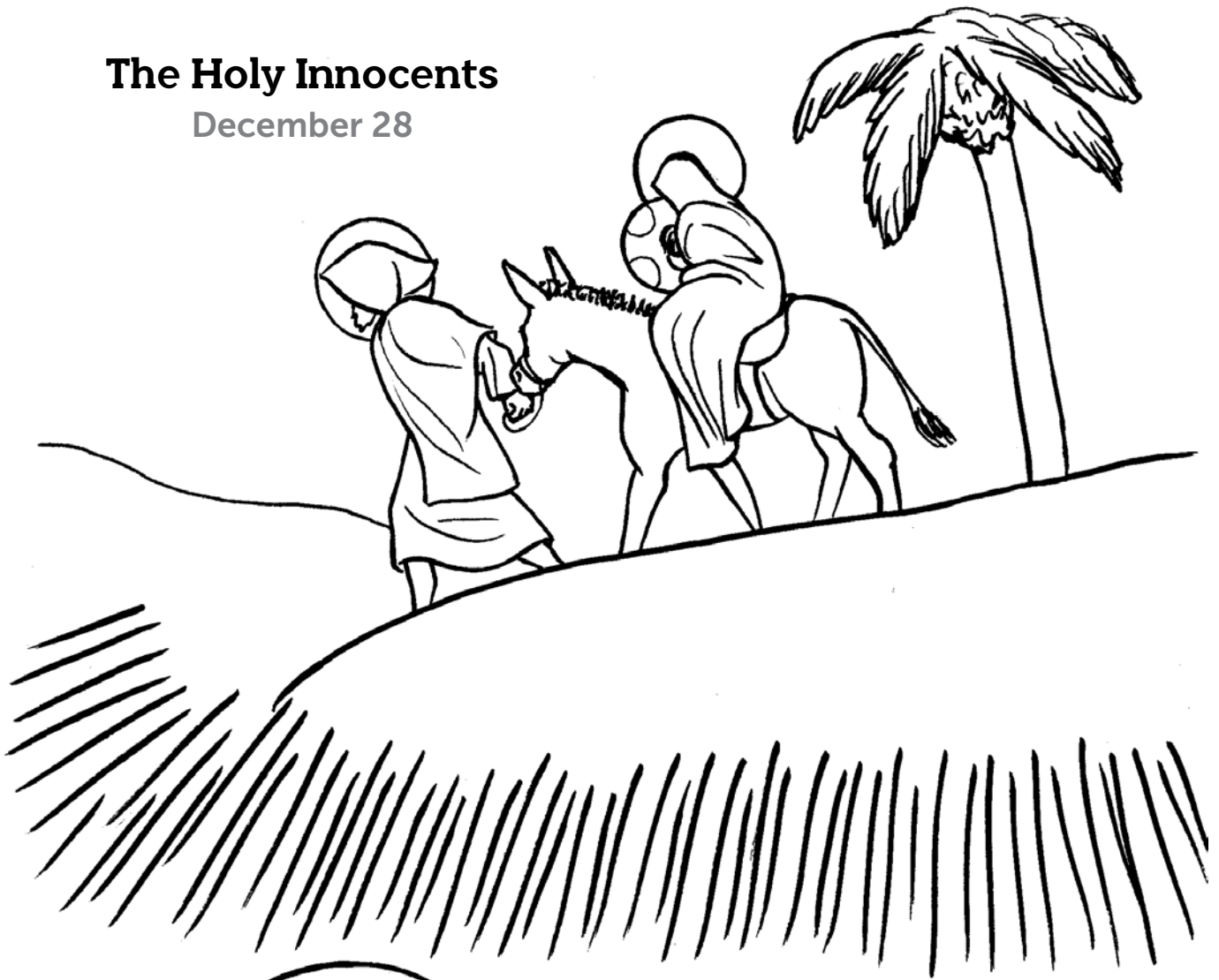


The Holy Innocents

December 28



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Biblical Figures

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Rise," the angel commanded. "Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

Joseph started awake, the angel's urgent command still clear in his mind. He went to where Mary was sleeping with the baby Jesus, gently shook her awake, and explained all the angel had told him. With haste, they prepared for their departure and loaded their faithful donkey with their few possessions. Anxious questions troubled Joseph. Would Jesus be safe? Where would they live in Egypt? Then, Mary's gentle hand rested on his arm, and her trusting gaze filled him with peace. The Father in heaven would look after them, and He would protect His Son, Jesus. And so the Holy Family fled into the night for Egypt.

In Jerusalem, King Herod was awaiting news from the three Wise Men. Earlier, they had come to Jerusalem seeking the newborn king of the Jews. Herod had pretended to be their friend and had sent them to Bethlehem, where the Messiah was prophesied to be born. The Wise Men were supposed to report back to Herod when they found the baby.

Herod feared that if another king was born, he might try to take Herod's throne! And so Herod was plotting to kill the baby Jesus when he discovered His identity. But after the three Wise Men had found Jesus in Bethlehem, an angel warned them, too, about Herod's plan, and so they went home by a hidden way.

When the Wise Men never returned to Jerusalem, Herod was furious. And so in his dark heart, he decided that he did not need to know the identity of the newborn Messiah to kill him. He would instead kill all the baby boys under two years old in Bethlehem. He ordered his soldiers to carry out his vile command. In Bethlehem, his soldiers committed the unspeakable evil that Herod had ordered.

All the innocent babies that died are called the Holy Innocents because they had done no wrong and had died for Jesus. Because of the angel's warning, the Holy Family escaped and lived in Egypt until Herod died and the angel told Joseph they could return home.

The Holy Innocents' pure souls rested in the bosom of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, until Jesus opened the gates of heaven after His death and Resurrection. Now they are honored as saints in heaven because they shed their innocent blood for the Savior of the world. Holy Innocents, help my heart be as pure and innocent as yours!