

St Mary the Virgin

Objective:

- ❖ To observe the value and importance of the St Mary the Virgin in our church and in the Holy Bible.
- ❖ To observe symbols of the virgin St Mary in the Old Testament
- ❖ To observe the life of St Mary in the New Testament
- ❖ To observe the miracles at El Zeitoun and at the dormition of the blessed virgin St Mary

Memory Verse:

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38

Introduction:

There is quite a lot of information that we all already know about St Mary. The purpose of this lesson is to look at a few things we might not know about St Mary.

It is not recommended to cover all the content below, but pick and choose a few topics that may be interesting for the kids in your class. At the end is a quiz that we can give the kids that covers all the topics.



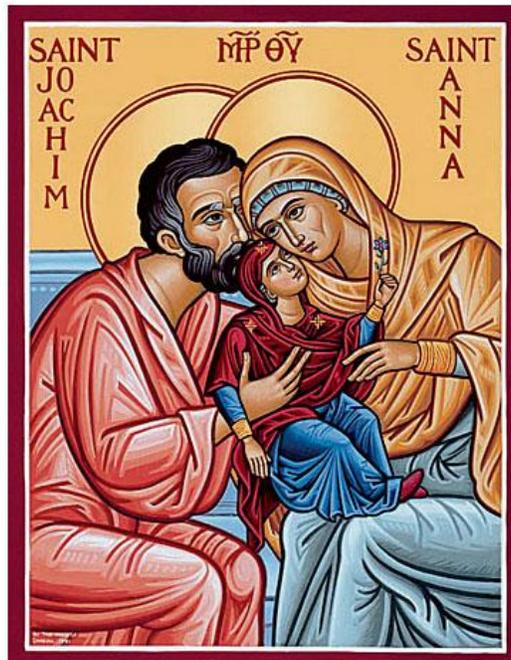
Saint Mary's Childhood

When the time drew near for the birth of the Saviour of the world, in the Galilean city of Nazareth, there lived a descendant of King David, *Joachim*, with his wife *Anna*. They were both pious people and were known not for their royal ancestry but for their humility and charity.

Their entire lives were permeated with love for God and people. They lived to a ripe old age but never had children, and this grieved them very much. In spite of their old age, they did not cease to petition God to send them children. They made a vow that, if a child was born to them, they would have consecrated it to the service of God. At that time, every Jew hoped that his posterity would have taken a part in the kingdom of the Messiah, that is, Christ the Saviour. Therefore, every childless Jew was held in contempt by the others, for this was considered a great punishment by God for one's sins. This was especially trying to Joachim as a descendant of King David because from his seed Christ meant to be born.

For their patience, great faith, and love for God and for each other, God sent Joachim and Anna great joy. Toward the end of their lives, a daughter was born to them. According to the command of an angel of God, She was given the name *Mary*. The birth of Mary brought a joy not only to Her parents but to all people because She was foreordained by God to be the *Mother of the Son of God, the Saviour of the world*.

When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anne took her to the temple and dedicated their child to God. She spent nine years in the temple. When Mary was twelve years old, Zacharias the priest wanted to find a suitable man who could take care of her. He gathered the canes of her male relatives, and put them in the temple. The next day the cane of Joseph the carpenter budded, just like Aaron's rod in the Old Testament (Num 17:8). So Mary and Joseph became betrothed to one another.



The Annunciation

Luke 1:26-38

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to the city of Nazareth to the Holy Virgin Mary with the glorious news that the Lord had chosen her to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

The Archangel appeared to St Mary while she was reading the Holy Scriptures. He came to her and said, "Rejoice, highly favoured [one,] the Lord [is] with you; blessed [are] you among women."

Mary was troubled by the words of the angel and thought: what manner of greeting this was.

The Archangel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Mary in astonishment asked the Archangel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

The angel answered her that all this would be accomplished by the power of Almighty God. "[The] Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

Then, St Mary answered the most beautiful answer that she could have said "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word"



The Assumption

The Holy Spirit informed St Mary that she was about to depart from this world. When the time of her departure arrived, the apostles came to her and surrounded her bed. The Lord Jesus Christ with a host of angels came to her and comforted her and told her about the eternal joy that was prepared for her, and she rejoiced. St Mary stretched out her hand and blessed the disciples, and she gave up her pure spirit in the hand of her Son and God who took her to Heaven.

The apostles prepared the body in a fitting manner and carried it to Gethsemane. Some of the Jews blocked their way to prevent them from burying the body. One of the Jews seized the coffin with his hands, which were separated instantly from his body and they remained attached to the coffin. He regretted his evil deed and wept bitterly. Through the supplications of the saintly apostles, his hands were reattached to his body, and he believed in the Lord Christ. When they placed the body in the tomb, the Lord hid it from them.

St. Thomas the Apostle was not present at the time of St. Mary's departure. He wanted to go to Jerusalem and a cloud carried him there. On his way, he saw the pure body of St. Mary carried by the angels and ascended to heaven with it. One of the angels told him, "Make haste and kiss the pure body of St. Mary," and he did.

When St. Thomas arrived where the disciples were, they told him about St. Mary's departure and he said to them, "You know how I conducted myself at the resurrection of the Lord Christ, I will not believe unless I see her body." They went with him to the tomb, and uncovered the place of the body but they did not find it, and everyone was surprised. St. Thomas told them how he saw the holy body and the angels that were ascending with it.

The years of her life on earth were 60 years. She was 12 years old when she left the temple. She spent 34 years in Joseph's house, until the Ascension of the Lord, and 14 years with St. John the Evangelist, according to the commandment of the Lord which he told her at the cross, "Behold, this is your son," and to St. John, "Behold, this is your mother."



The Titles of St Mary

St. Mary has many titles that are used by the Coptic Orthodox Church such as:

1. The 'Theotokos'
This is a Greek word composed of two syllables: 'Theo' meaning 'God', and 'tokos' meaning 'bearer'; that is, 'she who bore God in her womb'.
2. The 'Second Heaven'
According to Acts 7:49, "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool", God dwells in heaven, and therefore we call St. Mary the 'second heaven' because God descended and dwelt within her.
3. The 'Golden lampstand' and the 'Mother of True Light'
St. Mary carried our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the True Light of the world (Jn 8:12), and for this reason, we give her this title. In the introduction to the Creed, we also say 'We exalt you the Mother of the true Light...'
4. The 'Golden Censor'
St. Mary carried bore our Lord Jesus Christ, the 'Sweet Aroma'. On another point, the union, within the censor, of charcoal and fire, symbolizes the unity between the Divinity and Humanity of our Lord, and thus we call her the 'golden censor' because she carried the incarnate God in her womb.
5. The 'Burning Bush'
Moses saw a burning bush that was not consumed, "And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed" (Ex 3:2). The fire is a symbol of God, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire" (Deut 4:24), and the burning bush, which was not consumed by fire, is a symbol of St. Mary, who carried the fire of the Divinity in her womb and was not consumed by it.
6. 'Aaron's Rod'
This rod sprouted, put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds, without being planted nor watered (Num 17:1-11), and for this reason, it is a symbol of St. Mary, who being virgin, gave birth to God the logos.



7. The 'Ever-Virgin'

In the fraction of advent, the priest says 'She being virgin, gave birth to Him, and her virginity is sealed.' We believe that St. Mary's virginity existed before, during and after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ezekiel prophesied regarding her virginity and said "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me; this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it, therefore it shall be shut." (Ez 44:1-2). This closed gate is a symbol of St. Mary's perpetual virginity.

8. 'Jacob's Ladder'

"Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." (Gn 28:12) This Ladder is a symbol of St. Mary because our Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to earth by taking flesh through her, and thus she was the junction between heaven and earth.

9. The 'Manna Pot'

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the 'True Manna' Who descended from heaven and gave life to the world- "This is the bread which came down from heaven-not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats his bread will live forever." (Jn 6:58). Thus St. Mary is the 'golden pot' who carried the 'True Manna' in her womb (Ex 16:32-33).

10. The 'Ark of the Covenant'

"...and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat." (Heb 9:3-5) This Ark was overlaid on all sides with gold, and this is a symbol of St. Mary's purity that is like the pure gold. It contained the manna, which is a symbol of Jesus Christ, the 'Living Bread', and the tablets of the covenant, which are a symbol of Jesus Christ the Word (Jn 1:1). It also had placed above it the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat, which is why in the icon of St. Mary we see angels overshadowing her.



Apparition at El-Zeitoun

On April 2nd 1968, mechanics at the garage across the road from the Coptic Church in El-Zeitoun were all alarmed by some disturbance in the street. The workmen ran to the street. They saw a young lady dressed in white on the church dome. They saw her walking on the dome. They thought that she was about to throw herself down. So they cried: "Be careful. Take care, you may fall down, wait." As the dome is curved, no human being can walk on it. Then some of the pedestrians who stood to watch the scene realised who it was and cried "Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary."

As the garage workmen who were watching the apparition were all Moslems, they looked on keenly and they all became extremely astonished. The Blessed Virgin who appeared in a luminous body, moved on the dome and bowed and knelt before the cross..!

For more than a year, the Blessed Holy Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of God, appeared in different forms over the domes of the Coptic Orthodox Church named after her at Zeitoun, Cairo, Egypt. The late Rev. Father Constantine Moussa was the church priest at the time of these apparitions. The apparitions lasted from only a few minutes up to several hours and were sometimes accompanied by luminous heavenly bodies shaped like doves and moving at high speeds. The apparitions were seen by millions of Egyptians and foreigners. Among the witnesses were Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Moslems, Jews and non-religious people from all walks of life. The sick were cured and blind persons received their sight, but most importantly large numbers of unbelievers were converted.



Conclusion:

The Virgin was a model of the dwelling of God in man. So that Christ may not only be with us but also in us. This demands a higher level of purity and a higher standard of piety. No one could reach that level except Mary the Virgin. But we are all invited to reach that level so that we may be like Virgin Mary; a dwelling place for Christ, not in a symbolic way but in a practical way. He dwells among His people, abides in them, and become their God and we become His people and His beloved.

QUIZ

- 1) What are the names of St Mary's mother and father?
- 2) How old was St Mary when her parents devoted her to the temple?
- 3) How old was St Mary when the angel of the Lord appeared to her?
- 4) What was the angel's name?
- 5) How did she finally respond to the news that she will be giving birth to the Saviour of the world?
- 6) Name two symbols of St Mary in the Old Testament and how they symbolise St Mary
- 7) Name two other titles we know St Mary as
- 8) How old was St Mary when she completed her life on earth and the Lord took her to Heaven?
- 9) Who from the disciples was not present when St Mary passed away?
- 10) What was the area in Egypt that St Mary appeared?
- 11) Who first noticed St Mary on top of the church?
- 12) What year did St Mary appear in Egypt?