

The Glorification of St Mary

References and recommended reading:

1. *St Mary in the Orthodox Concept*, Malaty Fr. Tadros (1978)
2. *Comparative Theology*, H.H Pope Shenouda III (1988)
3. a few lessons found on St Mary, they're detailed as you read through.



Memory verse:

"Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women" Lk.1: 28

Main points:

The main thing here is to look at the differences in our beliefs of St Mary compared to other Christian faiths (mostly protestant) and to outline where we get our beliefs from.

		ORTH.	CATH.	PROT
<i>St. Mary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and gave birth to Jesus the Incarnated God. So, the Church calls her "mother of God" [Theotokos] 	Y	Y	?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is "ever- virgin ." 	Y	Y	N
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is in need to the salvation of Jesus Christ. 	Y	N(?)	Y
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She departed and her body raised to heaven. 	Y	Y	N
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church considered her above the Cherubim and more honourable than all the saints and has acceptable pleadings before her son Jesus Christ. 	Y	Y	N

From a lesson prepared for yr 9 "the Coptic Orthodox faith"

Spiritual preparation for the servants:

- Pray through the intercessions of St Mary this week that this lesson reaches out to the class, and that everyone leaves with something new, to allow them to know God better.
- In case you aren't 100% sure about the details of the story of St Mary, make sure you are familiar with her story (the introduction may be useful for this).
- Think of a personal story or look up a story about St Mary to share with the class about St Mary and her miracles.

Activity:

Since the emphasis of this lesson is not on the story of St Mary, prepare a quiz about St Mary to make sure they're all up to scratch... throw in a few bonus questions from the questions below!

(ii) another quick way to sum up the Story of St Mary is to get the class to tell you what it is, maybe one way to do this visually, is to get them to write up the events of her life on the whiteboard... around a picture of St Mary as a visual aid.

ST. MARY QUIZZ

- 1) What is St. Mary's mothers / fathers name? ANNA & JOACHIM
- 2) What was St. Mary's sister's name Un 19:25)? MARY
- 3) How many nephews did St. Mary have, name them.
(Matt 13:55, Mk 6:3) JAMES, JOSES, SIMON, JUDAS
- 4) Did St. Mary have any nieces? YES Matt. 13:55,56
- 5) How old was St. Mary when she was given to the temple? 3
- 6) Who gave St. Mary her name? Archangel Gabriel
- 7) What are the special dates we commemorate for St. Mary?

1 Pashans, 9 May	St. Mary's birth
7 Mesra	Annunciation to Her parents
24 Pashans	Entry into Egypt
3 Kiahk 13 December	Presentation to the temple.
Sunday 21 Tobi (21st of every month)	Dormition
16 Mesra	Assumption of St. Marys Pure body
21 Baounah	Consecration of the first church in her name in Philippi
- 8) Who took care of St. Mary when she was given to the temple?
Zachariah the priest, her cousin Elizabeth's husband
- 9) How old was St. Mary when her father / mother died? 6 and 8 years old
- 10) At what age did St. Mary leave the temple? 12 years old
- 11) Why was it a dilemma for the high priest and why did they take the unusual step of placing the rods of the unmarried male decendants of David on the altar?
Because St. Mary had taken the vow of virginity.
- 12) How old was St. Mary at her dormition? 58 years 8 months 6 days
- 13) What are some titles given to the Holy St. Mary?

Theotokos	The ever-virgin The
The Holy of Holies	Burning Bush
The Tent of Meeting	Jacob's Ladder
The Pot of Manna	Aaron's Cernsor
The Lampstand of Pure Gold The	The Ark of Testimaony
true Queen	The True Vine
- 14) Approx. how old was Joseph when he was betrothed to St. Mmy? 80 years old
- 15) How many times does the Bible record St. Mary's speech? 4

Introduction:

Now, let us firstly have a glance at her life. (This is taken from a lesson prepared earlier for yr 7 and 8 *The life of the Virgin, Mother of God, St Mary*)

A) *St Mary is the fruit of prayer*

Youakim was a rich Israelite and his wife Anna, Aaron's daughter from the tribe of Aaron (Israel) and she was barren and had no children.

Youakim and Anna always prayed and asked the Lord to grant them a child, and the Lord answered their prayer and gave them St Mary and they had another daughter by the name of Mary too.

B) *St Mary a babe in the temple*

- When Mary was three years old, her parents left her in the temple, to live there as a virgin serving in the temple. She was loved by all. When she was 12 years old, the priests exchanged views as to what to do with her, and who was to be in charge of her. Joseph was chosen to be in charge of her.
- We celebrate on 21st August the "Assumption of St Mary's Body" i.e. this feast commemorates the entrance of St Mary's body into heaven, as she preceded us and sat at the right hand of her Bridegroom and Son.
- Ask the teens why the Lord did not permit that the body of St Mary remain on earth? Because it is on the same body He had dwelt and from which he had formed His own humanity so this Body can't become a prey to corruption and dissolution. Therefore, St Mary as a human being, her body died, but ascended to Heaven.
- What can we learn from St Mary's life?
 - a) **Obedience-** In how she accepts to be the Mother of God even though she was not married and pregnant virgins are a great shame and can be stoned
 - b) **Humbleness-** In how she served Elizabeth, travelled long distances to help an elderly in her pregnancy (even though she was the Mother of God)
 - c) **Meekness**
 - d) **Life of Acceptance**
 - e) **Purity** (Refer to Luke 1:26-45 John 2:1-2)

The lesson:

The Veneration of St. Mary the Virgin... why do we Glorify her???

(1) Our Protestant brethren do not venerate our Lady the Virgin nor do they ask for her intercession. Some of their groups even go to the extent of likening her to the eggshell that loses its value after the chick hatches. This exaggeration in not venerating the Virgin Mary is probably a reaction to the exaggerated veneration given her by the Roman Catholics. Thus our Protestant brethren do not celebrate any of the Virgin's feasts.

- Lk 1:48 "For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"
Commenced at the nativity of the Lord and shall continue for "all generations" until the end of ages.

- Records of glorification of St Mary are found in the bible by
 - Elizabeth her cousin

Lk 1:43,44 *"But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy"* (Lk1: 43,44).

- By the angels "Angel Gabrielle"

Lk.1: 28 *"Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women"*

- The phrase '*Blessed are you among women*', which was said by Angel Gabriel and by St. Elizabeth, means that if the Virgin is compared with all the women of the world she will be the blessed one because none of the women of the world received the glory which she had received through the Divine Incarnation. Undoubtedly, God chose our Lady the Virgin from among all women, because no other woman has ever had the Virgin's qualities. **This shows her exaltation and elevated position.**

(2) Some Protestant groups call the Virgin Mary 'our sister'.

- Christ said of Himself. *"I am the light of the world"* (John.8: 12) Therefore, His mother the Virgin is the Mother of Light or the Mother of the True Light. Since Christ is the Holy One (Lk.1: 35), thus the Virgin is the Mother of the Holy One, the mother of our Saviour. Since Christ is God (1John.1); (Rom.9: 5); (John.20: 28), **therefore the Virgin is the Mother of God.**
- If the Virgin Mary is the Mother of Christ, then unquestionably, she is the spiritual mother of all Christians. It suffices that when the Lord Jesus Christ was on the cross, He said to St. John, the beloved Apostle, of her: *"Behold your mother!"* (John.19: 27) If the Virgin is mother to St. John who addresses us, saying: *"My little children"* (1John.2: 1), therefore she is the mother of us all.

Consequently, the title "our sister" is not welcomed and does not deserve a reply because it is unacceptable and illogical to consider the mother of Christ the sister of His children who believe in His name!

(3) In addition, our Protestant brethren say that after the Virgin had given birth to the Lord Jesus she consummated her marriage to Joseph and begot children known as Jesus' brothers" or "the Lord's brothers".

(i) The phrase “her firstborn Son”... Christ’s siblings??

- The Holy Bible clearly defines the meaning of the word *firstborn*. Prior to the establishment of Aaronic priesthood, the Divine Inspiration had said: *“Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal; it is Mine”* (Ex. 13: 2). Every firstborn was consecrated to God; dedicated to Him, whether or not a brother was born to him later. The parents did not wait until they begot him a brother, nor did the owner of the livestock wait until another offspring was born before offering and consecrating the firstborn to the Lord! But from his birth the firstborn was consecrated because he was the first offspring of the womb. Therefore there was a great possibility that any firstborn was an only son.
- Thus the Lord Jesus Christ was the firstborn and the only Son. St. Jerome was right when he said: *“Every only son is a firstborn but not every firstborn is an only son.”* The expression ‘firstborn’ does not mean that another is born after him but it means that no sibling was born before him.
- In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the Virgin. For when the Virgin and Joseph offered a sacrifice forty days after His birth, the Holy Bible tells us: *“Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’”* (Lk.2: 22-24).
- It is clear that the law of the firstborn was applied to the Lord Jesus Christ forty days after His birth. Of course, there is no relation at all between the firstborn and the birth of siblings. Here St. Jerome asks: *“When God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, did He strike only those who had siblings or every male who opened the womb whether he had siblings or not?”*

(ii) The phrase “your wife”

- The word ‘wife’ or ‘woman’ was the title given to a betrothed maiden immediately after her betrothal. In interpreting the words of the angel to Joseph: *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy, Spirit”* (Matt.1: 20), St. John Chrysostom says: *“Here the angel calls the betrothed ‘wife’ because the Holy Bible always calls the betrothed couple ‘man and wife’ before their marriage. He also says: “What is the meaning of ‘take her to you’? It means: ‘Keep her in your house, as she has been entrusted to you by God and not by her parents; because you are entrusted to take her, not to consummate the marriage but to be he guardian. ‘In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself entrusted the Virgin Mary to His disciple John”* (Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew).
- St. Jerome says that the title ‘woman’ or ‘wife’ was also given to the betrothed maiden. The Biblical text proofs are: *“If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she*

did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbour's wife" (Deut.22: 23,24) and "...what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her?"(Deut.20: 7) **Thus the Holy Bible uses the words 'woman' and 'wife' to mean a pledged virgin. They are used to signify femininity and not the state of being wedded.**

- Eve was first called 'woman' because she was taken out of man (Gen.3: 20). So the word 'woman' signifies her creation and femininity and the word 'Eve' signifies her motherhood. The proof that the word 'wife' attributed to the Virgin Mary meant pledged and not married, are the words of St. Luke the Evangelist: "*And Joseph also went up from Galilee... to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child*" (Lk.2: 4,5). Therefore the phrase 'your wife' means 'your betrothed one'. Therefore the Virgin Mary was called 'wife' not because she lost her virginity, God forbid, for the Holy Bible testifies that Joseph did not know her. But she was so called because the common Jewish expression for the pledged to be married was 'wife' and the expression for the unmarried girl was 'woman'. A clear proof of this is that immediately after her creation, Eve was called 'woman'; before the sin, the dismissal out of Paradise and the begetting of children.
- We notice that the angel did not use the word 'wife' after the Virgin had given birth to the Lord Jesus, but said to Joseph: "*Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt*" (Matt.2: 13). And on Joseph's return from Egypt, the angel said to him: "*Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel*" (Matt.2: 20). Joseph did as he was told on going to and returning from Egypt: "*When he rose, he took the young Child and His mother*" (Matt.2: 14,21). Here the Holy Bible does not use the phrase 'his wife'.
- The phrase 'his wife' was used before and after the conception so that the Jews would not stone the Virgin Mary because she conceived a Child while she was not a man's wife. But after giving birth to Christ, the Divine Inspiration did not use that expression; not in the angel's words to Joseph, nor in describing what Joseph did, nor in talking about the Magi, of whom the Holy Bible says: "*And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother*" (Matt.2: 11), nor in talking about the shepherds who "*found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger*" (Lk.2: 16).

(iii) The sentence "before they came together, she was found with child"

- St Luke the Evangelist aims at proving that Christ was conceived of a virgin who did not know any man, for two reasons:
 - (a) The fact that Christ was not born through the natural way from two parents as all people are, but was born of a virgin, is proof of His Divinity; proof that He was born of the Holy Spirit as expressed by the angel: "*...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1: 20).
 - (b) His birth from a virgin convinces us that He did not inherit Adam's sin. Thus He would be able to save us since the One without sin is able to die for the sinners.

Therefore the Apostle concentrated on the Virgin not knowing any man before giving birth to Christ in order to prove the Lord's Virgin Birth. But the fact that the Virgin Mary did not know any man after giving birth to Christ is a self-evident truth.

(iv) The sentence "did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son"

- The word 'till' refers only to the precedent clause, and does not imply that the subordinate clause it introduces is opposite in meaning to the precedent clause. Some examples to illustrate this:

(a) The Holy Bible says that Michel, King Saul's daughter, "*had no children to (till) the day of her death*" (2Sam.6: 23). Of course she did not bring forth children after her death.

(b) The Lord Jesus Christ says: "*I am with you always, even to (till) the end of ages*" (Matt.28: 20). Of course, and after the end of ages as well.

(c) The Lord says to Christ: "*Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool*" (Ps.110: 1). Of course Christ will continue to sit at the right hand of God the Father forever. There are numerous examples of this point. Therefore, the word 'till' does not necessarily imply the opposite meaning of what precedes it.

Joseph did not know the Virgin Mary till she gave birth to her firstborn Son, neither did he know her after she gave birth. If he withheld to touch her before she gave birth to Christ, how would he feel after she had given birth to Him; after he had seen the miraculous signs, the angels and the Magi, and after knowing that He is the Holy One, Emmanuel and the Saviour?

(5) The phrase 'His brothers'

In Hebrew expressions, the word 'brother' may signify near relations or step-brothers. There are numerous examples of this in the Holy Bible, such as:

(i) Jacob and his uncle Laban

The Holy Bible says about the meeting between Jacob and Rachel: "*And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was **her father's brother***" (Gen.29: 10-12).

Thus Jacob called Rachel's father his brother although he was his mother's brother. The phrase '*mother's brother*' was repeated many times in this chapter. The word 'brother' was used to mean very near relations. Laban talked to Jacob in the same manner, saying: "*Because you are my **brother**, should you therefore serve me for nothing?*" Tell me, what should your wages be?" (Gen.29: 15) Thus Laban called Jacob his brother although he was his nephew.

(ii) Abram and Lot

Lot was Abram's nephew, the son of his brother Haran (Gen.11: 31), yet the Holy Bible says: "*Now when Abram heard that his **brother** was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants*" (Gen.14: 14). Here Abram considered Lot his brother although he was his nephew, due to their near relationship.

In like manner, the phrase 'brothers of Jesus' was used in referring to the cousins of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who are the brothers of the Lord?

When the Lord went to His own country, the people were astonished and said: *"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?"* (Matt.13: 55,56); (Mark.6: 1-3)

St. Peter the Apostle mentions that he saw James, the Lord's brother (Gal.1: 19). This James was called *'the Less'* (Mark.15: 40) to distinguish him from James the son of

Zebedee. He was also called the son of Alphaeus (Matt.10: 3) and was one of the Apostles (Gal.1: 19).

St. Matthew the Apostle says in his Gospel that at the cross *"many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons"* (Matt.27: 55,56).

Who then was Mary, mother of James and Joses? Was she the Virgin Mary? Is it reasonable to assume that the Virgin Mary begot all those children? The mother of James and Joses was Mary, the wife of Halfa or Clopas, of whom St.

John the Apostle said: *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene"* (John.19: 25). Compare this verse with verses 55 and 56 of chapter 27 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Mary the mother of James and Joses was with Mary Magdalene at the cross of Christ

(Matt.27: 55,56). They were the same persons of whom St. John said in his Gospel: *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene"* (John.19: 25).

Therefore, the brothers of Jesus are His cousins, the sons of Mary, the Virgin's sister, the wife of Clopas or Halpha and mother of James, Joses and the rest of the brothers.

Regarding the difference between the names Clopas and Halfa, it may be a difference in pronunciation or, as St. Jerome said, it is not uncommon for the Holy Bible to give more than one name to a person. Moses 'father-in-law' was called Reuel (Ex.2: 18) and was also called Jethro (Ex.4: 18). Gideon was called Jerubbaal (Judg.6: 32), Peter was called Simon and Cephas, and Judas the Zeolot was called Thaddeaus (Matt.10: 3).

It is obvious that Mary the mother of James and Joses is not the Virgin Mary who was never called by that name in the Holy Bible.

Remarks:

- It is unreasonable that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the Virgin Mary to His Apostle John when He was on the cross if she had all those sons and daughters. Undoubtedly her children, if she had any, should have been the ones to look after her.
- We notice that during the journey of St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary to and from Egypt, there is no mention of any other children of the Virgin Mary except the Lord Jesus (Matt.2: 14,20,21). Neither is there any mention of the sort during their journey to and from Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus was twelve years old (Lk.2: 43).
- It is unsound to hold, as some people do, that the 'brothers of Jesus' are the sons of Joseph whom he begot from another wife after whose death he became a widower, because the Holy Bible mentions that Mary the mother of James and Joses was present at the time of Christ's crucifixion and burial, as we have previously explained (M k. 15: 47).
- **There is a clear Biblical text confirming the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary. In his prophecy, Prophet Ezekiel saw a closed gate in the East and he was told: *"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: 2). This gate is the Virgin's womb through which the Lord entered; it remained shut and was not opened by another child.**

(4) Our Protestant brethren also object to some of the titles which our Church gives to our Lady the Virgin.

The titles have been listed earlier on, we're not covering them here, mainly because it's a lesson all on it's own... details are outlined on pages 115-121 of *comparative theology* by H.H Pope Shenouda III.

(5) One of the features which reveals the non-veneration of the Virgin is that, in their translation of the Holy Bible, they have changed the title given her by the angel from 'full of grace' into "highly favoured".

(6) Our Protestant brethren frequently give our Lady the Virgin the title 'Mother of Jesus' instead of 'Mother of God' (Theotokos).

The Concept of Intercession

- In our Orthodox Church, we cannot accept any mediator between God and people, except Jesus Christ, the sole High Priest of the heavens, and the Sacrifice by whose blood we receive the reconciliation and remission of sins. There is no other name under heaven by whom we can be saved except that of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12).
- Perhaps one may ask: if that is the case why is it in the Church rites that believers ask for the intercession of St. Mary and the prayers of the Saints? Are there any evangelical texts that prove the Saints' intercession?
- Truly, the Gospel in its spirit and texts, aims at bringing man to the experience of divine life, that is, divine love. This means that the person puts aside his own-self, so that by the Holy Spirit he offers his whole life for the salvation of his fellow brethren. In other words the evangelical life is but an intermediary life, during which the believer does his best, through his deeds and prayers, to see that everybody is glorified in the bosom of God.
- This is precisely the concept of "intercession". As the soul moves closer to God, in a deeper union with Jesus Christ it becomes more attached to others, and hence prays for them, asks for their salvation.
- That is what St. Macarius meant when he said that no man can obtain salvation outside his relationship with others. "We all pray for one another. Parents exhort their children, are solicitous for their salvation and pray for them. We are as St. Paul once said, 'God's co-adjutors'. Each of us is an intermediary, a mediator of grace for others". (1)
- Looking to our Lord Jesus Christ we can establish the positive response that He has given to the intercession of people and their petitions for others. For instance, He healed the paralytic for the sake of those who brought him. (Mat. 9:2). He also healed the centurion's servant because of the petition of his master (Mat. 8:5) and the daughter of the Canaanite woman's madness in response to the cries of her mother. God, the lover of man, gives generously, longs to see us like Him, love the others and ask for them more than for ourselves.
- On the other side, which follows directly from the above, it is evident that the evangelical love is always associated with a true humbleness. This implies that in our mind, we feel we are not worthy to pray for others, but rather we ask them to pray for us.

- For instance St. Paul, knowing that he was called by God Himself for the ministry of the word through visions and revelations, still asked for the prayers of his people, so that the Lord may grant him the ability to preach.
- We then wonder, was the apostle inferior, not to ask God directly to give him what he wanted? Certainly not, but he felt the need to share love and humility with other people.
- Once again we may wonder, if human intercession between the Communion of the Saints does actually exist on earth, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then surely it is even more valid for those who enter Paradise, that they do not cease in praying for their brethren!! If, while on earth, tied down under the burden of flesh, they ask more for the others than for themselves, then how intense would their prayers be for those who are still living, when they are close to the author of Love Himself!
- In brief, the intercession of Saints in our Orthodox concept confirms the effectiveness of the saving deeds of God in the life of every believer, and substantially rejects any ideas of worshipping Saints. It declares the unity of the Church, as members of one body, all members suffering if one is hurt, and pleased at the honour of others. (1 Cor. 12:26, 27).

Conclusion:

Let us ask for her prayers and intercessions that we may be able to fulfil the commandment of Her Son. Thus through Her motherhood to the Lord, we can be saved by the grace of the Blood of Her Begotten Son.