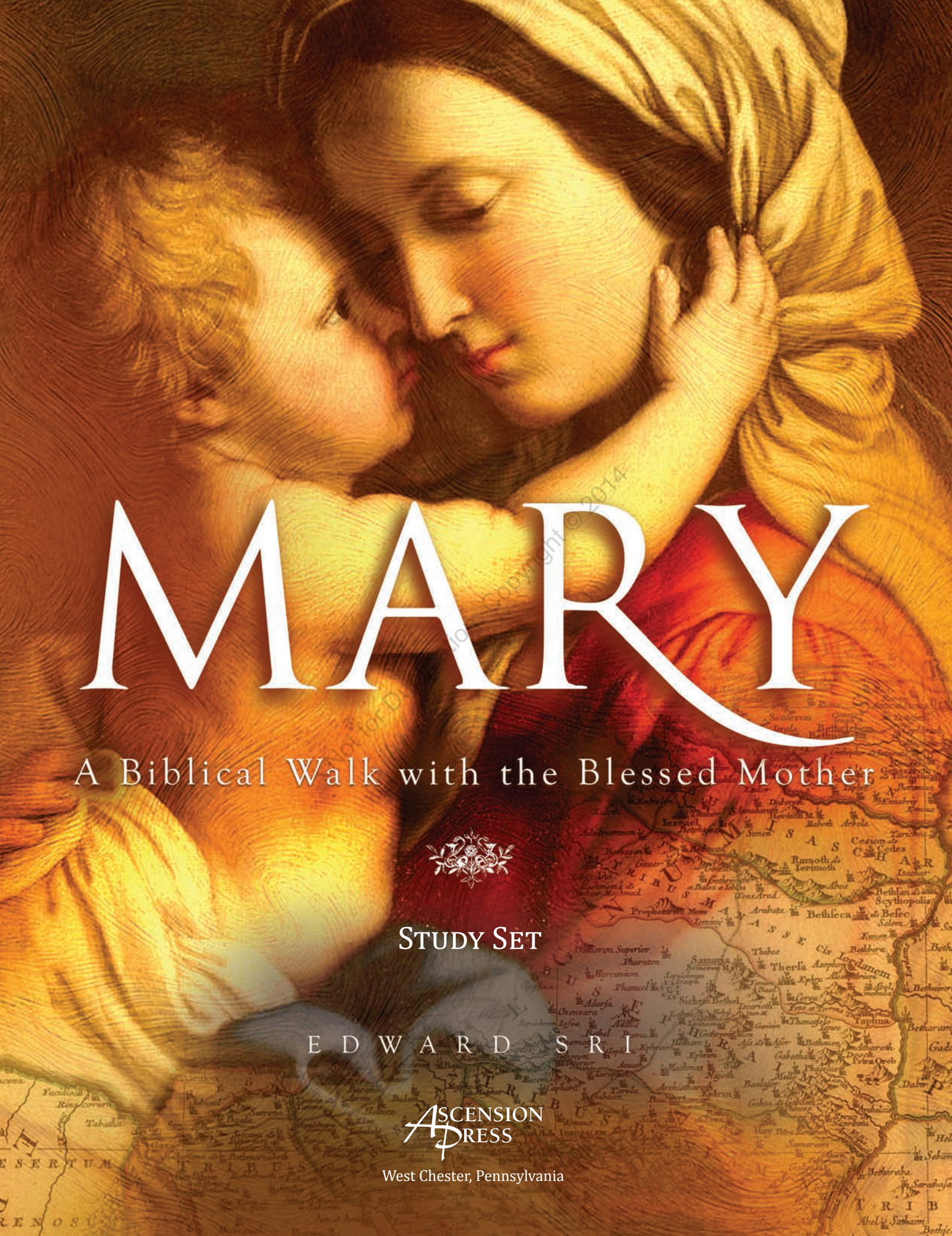




MARY

A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother



STUDY SET

EDWARD SRI

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Contents

Welcome to <i>The Great Adventure</i>	iv
About <i>Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother</i>	v
Questions	
<i>Session One – Introduction</i>	1
<i>Session Two – The Annunciation: Luke 1:26-38</i>	5
<i>Session Three – The Visitation: Luke 1:39-56</i>	15
<i>Session Four – The Nativity: Luke 2:1-20</i>	25
<i>Session Five – The Presentation & The Finding of Jesus in the Temple: Luke 2:21-52</i>	35
<i>Session Six – The Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11</i>	45
<i>Session Seven – Mary at the Cross: John 19:25-30</i>	55
<i>Session Eight – Mary Crowned with Glory: Revelation 12</i>	65
Responses	
<i>How to Use These Responses</i>	75
<i>Session Two – The Annunciation: Luke 1:26-38</i>	77
<i>Session Three – The Visitation: Luke 1:39-56</i>	81
<i>Session Four – The Nativity: Luke 2:1-20</i>	85
<i>Session Five – The Presentation & The Finding of Jesus in the Temple: Luke 2:21-52</i>	89
<i>Session Six – The Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11</i>	93
<i>Session Seven – Mary at the Cross: John 19:25-30</i>	97
<i>Session Eight – Mary Crowned with Glory: Revelation 12</i>	101
What's Next	104

Welcome to *The Great Adventure*

*“To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances;
to seek him, the greatest adventure.”*

– St. Augustine

The Bible is at the heart of our Catholic Faith—and our relationship with God. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and lovingly speaks to us. Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but understanding it is not always easy. Many people tell us they have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because they “just don’t get it.”

The Great Adventure is designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God’s Word. At the core of *The Great Adventure* is the concept that there is a story running through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and makes sense not just of the Bible, but of our lives as well.

That story is God’s plan as it has unfolded throughout salvation history and continues to unfold today. Once we grasp this “big picture,” the readings at Mass begin to make more sense, our Scripture reading and study come to life, and we see how our lives fit into God’s loving plan.

Hundreds of thousands of participants have discovered the riches of Scripture by experiencing one or more *Great Adventure* Bible studies. It is our prayer that you will gain a newfound understanding of God’s Word that will transform your life and bring you closer to Christ.

Jeff Cavins, Creator & President, *The Great Adventure*

Sarah Christmyer, Co-developer & Author, *The Great Adventure*

About The Great Adventure Catholic Bible Study Program

At the core of *The Great Adventure* Bible Study Program is *The Bible Timeline* learning system: a simple way to get the “big picture” of the Bible by focusing on the story that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. *Great Adventure* Bible studies explore the biblical narrative in light of Catholic teaching and the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Scriptures in order to discover what Scripture reveals about God’s plan and our place within it. Studies of individual books of the Bible are supplemented by thematic and “life application” studies.

Every *Great Adventure* study is designed to foster:

- Familiarity with the Bible and ease of reading it
- Bible study habits consistent with the guidelines of the Catholic Church
- Personal engagement in the Word of God
- Faith-sharing based on the Word of God
- Growth in knowledge about Scripture and the Catholic Faith

About Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother

Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother is a powerful Bible study that reveals Mary's unique role in God's kingdom and in our lives. You will experience the gospel through the eyes of Mary and get a vivid glimpse into her daily life. Seeing her in this way will lead you to a deeper relationship with the Blessed Mother and her son, Jesus.

Session Outline

There are eight sessions in *Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother*. In addition to a video presentation for each of these sessions, the DVD Set includes a 5-minute informational video that you can use to promote this study at your parish.

- **Session One:** Introduction
- **Session Two:** The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)
- **Session Three:** The Visitation (Luke 1:39-56)
- **Session Four:** The Nativity (Luke 2:1-20)
- **Session Five:** The Presentation & The Finding of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:21-52)
- **Session Six:** The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)
- **Session Seven:** Mary at the Cross (John 19:25-30)
- **Session Eight:** Mary Crowned with Glory (Revelation 12)

The following timeline of Mary's life appears on the first page of each session with the portion related to that session emphasized.



Materials

Materials for *Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother* include:

- **The Study Set** – This set includes engaging study questions (with session summaries, home reading assignments, Talk Notes, charts, and diagrams) and a set of responses to the study questions. (You will need one study set for each participant, study leader, and small-group facilitator.)
- **Video Presentations** (eight 30-minute sessions) – Presented by Dr. Edward Sri, these video presentations paint an amazing picture of Mary and provide you with a uniquely personal encounter with the Blessed Mother. (You will need one DVD Set.)

In addition, each participant, leader, and small-group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible. We recommend the Revised Standard Version–Catholic Edition (RSV-CE) or the New American Bible (NAB).

How the Study Works

Every *Great Adventure* study session includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will allow you to get the most out of each session.



Step 1: Home preparation

Note: There is no home preparation required for Session One.

Each session begins with personal study that involves reading Scripture and answering a series of questions that will help you understand and think more deeply about what you have read. Some questions will include additional reading from other parts of the Bible or from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help you consider the passage in light of the bigger picture of salvation history and Catholic teaching.

We recommend that you allow at least 90 minutes to complete the reading and answer the questions for each session. We also suggest that home preparation be done in several sittings over the course of a week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

Step 2: Small-group discussion

One of the richest parts of a *Great Adventure* Bible study is the small-group discussion. During this discussion, you and the other members of your small group will have the opportunity to share your insights into the Scripture readings. This small-group discussion will allow you to obtain a richer understanding of these readings and help you apply them to your life. Trained facilitators will guide the small-group discussions and keep them on track. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of a Small-Group-Discussion” on page viii.

Step 3: Video presentation

Dr. Edward Sri wraps up each session with a video presentation that offers unique insights and profound connections to help you gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and its relationship to the Catholic Faith and your life, with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned to your life.

Step 4: Review of responses

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this study set—is done at home prior to beginning the reading for the next session. These responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the richest study experience, complete these steps in order: Read and answer the questions; discuss them in your small group; view the video presentation; and then review the responses. Your small-group facilitator will incorporate the points made in the responses section during your discussion time, but the richness that comes from individual insights gets lost when participants view the responses prior to the discussion.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit **BibleStudyForCatholics.com/leaders**, or call our Study Consultants at 1-800-376-0520.

Getting the Most Out of This Study

This study will help you understand the Bible and the Blessed Mother in a new way. The “head knowledge” you gain will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. The Bible will always remain a mystery, though, and that is part of the beauty of it: We can never exhaust the treasures of Scripture. Fortunately for us, the Bible is not a subject to master; it is a place to encounter the living Word of God.

Whenever you open your Bible to read, *start with prayer*, and place yourself in God’s presence. You might take Samuel’s prayer as your own: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10). When you read, adopt an attitude of listening. Try not to treat Scripture as a text, but as a personal message from God. What is he saying? What does it mean? And what does it mean for my life? If you come to the Word focused on having an encounter with the Lord, he will speak to your heart, and you will be transformed.

An Important Note About the Responses to the Study Questions

Responses to the study questions are provided in the back of this Study Set. These responses do not exhaust the meaning that can be found in the Scripture reading. People will have unique insights. The responses have two important functions:

1. They provide participants with a review of each session, which will help establish a context for the reading and for the questions in the following session. The best time to read the responses is just before starting on the next session.
2. The second purpose of the responses is to provide guidelines for the small-group facilitators. **Facilitators:** Complete the Scripture reading and answer the questions on your own before reading the responses in preparation for facilitating the small-group discussion.

Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the session is completed. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait for the following reasons.

(1) Bible study is not about simply watching a video presentation or reading a Bible commentary. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the Word of God itself and engage it with your heart and mind. The questions in *The Great Adventure* studies are written with the purpose of drawing you into the Scriptures so that the Word of God will be planted in your heart where it will continue to grow. Reading a response written by someone else may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not result in the kind of growth that will occur if you attempt to answer the question on your own first.

(2) The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the Scripture passages on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

For these reasons, please wait to read the responses until after the session. When you follow the steps of this study as intended, you will explore the Word of God in different ways: in the reading, the small-group discussion, the video presentation, and, finally, in the responses. Follow these steps over time and you will be more than be fed; you will learn to feed yourself.

Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion

- 1. Enjoy yourself!**
- 2. Speak with respect and charity.**
- 3. Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say. Keep comments positive.**
- 4. Come prepared.**
- 5. If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.**
- 6. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.**
- 7. Start and end on time.**
- 8. Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.**
- 9. Listen to others without interrupting.**
- 10. Keep personal matters within the group.**



Nazareth Village, Israel

Session One

Introduction



"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord ..."

Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother

Many Christians revere Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the most important woman in salvation history. Catholics in particular hold Mary in high esteem. We often decorate our churches with statues, stained glass windows, and paintings of Mary. We recite prayers such as the Hail Mary and the Rosary in which we ask Mary to pray for us. We sing hymns that honor her and recognize special feast days related to aspects of Mary's life. The Catholic Church also teaches doctrines related to the Blessed Virgin Mary: She is the Mother of God; she was conceived without sin; she remained a virgin throughout her life; she was assumed body and soul into heaven.

Whatever our level of familiarity with Catholic Marian doctrine and devotion, one question we can ask ourselves is this: How well do we know the humanness of Mary and her profound journey of faith? How well do we know the young woman of Nazareth who was called to a most extraordinary mission and was led by God step-by-step into deeper trust and surrender to his plan and her son's mission?

The Bible does not offer a lot of information about Mary. She only appears in a few chapters in the New Testament. But these passages are packed with rich meaning and serve as important windows into Mary's life—and it is a life to which we can all relate and which offers much insight for our own journey of faith. We will see that Mary experienced the joys of motherhood and God's blessings, but that she also faced trials and sufferings. She had moments when God's will was clear to her and other moments of discernment, moments of darkness, and moments when she did not understand—when all she could do was keep all these things and ponder them in her heart. Mary certainly received extraordinary revelations, but not everything was disclosed to her at once. Though she was endowed with unique graces and privileges, she still had to walk by faith, not by sight.

In this study, we will walk with Mary through the stages of her life, starting with the angel Gabriel's announcement to her in Nazareth that she would become the mother of Jesus. We will accompany Mary on her visit to her kinswoman Elizabeth and consider what Mary was going through in the events surrounding her delivery of the child Jesus in Bethlehem; her presentation of the infant child in the Temple; and her losing and finding her child in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old.

We then will move ahead to study Mary's relationship with Jesus in his adult life. We will reflect on her role in the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana at the start of his public ministry and her role at the climax of his mission when he offered his life on the Cross. Finally, we will consider what the mysterious passage about "a woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12 may tell us about Mary's role in the life of the Christian today.

As we walk with Mary through her life, we will consider what the Bible tells us about her journey of faith, the practical lessons we can gain from her for our own relationship with God, and what the Scriptures tell us about Catholic Marian beliefs. We will focus on Mary in the Scriptures and on insights from Catholic Tradition that can help illuminate Mary's life.

It is my hope that this study will help you to know and love Mary more and to walk in her footsteps, imitating her as the first and model disciple of Christ.

Edward Sri

Session One *Talk Notes*

Introduction

I. Scope and Purpose: Getting to Know Mary as Revealed in Scripture

- A. Mary as model disciple
- B. Mary's journey of faith, from Nazareth to the Cross
- C. Inspiration and model for our lives

II. Facts About Mary's Early Life (Luke 1:26-27)

- A. Mary is from Nazareth
 - 1. Obscure town of two hundred people; in Galilee
- B. She is a virgin who is "betrothed"
 - 1. Two-step ancient Jewish marriage process

- a.** First step: betrothal – legally bound, not living together
 - b.** Second step: taking into home of husband
- 2.** Typical age of girl at betrothal: thirteen or fourteen years old; a virgin
- C.** Joseph is from the house of David (verse 27), the “royal family”
 - 1.** 586 BC: end of Davidic dynasty
 - 2.** Source of hope to the reader
 - a.** Messiah to come from house of David
 - b.** Joseph: from lineage of David

III. Role of Home Preparation

- A.** Reading and study questions
- B.** Join Mary – keep the Word in your heart