

Mary in the New Testament

A Brief History of Mary,
The Mother of Jesus



Mary in the New Testament

Four Gospels,
Four Traditions





The Christmas Story

Matthew 1:20-2:11 “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin [young woman] shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.”
[Isaiah 7:14]

Luke 2:19 (The Shepherds)

“Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

Luke 1:26ff

“the angel Gabriel was sent to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph... The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ...

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.” ... Then Mary said: Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Elizabeth greets Mary (Luke 1:42f)

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has...the mother of my Lord come to me?”

Luke 1:46ff (“Magnificat”)

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Almighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ...”

Luke 2:34

“This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Luke 2:46-51

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But his parents did not understand him. Then he went down with them [to] Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”

Other References to Mary

**Mk. 3:20f: “Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”
[no parallel texts]**

Mark 3:31-35

“Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you.

He replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”” [Parallel texts: Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21]

Mark 6:2f

“On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said...is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”

Mark 6:4

“Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”

Parallel text: Luke 4:16-30, with no mention of “prophets without honor in their hometown.” Instead of “son of Mary,” Luke has: “Is he not the son of Joseph?”

Luke 11:27

“a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!” But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!”

In Mark, Matthew and Luke

Mary is not named as being among the women either at the cross or in the story of the resurrection.

Book of Acts 1:14

(After the Ascension of Jesus into heaven the disciples gather in a room in Jerusalem) “devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.”

John 6:41-42

“The Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They were saying, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?””

John 2:1-12 (Marriage at Cana)

“When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.”“ (Jesus tells servants to fill 6 jars with water...) ... “Afterwards he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and his brothers and his disciples...”

John 19:27: (Words from the Cross)

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother: “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is you mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

Book of Revelation, Chapter 12

A woman appears in heaven “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” In great pain she gives birth to a son, whom the devil tries to kill. But the child was taken by God to God’s throne, while the woman fled to a protected place in the desert.

The Second Century

Gospel of James (150-200AD)

And look! An angel of the Lord stood nearby, saying to her, “Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer. You will conceive and give birth, and your offspring will be spoken of throughout the whole world. ...

Birth of Mary

... And when the child grew to be a year old, Joachim ... brought the child to the priests, and they blessed her, saying, “God of our ancestors, bless this child and give her a name that will be spoken forever among all generations.” ...

And they brought her to the chief priests, and they blessed her, saying, “Most High God, look upon this child, and bless her with a final blessing which cannot be surpassed.”

Birth of Mary

... They went up to the Temple of the Lord. And the priest welcomed her, and said, “The Lord God has magnified your name among all the generations. Through you, the Lord will reveal his redemption of the people of Israel in the last days.”

And he sat her down on the third step of the altar, and the Lord God poured grace upon her. ...

Birth of Jesus

A great light appeared in the cave, so that their eyes could not bear it. And a little later, the light withdrew until an infant appeared. And he came and took the breast of his mother, Mary.

In the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, God says to Eve that she will experience pain in bearing children (Genesis 3:16). In this story, Mary does not experience pain in Jesus' birth.

In the 2nd century this story of the birth is contested as “gnostic,” a belief system that considered matter and physical life inherently evil. Tertullian also wrote that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the New Testament were the natural children of Mary and Joseph.

In the 2nd century, two other notable theologians, Justin and Irenaeus, contrast Mary, the obedient woman, with Eve, the disobedient woman.

In the following two centuries Eve becomes associated with impurity, sexual lust, emotion, while Mary is the opposite. This epoch in history is known for its asceticism, the practice of denial of the body (Peter Brown, The Body and Society). Mary's virginity, including after the birth of Jesus, becomes, for the church, the highest image and symbol of bodily and spiritual purity.

Where the Gospels speak of Jesus' brothers and sisters, these will be called either the children of Joseph by a previous marriage or cousins of Jesus. The latter was taught in the late 4th century by the theologian Jerome, who states in one of his writings that virginity is better than marriage. Both popular asceticism and Jerome's influence contributed to the development of male and female monasticism.

