

## St Mary in the Orthodox Church

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

### Aim

- ✝ To know about St Mary and her great position in our Coptic Orthodox Church.
- ✝ To follow her steps and learn from her virtues.

### Key verses

*“Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1: 48)*

### Lesson



*Awake o my harp, your chords,  
In praise of the Virgin Mary!  
Lift up your voice and sing  
The wonderful history of this Virgin,  
The daughter of David,  
Who gave birth to the Life of the world!*  
St Ephraim the Syrian

- ❖ August 22, is the Celebration/Feast of the Assumption of the body of our pure Lady St. Mary, the Mother of God. While she was keeping vigil, praying in the Holy Sepulcher, and waiting for the happy minute of her liberation from the bonds of the flesh, the Holy Spirit informed her of her forthcoming departure from this vain world. When the time drew near, the disciples and the virgins of the Mount of Olives came and the Lady was lying on her bed. Our Lord, surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels, came to her. He consoled her, and announced her with the everlasting joy which was prepared for her. She was happy, and she stretched out her hands, blessed the Disciples, and the Virgins.

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Then, she delivered up her pure soul in the hand of her Son and God, Jesus Christ, Who ascended her to the higher habitations.

- ❖ As of the pure body, they shrouded it and carried it to Gethsemane. On their way, some of the Jews blocked the way in the face of the disciples to prevent the burial. One of them seized the coffin. **His hands were separated from his body**, and remained hanging until he believed and repented for his mischievous deed. With the prayers of the holy disciples, his hands were reattached to his body as they had been before.
- ❖ St. Thomas was absent at the time of St Mary's departure, but he came after the burial. On his way back to Jerusalem, St Thomas saw angels carrying St Mary's pure body and ascending with it to heaven, and one of the angels said to him, "Hurry and kiss the pure body of St Mary." When he arrived to the disciples, they informed him about St Mary's departure. He told them "I will not believe, unless I see her body, as you all know how I did doubt the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ before." They took him to the tomb, to uncover the body but they did not find it, and they were perplexed and amazed. St Thomas told them how he saw the pure body ascending to heaven, carried by angels. The Holy Spirit then told them, "The Lord did not will to leave her holy body on earth." The Lord had promised His pure apostles that they would see her in flesh another time. They were waiting for the fulfillment of this truthful promise, until the 16<sup>th</sup> of Misra, when the promise of seeing her was fulfilled. They saw her sitting on the right hand of her Son and her Lord, surrounded by the angelic hosts, as David prophesied and said, "**at your right hand stands the queen.**" (Psalm 45:9)
- ❖ St Mary's life on earth was **60** years. She spent 12 years of them in the temple, 30 years in the house of the righteous St Joseph, and 14 years in the care of St John the Evangelist, as the Lord commanded her saying "**Woman behold your Son**" and to St John, "**Behold your Mother.**"

### The Orthodox Veneration of Saint Mary

#### 1. Saint Mary is the Greatest Woman Who Ever Lived

- a. "Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28, 42).
- b. She is the first person in all of history to receive and accept Christ as her Saviour
- c. We are called to follow this example – to enthrone the Lord in our hearts and lives
- d. She found favour in the sight of God (Luke 1:30)
  - i. In her purity
  - ii. She gave her life to Him
  - iii. In prayer and devotion
  - iv. She sought Him with all her heart

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### **2. Saint Mary is our Model for the Christian Life**

- a. A model of obedience (at the annunciation, at the Wedding in Cana)
- b. A model of purity and holiness
  - i. We remember this every time we chant “Shere Ne Maria” (“Hail to You Mary, the beautiful dove, who bore for us God the word”) before the reading of the Book of Acts
  - ii. She is a symbol of the spotless Church who received the holiness of God in Jesus Christ.
- c. A model of royalty and intercession
  - i. She is the Queen
  - ii. She is more honoured than the cherubim and more glorious than the seraphim

### **3. Saint Mary is the Mother of God**

- a. Saint Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit first confessed this saying, “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (Luke 1:42)?
- b. By confessing that Saint Mary bore God in her womb, is to confess the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- c. To deny her this title is to deny that our Lord Jesus Christ was fully man and fully God.

### **Saint Mary’s Virginit**

The virginity of Saint Mary is a biblical reality which is tied to our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied saying, “Behold, **the virgin** shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is 7:14). When God took flesh, He was particular about the virgin who would be His mother. No other woman on earth found more favour in the eyes of God than Saint Mary.

### **Virginit and Christology**

The scriptures describe St Mary as the Virgin who was engaged to St Joseph. The Virginal Birth only happened once and was never repeated. It shows us that Jesus Christ is not of this world but from High. The virginal birth is an important part of the Early Church because it reveals the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ. That is Jesus was not conceived of human seed but of the Holy Spirit.

The virgin birth is a proof of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Archangel Gabriel proclaimed the good news to Saint Mary saying, “**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**” (Luke 1:35).

The virgin birth is a key element in the creeds and apologetic writings of the early church, not because it says something about Saint Mary, but because it reveals the person and nature of the Lord Jesus Christ; He is the real son of a real mother. He was not conceived of human seed, but of the Holy Spirit.

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### **Theotokos**

The word “Theotokos” literally means the **“Birth-giver of God”** or, as more commonly translated, **“Mother of God.”** By this name, the Church confirms its faith that God the Word truly became Man. In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, God was joined to Man from the very instant of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He was perfect in His humanity and divinity (see Gal. 4:4, 1 Tim. 3:16, Luke 1:41-44).

**Saint Cyril of Alexandria**, wrote many treatises Orthodox faith that Christ’s humanity was united to His divinity in one person without separation, alteration, mingling, or confusion.

### **Virginity and Our Salvation**

God became man and united Himself with us, not because of our human efforts or merits, but because of His Divine grace and free gift of love bestowed upon us. In other words, Saint Mary’s virginity is a sign of mankind’s poverty and his inability to work out his own salvation. God had to become man in order to save His creation.

In Saint Mary, we see that our spiritual life is not passive. God did not force Himself in Saint Mary’s womb, but rather she accepted (Luke 1:38). The Divine Incarnation was realized by the free grace of God, but Saint Mary accepted Him in obedience and humility.

Saint Mary’s virginity declares the heavenly nature of the kingdom of God. Virginity is the law of the heavens, while marriage only occurs in the present world. Therefore, Saint Mary’s virginity means that the heavenly kingdom has been established among the human race. The people of God are called to a new life in their hearts, minds, and souls.

### **Saint Mary’s Perpetual Virginity**

Did Saint Mary remain a virgin after giving birth to the Lord? The sealed eastern gate seen in the vision of Ezekiel (44:1-2) is a type of Saint Mary’s perpetual virginity. The Lord alone entered her womb, and this gate was never opened to another. The early Church Fathers also attest to Saint Mary’s perpetual virginity.

### **Was it Marriage or Betrothal?**

According to Jewish tradition, marriage consists of two steps: betrothal and formal marriage. After certain financial arrangements were made, the couple was betrothed to one another in the house of the bride. The betrothal was in every respect equivalent to marriage without any sexual relationship. The betrothed woman was called the man’s wife. She would become a widow if her betrothed died, and could claim the financial settlement accorded to a wife widowed or divorced. In case of infidelity she was liable to the same punishment as an adulterous wife. If the betrothed woman had not been married previously, she usually waited a year before the formal marriage. That is why St. Mary is called “Joseph’s wife”. They were betrothed and not married. And as she answered the archangel Gabriel “how can this be, since I do not know a man?” means she planned not to have a real marriage with her betrothed man; St Joseph.

**Glory is to God forever. Amen.**