



# Scripture Illuminated

A Coloring Book for  
Prayer and Meditation





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**A Coloring Book for Prayer and Meditation**

**Art by Estelle Chandelier**

**Introduction by Emmanuelle Rémond-Dalyac**



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Art by Estelle Chandelier

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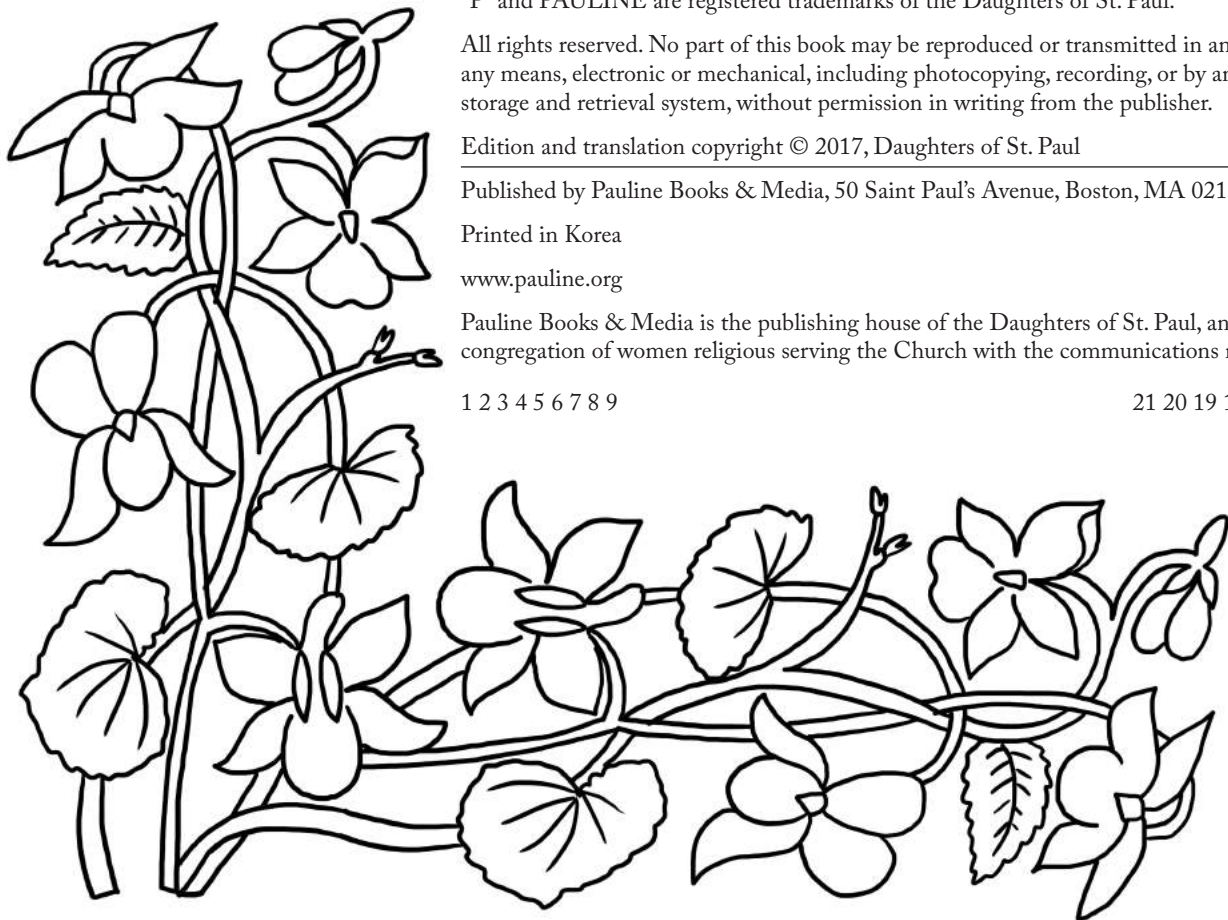
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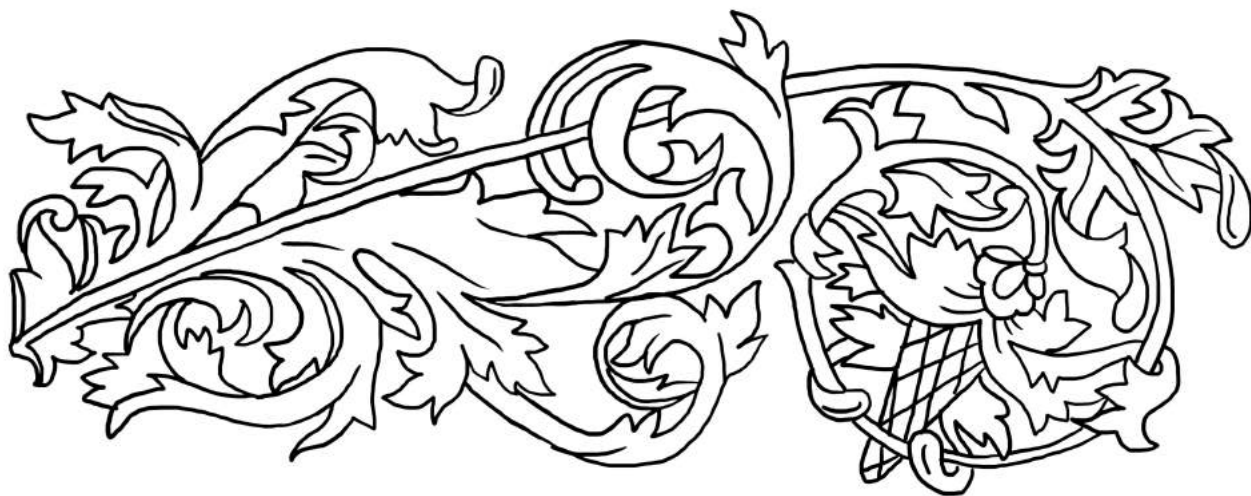
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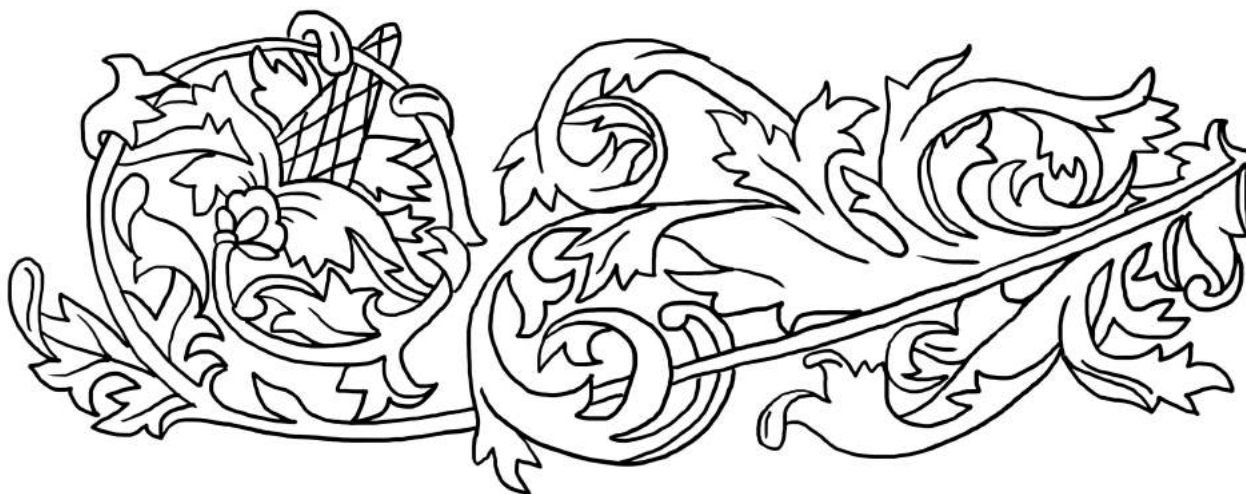






“The word is very near  
to you; it is in your  
mouth and in your heart  
for you to observe.”

DEUTERONOMY 30:14



# The Art of Illumination

In admiring an illuminated manuscript, who has not thought of the monks in the scriptorium of their monasteries, leaning on their manuscripts with pen in hand, copying the Gospel and other biblical texts for the greater glory of God and the edification of the faithful? The art of illumination, however, is not found only in medieval Christianity. In ancient Egypt, rolls of papyrus were illustrated in the time of the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1077 BC). This technique spread throughout the Mediterranean after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great (fourth century BC). But the papyrus was made from the stem of the papyrus plant, which did not allow for applying several layers of paint. Besides, it easily disintegrated due to the effect of humidity when it was exported to countries more temperate than Egypt.

# The Book: A Technological Revolution

The art of illumination took off later, in the first century of our era, with the invention of the vellum or parchment codex. Made of pages that could turn instead of a scroll that would unroll, the codex was a technological revolution. Historians do not hesitate to compare it to printing in the way it changed people's reading habits. The scroll was held in two hands, with a panoramic vision of the text, which was in several columns. This made it necessary to read aloud continuously. The codex, instead, being easier to handle and browse through, made possible a more selective and silent reading. It could include more text because the text was written on both sides, and it was easy to add to the number of pages.

This great advantage explains why parchment was generally adopted despite the meticulous care required to

produce it. Parchment was made from the skin of a calf or sheep soaked in a solution of water and lime [calcium hydroxide], and then beaten out and stretched. (The term “vellum” was reserved for the skin of a stillborn calf, rare and prized.) After being dried, the skin was polished with a pumice stone, the vellum was folded in two, four, or eight, according to the dimensions of the book. Then the pages were sewn. A book of sixteen sheets in a small format required fifteen skins. The work of making parchment took a long time!

When the codex was ready, the copyist took over: he would adjust the upper sheet of paper of the bundle and perforate all the pages with the help of a hole punch. He would then draw lines between the perforations for spacing, so that the margins would be the same for each page. The illuminator, who was not the copyist, would show him the space that had to be reserved for the ornamental borders, the letters and the miniatures, the name given to the figurative scenes that sometimes took up the whole page. The copyist would use ink made with charcoal, and

the illuminator would use a paintbrush to apply colors made from animal, vegetable, or mineral sources, mixed with some egg whites or honey. With this method, all sorts of texts were illuminated in antiquity: poems; treatises on the natural sciences, in particular on flowers; plays, etc. This art was elevated to the rank of the major arts around the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

## The Illuminated Bible

The Desert Fathers, the first Christian hermits in Egypt during the third century, had already used the art of calligraphy for the Bible in their huts. In the West, this art disappeared with the collapse of the Roman Empire. The upheavals of war made it difficult to practice this art that requires concentration, calm, and silence. But new developments occurred with the rise of Irish monasticism, under the guidance of Saint Columban. In the

sixth century he sent missionaries to Scotland. The most famous example of their work is the illuminated Gospel book from the monastery at Lindisfarne, which dates from around the year 698.

The practice of illuminating the Bible expressed devotion and honor for the sacred character of the text, but it also had a practical function: the Book of the Gospels that arranged the Gospels in their liturgical order also contained visual indications that allowed one to identify the context of the text before the reading began. And during a time in which these texts were always proclaimed in Latin, the gospel scenes could also be viewed from afar by the assembly of the faithful. The missionaries carried these texts with them all across Europe. The beauty of the written text, enhanced by the beautiful images, made for a powerful form of evangelization.

The books were rare because producing them was a long and costly process, so their possessors enjoyed great social prestige. Emperors, kings, and princes collected them, and during the twelfth century, when European

cities developed, rich merchants wanted them too. The illuminators left the quiet of the monasteries and spread to the new universities of Europe, such as Paris or Oxford. Their style continued to develop over the centuries.

Gutenberg's invention of printing in 1450 retained for a time some illumination at the heads of chapters and on borders, but illumination as a major art was gradually lost with the development of engraving and the mastery of full-color printing. In our imagination, illumination is henceforth associated, like the cathedrals of the cities or the abbeys of the countryside, with the time of the Middle Ages and its marvels of a Christian civilization.





# A Thousand Years of Creative Art

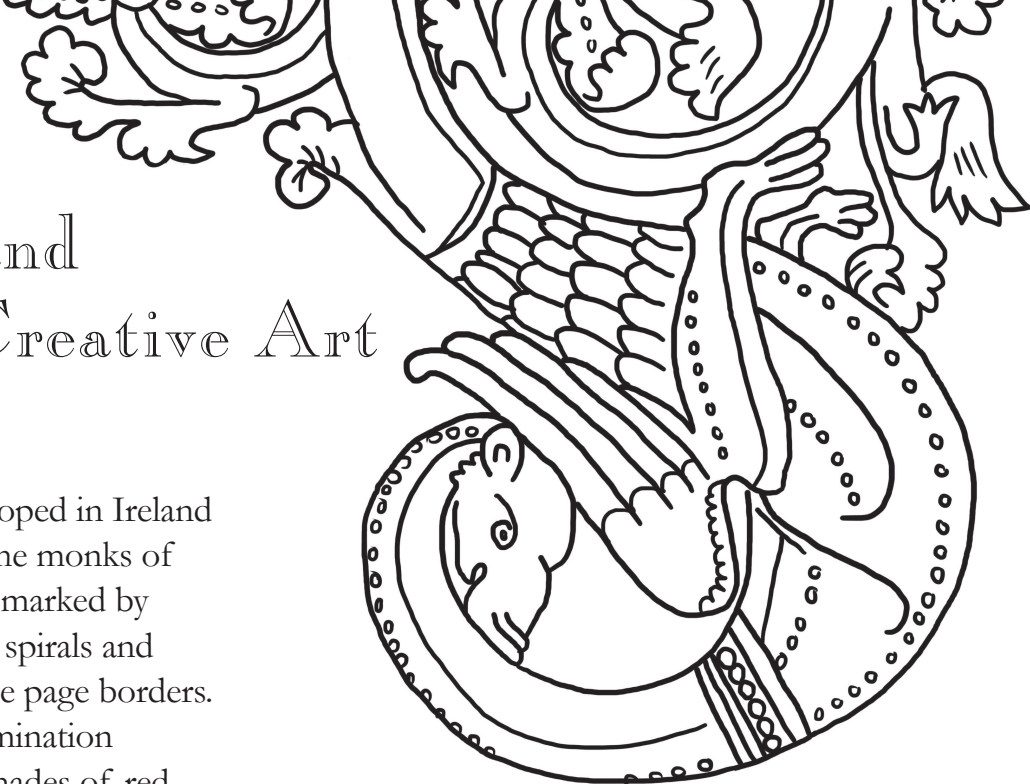
## *The Celtic Style*

This style was developed in Ireland under the impetus of the monks of Saint Columban and is marked by a mixture of interlaced spirals and geometric designs in the page borders. The Celtic style of illumination principally used solid shades of red and green with red dotted lines applied around the initial letter of the page to soften its contour.

*This style of art can be found on pages 16–17, 18–19, 26–27, 72–73.*

The late Celtic style includes more exotic themes using designs based on animals: the animals are twisted to adapt to the form of the letters.

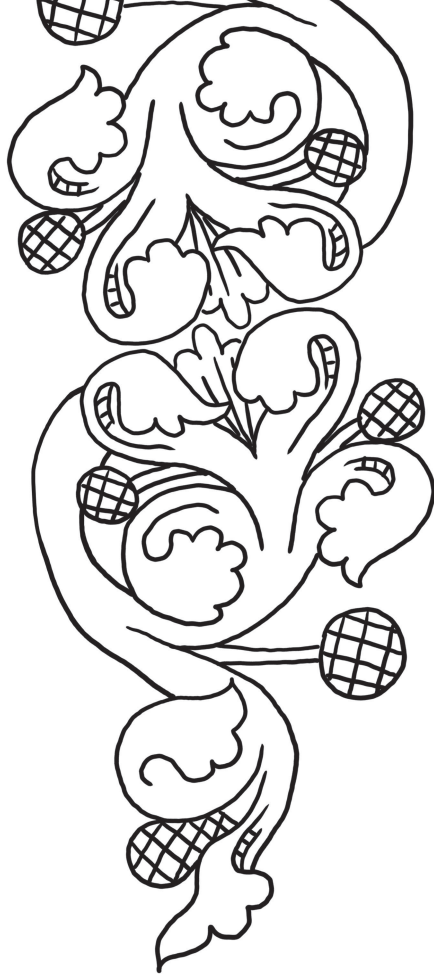
*This style of art can be found on pages 44–45, 66–67.*



## *The Roman Style*

This style spread in Europe at the beginning of the ninth century after the Court of Charlemagne linked the Roman world with that of Northern Germany. After his crowning at Rome, the new emperor commanded his copyists to add Mediterranean motifs to their Gospel books: palm leaves and branches, acanthus leaves, multicolor gradations. They often had historiated initials, which were letters that contained small scenes of something narrated in the text.

*This style of art can be found on pages 32–33, 46–47, 56–57.*



## *The Gothic Style*

This style developed in the cities of France and England, where lay people, rather than monks, began illuminating manuscripts. They most often decorated books of hours and liturgical psalters, containing a calendar and eight chapters of psalms, with hymns and prayers. The most famous of these is that of the Duke of Berry, produced in Paris between 1413 and 1416 by the Limbourg brothers. Decorated in gold, the borders are dotted with flowers and the pictures are executed in watercolors.

*This style of art can be found on pages 24–25, 28–29, 58–59, 76–77.*

## *The Renaissance Style*

The art of illumination was also influenced by the Renaissance, which restored the ancient Greek and Latin heritage and spread in Europe, especially in Italy, in the fifteenth century. The style called the “white vine” style appeared, in which the initial letter was interlaced by a white climbing vine on a color base. This style adopted some Roman elements copied from monuments and tombs found in excavations.

*This style of art can be found on pages 48–49.*



# A Few Tips

## *The Colors*



Vary your selection of colors from one illumination to another. If you wish a softer effect, work with harmonious combinations of pastels using different shades that you develop on a scale of your own. For vivacity, choose primary colors (red, yellow, blue) or work with some combinations: red and green, blue and orange, yellow and violet. You can use models found on the cover or look for inspiration online.

## *Meditate, Pray*

While coloring, the biblical citations can also become privileged moments of *lectio divina*, which is a prayerful reading of the Bible. Meditation can thus be serenely joined to the work of coloring. This is the balance we should strive for, according to the teaching of Saint Benedict, founder of many monastic communities in the sixth century. For example, you can proceed in the following way:

- ❧ Choose an appropriate time, when you are certain of not being disturbed.  
Give yourself enough time, at least twenty minutes.
- ❧ Choose a citation by consulting the index ( pp. 78–79).
- ❧ Slowly read the text, paying attention to each word.
- ❧ Let the text resonate within you, with your own experience.
- ❧ Illuminate [or color] the words, beginning with those that speak to you.

As you work, open yourself if you can and spend some time in prayer, which is a time of dialogue with God. As Saint Augustine said, “Your prayer is your word addressed to God. When you read, it is God who is speaking to you; when you pray, it is you who are speaking with God.”

When the Word of God suddenly opens up an interior silence in which God makes himself present, focus your attention on this as you open yourself to this time of contemplation.


As a



DER

thirsts for streams  
of water





so, my God,  
does my soul  
pant for you.  
Athirst is my soul  
for God, for  
the living God;  
“When shall  
I go and see  
God’s face?”

PSALM 42:2-3

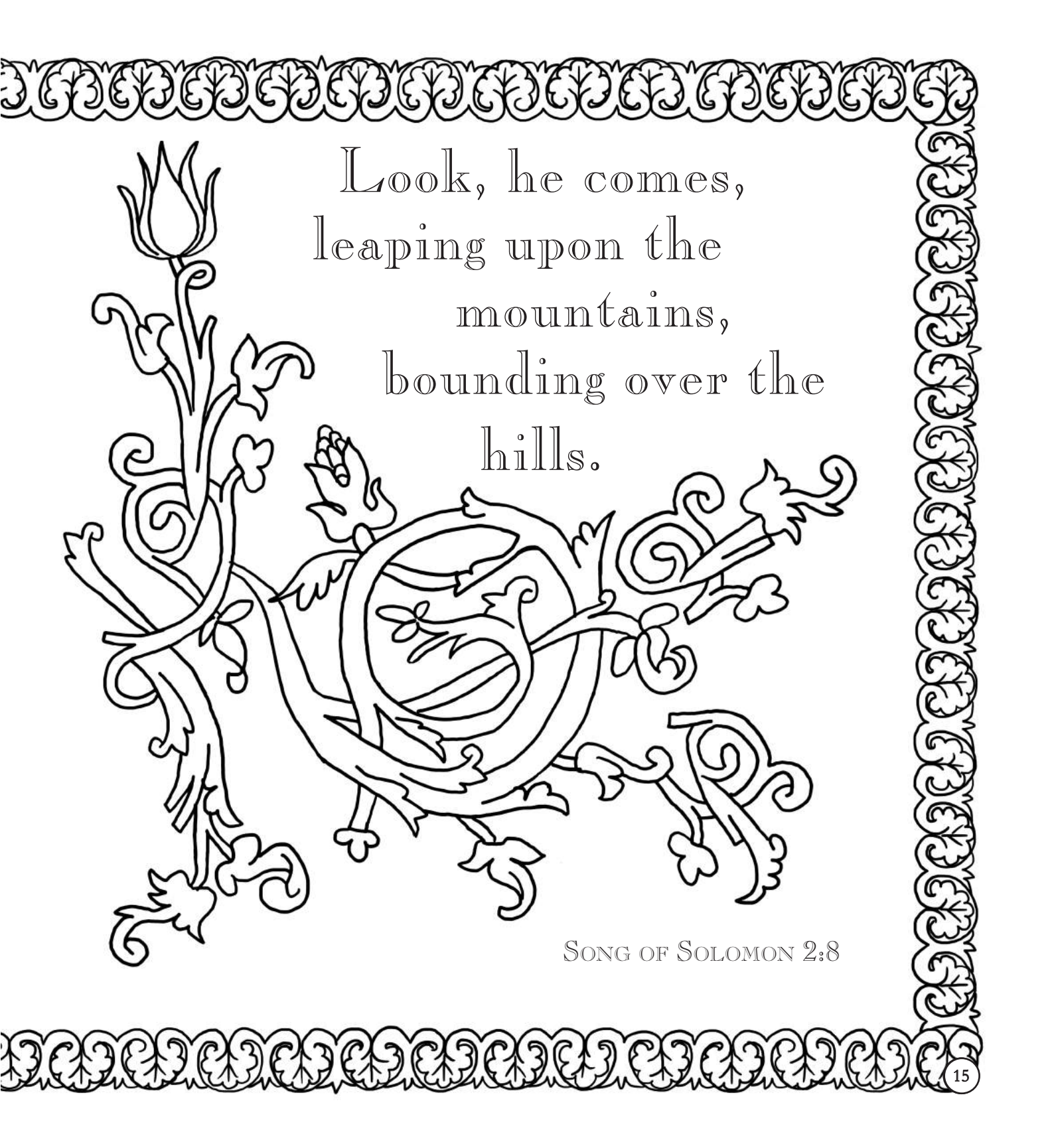
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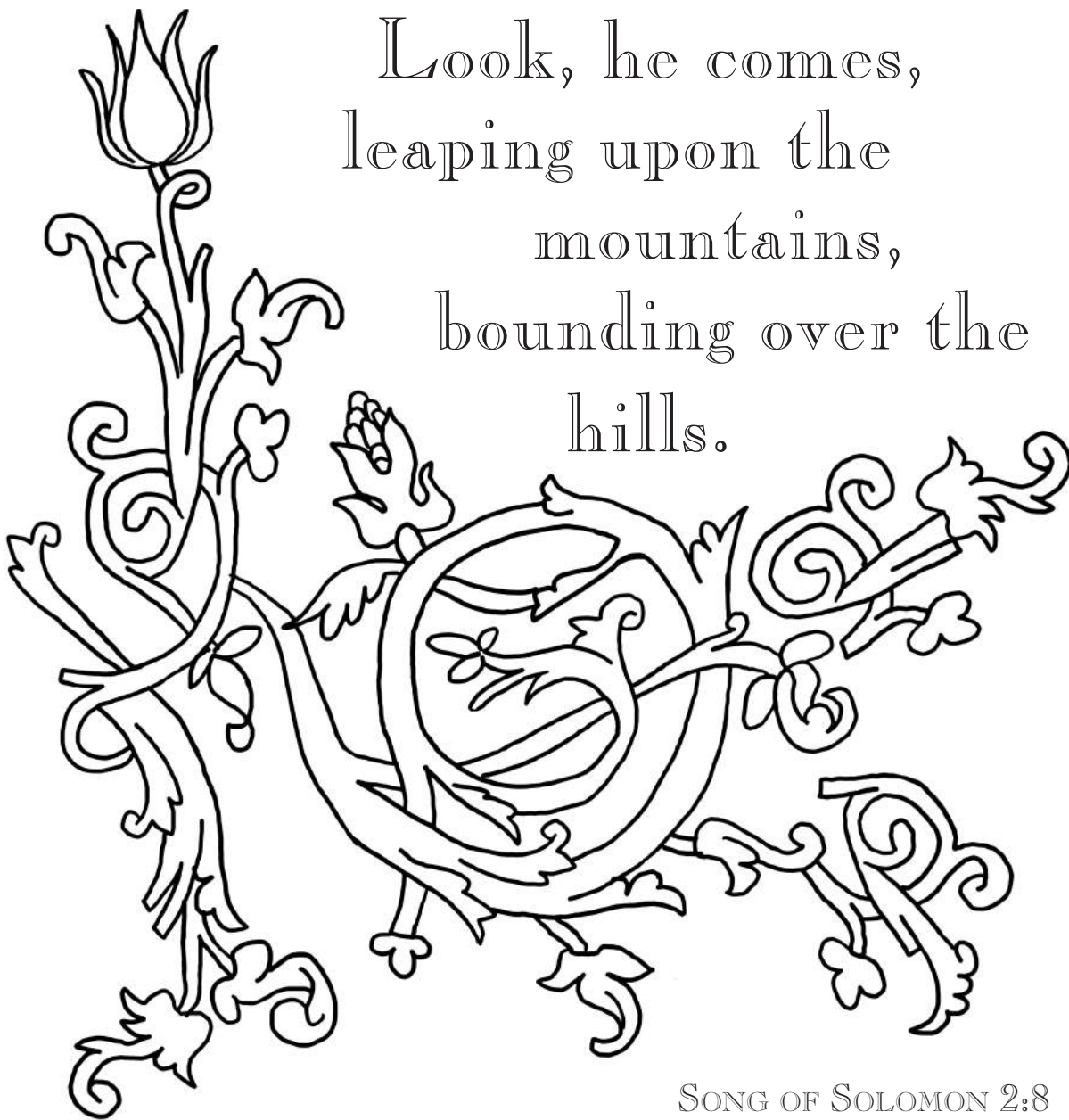
VOICE

of my beloved!





Look, he comes,  
leaping upon the  
mountains,  
bounding over the  
hills.



SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8