

Let's Learn ...

CHATTING

ABOUT MARY

Recall with the children what they remember about Mary, using these or similar questions:

- Can you remember the first story you heard about Mary? Which story was that?
- How did Mary respond to God's call to her to be the Mother of Jesus?
- What prayers do you know that we can say to Mary?
- What do you think is the most important thing about Mary?
- Do you remember what an apparition is? Which apparitions of Mary can you name?
- What is a pilgrimage? What do we call pilgrimages to sites associated with Mary?

SONG

'A MHIURE MHÁTHAIR'

Introduce the song 'A Mhuire Mháthair' (CD 1, track 19, p. 349) to the children. Explain that this is a traditional Irish prayer to Mary.

STORY

The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Back in 1531, European explorers landed in South America. Some began to seek their fortunes, while others began to teach the local people the story of Jesus. One of the people who heard the story of Jesus and wanted to become a follower of Jesus was a poor, middle-aged Aztec Indian peasant named Juan Diego, who lived in a place that would later be called Guadalupe, in Mexico, Central America. At that time the Aztecs worshipped false gods. Juan, however, would soon become a Catholic.

One day as Juan Diego was passing by Tepeyac Hill on his way to Mass, he saw a beautiful woman standing on the hill. The woman was surrounded by a ball of sunlight. She spoke to Juan in his native language and said: 'My dear son, I love you. I want you to know who I am. I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God who gives life to all living things. He created all things. He is in all places. He is Lord of heaven and earth. I would like to have a church built in this place where your people may come to pray and experience my compassion. All those who come here can ask for my help in their work and in their sorrows. I will help them like a mother helps her children. So go now to Tenochtitlan and tell the bishop all that you have seen and heard.'

Immediately, Juan left for Tenochtitlan. He requested a meeting with the bishop,

Fray Juan de Zumárraga. However, the bishop and his servants were doubtful about Juan's story. They asked Juan to bring back a sign from the lady as proof of who she was.

Our Lady promised to give a sign to the bishop, but she asked that Juan Diego would return to meet her the following day. Unfortunately, Juan was not able to return to the hill the next day because he had to care for his uncle who had become seriously ill. After forty-eight hours Juan went to find a priest for his uncle, who was close to death. He was ashamed of having failed to turn up as Mary had requested and he took a different route in order to avoid seeing her. However, Mary intercepted him and asked where he was going. Juan explained what had happened and Mary told him that he would not need a priest because his uncle would make a full recovery. She also said these words, which are now inscribed over the door of the basilica in Guadalupe: 'Am I not here, I who am your mother?' Then Mary told Juan to gather a bunch of flowers that were growing on top of the hill and bring them to her.

Despite the freezing weather on the hilltop, Juan found a full bloom of Castilian roses. He gathered the flowers in his *tilma*, a poncho-like cape made of cactus fibre, and brought them to Our Lady. She rearranged the flowers and sent