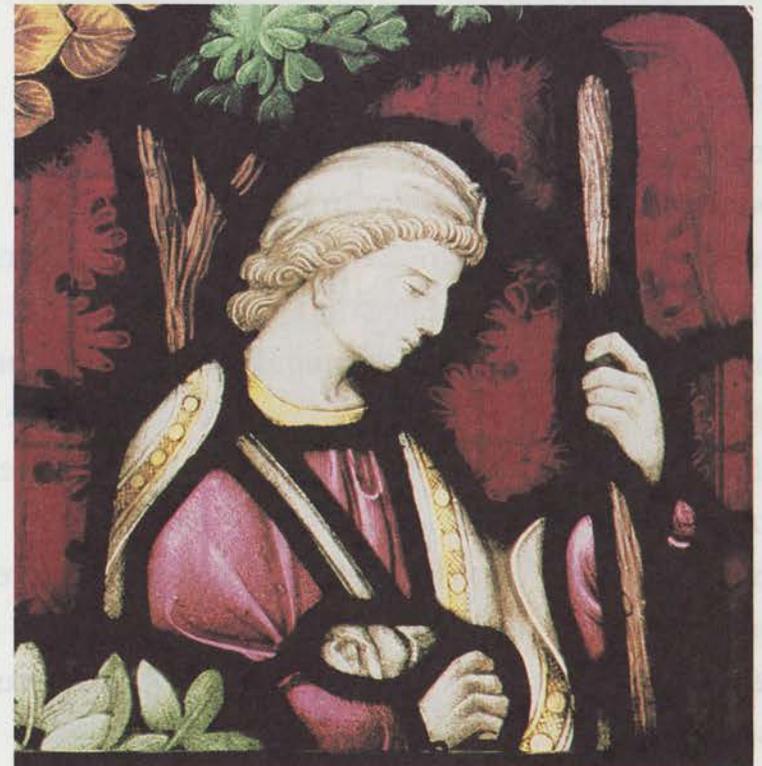
John Mark could never forget what happened that night. He was the young son of a woman named Mary. At Mary’s home, many of Peter’s friends gathered to pray as soon as they heard he was being held in chains.

When the angel set Peter free, he went at once to Mary’s house. He knocked at the gate. A maid named Rhoda answered.

When Rhoda peeked through a crack, she saw Peter standing. She was so excited and full of joy that she could not open the gate. She rushed back and shouted, “Peter is here! He is standing at the gate right now!”

No one believed it could be true.

They said to Rhoda, “You are out of your mind. You must have seen an angel instead.”



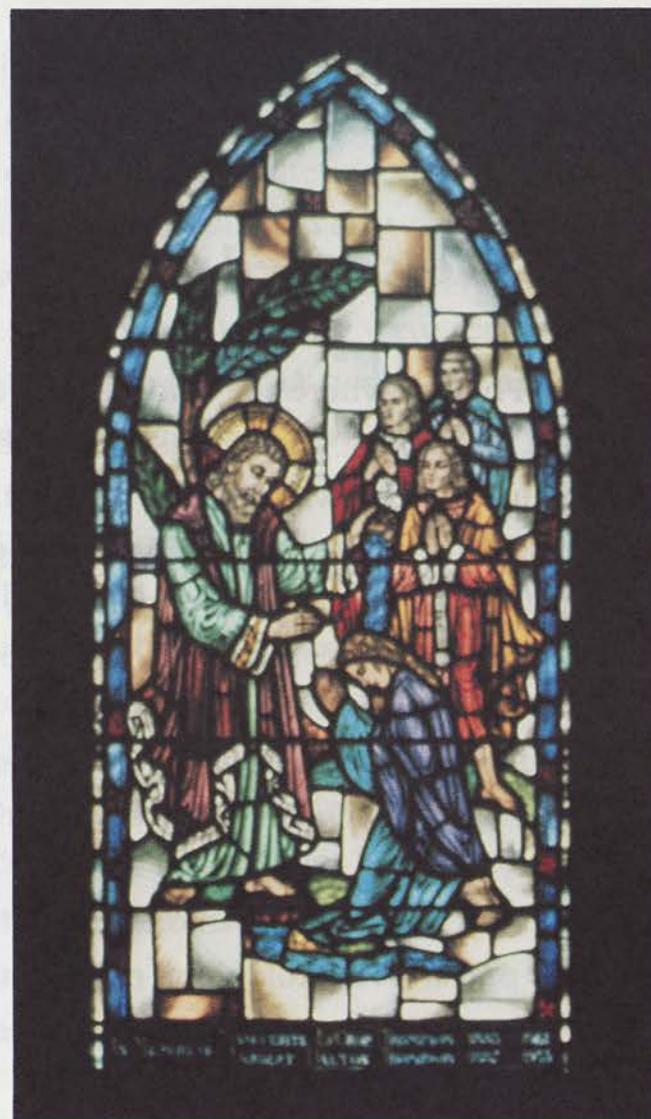
John Mark was a friend of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

But Peter did not stop knocking. At last the gate was opened, and everyone was amazed. Peter asked them to be quiet, and he told them the whole story of what had happened. John Mark listened.

What an amazing thing God had done for Peter! John Mark would not forget. His faith in Jesus grew stronger. He wanted to share in Peter's work. He wanted to join his cousin, Barnabas, in telling others the good news of Jesus Christ.

John Mark traveled with Barnabas and Paul on one long journey. Then something happened that made Paul feel John Mark should not go with them on their next trip. Barnabas did not agree, so he took John Mark and traveled in a different direction. We can read about this in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Years later, John Mark was with Paul in Rome. Paul trusted him again.



Lydia believed in God.
She shared with others.

CHAPTER 8

Lydia Welcomed Others

Lydia lived in Philippi where she made and sold purple cloth. In those days, purple was a color that cost more because the dye was not easy to make. It came from a type of snail. People who had enough money to buy purple cloth liked it very much. It did not fade the way other colors did. Lydia watched carefully as the cloth was woven and dyed.

Lydia believed in God. On the Jewish day of rest, she would join other women at a place of prayer near a river.

One sabbath, Paul and his companions joined the women in their prayers. Paul told them of his faith in Jesus, the risen Lord. He shared the story of Jesus' life and explained what it meant to be a believer.

Lydia had never heard such good news from God. She accepted what she heard from Paul, the servant of Christ. Then she and her whole household were baptized.

Lydia said to Paul, "If you find me faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay with me." Paul and his friends were her grateful guests.

At a later time, Paul and Silas were put in jail when they were accused of starting a riot. They were innocent. When at last they were set free, Paul said, "Let us go back to Lydia's house. We need a place to stay where we can rest a while." Lydia welcomed them gladly.

As Luke was writing *The Acts of the Apostles*, he must have said to himself, "I will not forget to tell about Lydia. She was an important friend to Paul. She helped Christians in her city in many ways."

We still remember Lydia because she opened her home to others. She wanted to be with Christian friends, and she shared her hospitality freely. She became a good example.

CHAPTER 9

The First Pentecost

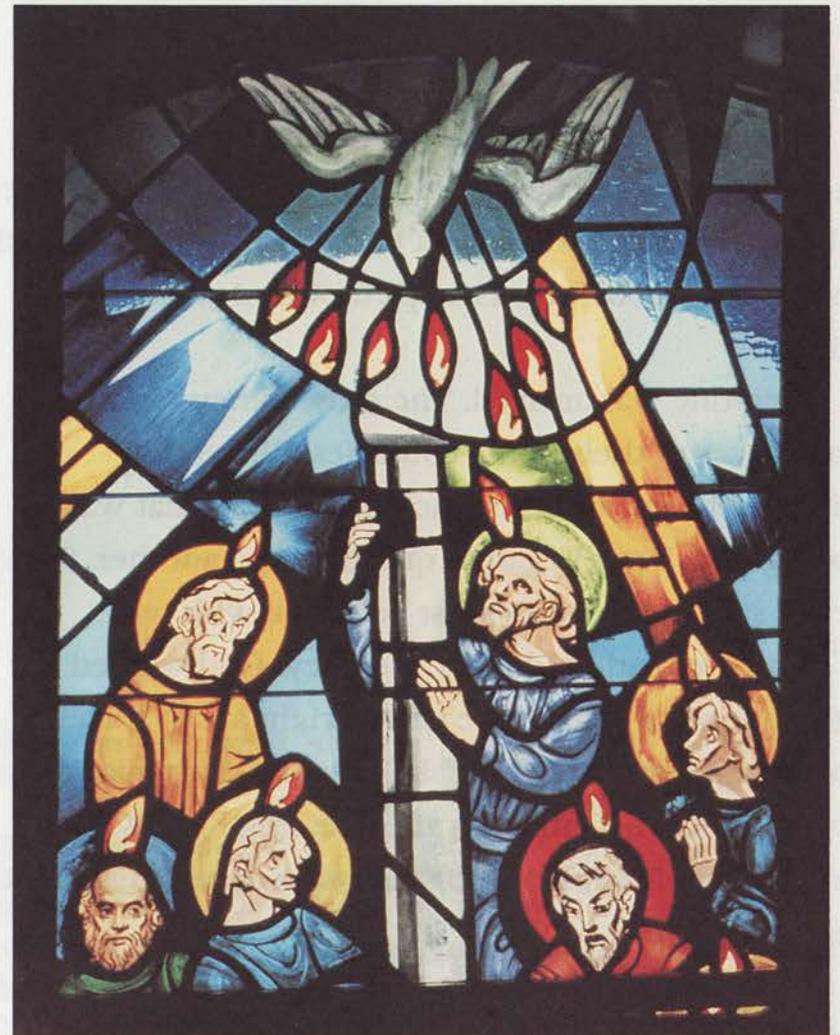
When Luke finished writing his second book, he sat thinking. He remembered friends in the Christian churches he visited with Paul.

“God has done the great things that were promised,” Luke said. “It all began a few weeks after Jesus was raised from the dead. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost. I am glad I decided to put this marvelous story at the beginning. I hope the churches will always remember it. Without the help of the Spirit, we can do nothing for our Lord.”

He turned back in the big scroll and started to read, “When Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. . . .”

Jewish people from other nations were living in Jerusalem. They spoke different languages, but they all believed in one God.

What happened that day caused many to gather in a hurry at the scene. There they found the twelve apostles of Christ.



The Holy Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost.

The people shouted, "What are you doing? We heard strange sounds coming from here!"

The apostles told what God had done. A sound like a strong wind startled them, and they saw tongue-like flames. Each of them began to speak in ways they had never spoken before. The Spirit of God was with them.

Everyone was amazed. The crowd knew only the languages of their home countries. But as they listened to the apostles, each one knew what was being said. They began to question one another. Some even said the apostles must be drunk with wine.

But Peter had no doubts. He knew God wanted the good news of Jesus to be shared right away. "Peter preached a great sermon," Luke said. "Many, many others became Christians after hearing him. What he said is here in my book for everyone to read again and again."

We can find Peter's Pentecost sermon in *The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2*.

Shell Year—Primary, Unit IV

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