

## A General introduction to the Blessed Virgin Mary

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Who is this Mary people were talking about in the last 2000 years? Mary is the one who heard and believed what God told her and pondered God's promises in her heart. This humble woman of Nazareth was more obedient to God's call than other men of faith like Moses, David or St. Paul. The meaning of the word of the word Mary means exalted one.

Mary is known in different names and titles in the history of Christendom. Some of her titles are Mary of Nazareth, Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady, Mother of Jesus, Mother of God and Theotokos (God Bearer). Even though Mary never claimed any of these titles, she is given by the Church all these names due to her role in the history of salvation. Countless Churches were built in her name throughout the century and it is believed that the first Church was built in Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. People throughout the centuries claimed to have seen her appearances in different parts of the world and those places attracted pilgrims for centuries. Some examples are Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Walsingham, Black Madonna of Switzerland and Black Madonna of Poland. There are countless hymns, photographs, pictures and books to honor her.

In the Bible, Mary's name is mentioned in 7 chapters. St. Luke chapter 1 and 2. St. Mathew chapter 2 and 12. St. John chapter 2 and chapter 19: Acts of the apostles 1:14, 2:1-4 and Revelation chapter 12. In the non-canonical books outside the Bible, there are other stories about Mary, her parents and her childhood. This could be because Church came first and the books of the bible were written after so many years. The Christians including the apostles and evangelists came to realize that the second coming of Jesus Christ is not imminent as expected. Even though the books were not written, the story of Salvation was carried down orally from generation to generation. According to oral tradition Mary is born to Anne and Joachim after years of prayer as Anne was barren like Elizabeth. Anne gave birth to a little girl in her old age and named her Mary and dedicated her in the temple of Jerusalem just like Hannah dedicated Samuel. So Mary was brought up in the temple and educated there in the Old Testament scriptures like Torah and the Prophets. As the women in her time expecting to be the Mothers of the Messiah, Mary also lived in expectation. That is why, I think although she was afraid when she saw the angel but not surprised, didn't ask many questions except "how can it be being that I am a virgin".

According to the oral tradition, when Mary attained puberty, the priest decided to get her married to a man who will take care of her. They chose 12 men from each tribe of Israel and gave them one olive stem each. Those stems were placed in the holy of holies overnight. The next day when the high priest took out the stems, the stem of Joseph sprouted and had leaves and flowers. So they decided that God chose Joseph as the bridegroom of Mary and did their engagement. In the Holy Bible we see the names of Jesus brothers mentioned several times; but according to early Church Fathers, they are either Jesus cousins or the children of Joseph from his first marriage. If Mary had other

children, Jesus would not have asked John to take care of Her. According to the Fathers of the Church, when Jesus called her “Woman” from the cross, He was pointing out his Fathers promise; “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed” (Genesis Chp. 3:15) . Jesus thus proclaiming Mary is that ~~Woman~~, and He is the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

The undivided Church always held the doctrine of Mary’s Perpetual Virginity. Only with the Protestant Reformation, controversial theories started to bloom about her. We need to remember Jesus Christ is the savior of the world and Mary is not equal to her Son. We venerate her, but we do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone. We ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints to pray for us to Jesus on our behalf. Mary is also redeemed by the grace of Grace of God in a special way. She was willing to take all the responsibilities of bearing God’s Son in her womb and raising him and giving him back to God for the salvation of the world. When we see Mary at the cross of her Son, her tears were tears of joy and sorrow that she fulfilled her job when she said to angel Gabriel “Be unto me according to thy word”. Mary followed Jesus from Bethlehem to Golgotha and she watched her son being crucified and ~~experiencing~~ <sup>fulfilling</sup> Simeon’s prophecy “a sword ~~will pierce~~ appears through your own soul”. She heard Jesus crying “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”, and she might have remembered the rest of the Psalms and how true are the angles words long time ago.

Church celebrates several feast in memory of Mary of our Lady..The feast of annunciation on March 25th, Visitation on may 31st, Assumption/Dormition on August 15th, Nativity of Mary on September 8h, and Conception on December 8th. When we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord on December 25th Mary is present as we remember her with her son. The Holy name of Jesus on January 1st, and February 2nd we celebrate the presentation of our lord in the temple/Purification of Mary.

For two thousand years the church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary as the prototype of all Christians-the model that we have to become in Christ. Mary is our model in that she was the first person to receive Jesus Christ. As Mary bore Jesus Christ in her womb physically, all Christians now have the privilege of bearing God within them spiritually. From early times, the church has called her, Mother of God (Theotokos), a title which implies that her Son is fully man and both God. As His mother, Mary was the source of Jesus human nature. And the One she bore in the womb was also the eternal God. Because of her various roles in Gods plan of salvation, Christians appropriately honor Mary as the first among the saint. The Arch Angle Gabriel initiated this honor in his address to her: “Rejoice, highly favored one, the lord is with you, blessed are you among women” (Lk 1:28) The salutation clearly indicates that God had chose to honor Mary. Her favored status was confirmed when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was then 6 month pregnant with John the Baptist. More things could be written about Mary. But I would like to end with a prayer from the Orthodox Tradition; which expresses Mary’s unique place in creation: “It is truly right to bless you, Oh Theotokos, ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without defilement you gave birth to God the Word: True Theotokos, we magnify you.”