

St Mary: The Greatest Human

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

- † Review the students' knowledge of the life of St Mary the Theotokos
- † Introduce St Mary in the Coptic Orthodox perspective
- † Appreciate the greatness of St Mary as a human, and our intercessor.

Key verse

"And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28)

Lesson

We've all heard a lot about St Mary, from stories to miracles and apparitions. She is obviously very, very special in our Church (and not just the Coptic Orthodox Church), and we have so many praises and hymns for the Blessed Virgin! But who exactly is St Mary? What do we know about her? What do YOU know about her?

[Class Discussion]

Very Simply, St Mary is the Mother of God, which is "Theotokos" in Greek. But this leaves us with a few questions that we will discuss:

- **Was St Mary a human being, like us?**
- **How can a human give birth to God?**
- **How can she be a virgin?**
- **What's so special about St Mary and what can we learn from her life?**

(1) Was St Mary a human being, like us?

- ❖ Yes of course!
- ❖ She had parents Joachim and Anna.
- ❖ She was from the tribe of David, and
- ❖ Like us, she was born with the original sin of Adam and Eve, and so she also needed salvation

[Read Luke 1:46-47]

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(2) How can a human give birth to God?

- ❖ The problem here is the question, not the answer!
- ❖ Remember first of all that with God nothing is impossible! (Luke 1:37)
- ❖ God in order to save us from the death caused by our sins became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. The fact that he was born of a human mother shows that he truly was a human. This means that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine (1 Tim. 3:16).

(3) How can she be a virgin?

- ❖ Again let us remember that nothing is impossible for God, and even Archangel Gabriel reminded St Mary of this when she asked how she could give birth without knowing a man

[Read Luke 1:34-38 – for the explanation given by Archangel Gabriel]

- ❖ The fact that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin clearly demonstrates His true divinity, it is not to do with St Mary, but rather the awesome power of God, and shows us that from the beginning He is fully God and fully human in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Even in the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel*” (Isa. 7:14).

(4) What’s so special about St Mary and what can we learn from her life?

- ❖ This is the big question for today’s lesson. So far we’ve seen that St Mary was an ordinary human being, born with original sin like the rest of us...so how come the big fuss?... clearly there must be something very special about St Mary if God chose her from among all the women that had and would ever set foot on the Earth! So let’s take a closer look!
- ❖ God did not just choose any woman to be His Mother; He was waiting for her specifically, because no one else found more favour in His eyes. When the Archangel Gabriel first greeted her he said “Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:28)
- ❖ We can see St Mary’s faith, obedience and humility when she accepts the angel’s strange message by saying “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”
 - REMEMBER that God did not force her to accept Him into her womb, just like God doesn’t force Himself into our lives. God cannot come and work wonders in us and through us if we don’t let Him in!
- ❖ St Mary was also the first person to ever receive and accept Christ as her Saviour!
- ❖ St Mary lived a life of great service, and for an example let’s look at the story of the wedding in Cana of Galilee

[Read John 2:1-5]

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- ❖ This was the first miracle Jesus performed, and He did it for His mother, but why?
 - Look at what she was doing at the wedding in the first place, the disciples and Jesus were invited, but she was already there, clearly she was there helping out!
 - St Mary DID NOT TELL JESUS WHAT TO DO, she simply stated the problem “They have no wine” with complete faith that He knew exactly what to do, but not just that...
 - She also had complete faith that He would do something! Notice how she didn’t respond to Jesus’ question, but instead she turns to the servants and tells them to follow whatever instruction He gives them!
 - Finally, Jesus said “My hour has not yet come” but for the sake of the faith, love, service and purity of St Mary, Jesus performed a great miracle turning water into great wine!
- ❖ This leads to the great role St Mary has in heaven as our intercessor! Truly Blessed is St Mary who is honoured more than the Cherubim and the Seraphim, standing at the right hand of the Lord (Psalm 45:9)!
- ❖ There are many symbols for St Mary in the Old Testament, and we are so lucky to have a Church with such a great depth of knowledge integrated into all that we do, especially in the Tasbeha (the Midnight Psalmody) and the praises.
 - Perhaps the praise we know the best is “Shere Ne Maria” (Hail to you O Mary)

[Class Activity: Look at the words of “Shere Ne Maria” or sing one of the beautiful songs of praise for St Mary!]

Conclusion

We learn a great deal about obedience, humility and purity from St Mary who is our beloved intercessor and model for holiness! Jesus Christ said in Matthew 11:11 and Luke 7:28 that “*among those born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*” How great then is St Mary that her womb is the second heaven, made worthy to give birth to our Lord, God and Saviour! Sure, St Mary was human, but not just any human, the greatest human! Of course, we know that Jesus Christ is the ultimate and living example of perfection itself, He came as a man to save mankind, and to show us the Way the Truth and the Life, but after all, He is God!

“Hail to you, O’ Virgin and true Queen, Hail to the pride of mankind, Mother of Emmanuel, remember us O’ Faithful Pleader, before our Lord Jesus Christ, may He forgive us our sins.”

(From the Agpeya prayer of the First Hour)

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.