

BIOGRAPHY OF MARY

Study Guide 5/10/09

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INTRODUCTION

Mother's Day is a great time to look at the life of Jesus mother, Mary. In scripture there is little written about Mary but from what is allows us to get the view of a strong, devoted loving mother who took her role as mother very seriously. In this study we will look at Mary and the role she played in Jesus life. We will explore the Scripture references to Mary and draw a portrayal of the woman she was and the life she lived. In this we will find a devoted wife and mother who was very strong in her Jewish faith and her devotion to God and family.

MARY'S LIFE

THE EARLY YEARS

The Gospels say nothing of Mary's birth or childhood. Other historical sources name her mother and father as Anna and Joachim. She was born and raised in Nazareth, a small town outside the metropolis of Sephoris, in Galilee. Roman Catholic tradition has that Joachim and Anna were elderly and childless when Mary was conceived and being a gift to them from God she was born without original sin which is where the image of the Immaculate Conception of Mary comes from. The belief is held tat she was full of grace from the very beginning.

Mary would have grown up as a typical girl in Nazareth. She would have learned the ways of a woman in Jewish society of the time. She would have learned how to prepare meals, particularly the special meals of the Jewish festival days. She would have help with house keeping, working in the fields planting and harvesting crops. More importantly she would have attended Synagogue where she would have learned Scripture and would have been able to recite passage form the Hebrew Scriptures by heart. Mary would have been illiterate but as most people of those times had a much better memory than we

do as reading was not something that was generally needed.

THE BETROTHAL

As was the custom of the times a girl was betrothed to be married any time form the age of 12 on. Mary could have been as young as 12 or 13 when she was betrothed to Joseph. They were probably neighbors and knew each other by mix in events that went on in Nazareth. Although we think of fixed marriages as being something arranged fully by the parents there would have been an element of the children convincing their parents that there was a young man or woman that attracted them. Although the parents had the final say the young couple would not be total strangers and there would have been an element of attraction between the two.

A betrothal was a contract made between the two young people of the intention to get married and spend their lives together. It was like our engagement process but was far more binding. The period of betrothal was one year. In that time the couple were fully bound to each other, except they did not live together and were unable to have marital relations. The only way the betrothal could be broken was by a divorce and that required a severe breach of the trust of each party, such as infidelity. We read in both Matthew and Luke that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Joseph was probably older than Mary by several years quite possibly being in his 20s or older.

- **If you were Mary how would you feel about being betrothed to an older man?**
- **Do you think the ritual of betrothal with its rigid rules is a good idea? If so why if not why not? Do you think it would work in today's society?**

THE VIRGIN CONCEIVES

- **Read Luke 1:26-38**

This part of Scripture tells us the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary to tell her that she is to bear a son who will be the son of God. The Holy Spirit will cause her to conceive.

- From these words in Scripture what can you see of Mary's character?
- Considering the betrothal regulations what reactions do you think Mary would have?

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

- **Read Luke 1:39-56**

In these verses we see Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. The two women have their pregnancy in common and Elizabeth being older is probably a great deal of comfort and help to Mary during this time.

- Why do you think Mary left to be with Elizabeth? What does this tell you of Mary?
- Verses 46-55 have the words known as the Magnificat or Mary's prayer. These words are almost identical to those said by Hannah when she conceived Samuel (see 1 Samuel 2:1-6). Why do you think Mary used these words?

We read Mary stayed with Elizabeth 3 months in verse 56. When she returned we read of Joseph's reaction. Under Jewish law Mary could have been stoned to death for adultery but we see Joseph as a man of faith and compassion.

- **Read Matthew 1:18-25**
- Do you think Mary would have been concerned for her future when she returned?
- Why do you think Joseph reacted as he did? What does this tell you of Joseph's character?

JESUS BIRTH

The birth narrative is well known to us but let's read it this time looking not with Jesus as the main character but Mary.

- **Read Luke 2:1-7**
- What does this passage tell you of Mary considering she was nine months pregnant and had to travel the 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem?
- What would be your reaction to having to give birth in a damp, smelly, dirty cave? How would you see Mary reacting?
- Read Luke 2:19 and comment on how Mary was feeling at this point?

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

- **Read Luke 2:21-24 & 39-40**
- From these verses how would you consider Mary and Joseph as parents?
- From the sacrifice what does it tell you of Mary and Joseph's position in society? Does this make their journey to Jerusalem any more significant and at this point was Mary aware of who her son was?
- What can you deduce of Mary's role in raising Jesus in verse 40?

JESUS AS A YOUTH IN THE TEMPLE

- **Read Luke 2:41-52**
- Where Joseph and Mary negligent in not realizing Jesus was not with them when they left Jerusalem? If so why if not why not?
- If you had been Mary what would have been your reaction? What was Mary's reaction? Was she being a good mother at this point?

JESUS FIRST MIRACLE

- **Read John 2:1-11**
- What was Mary's role in the performing of this miracle of turning water into wine?

- Do you think that Mary was aware of Jesus extraordinary powers? If she was how would she have known this?
- In Jesus reaction to Mary in this passage how do you see Jesus relationship with Mary?

FAMILY REACTION TO JESUS

- **Read Mark 3:31-35**
- What do you think was Mary's motivation in this passage?

THE INTERVENING YEARS

Apart from the example given above we do not see Mary being involved in Jesus ministry or life. She probably followed his ministry closely knowing the special job God had for Jesus. Since Joseph is not mentioned after the episode in the temple when Jesus was 12 it is assumed that Joseph died when Jesus was a teenager. This would mean Mary was a single mother raising 6 children. Jesus being the oldest son would have taken up the responsibility of being the man of the house. This could explain why he was 30 before he started his ministry, he had earthly duties to take care of.

MARY AT THE CRUCIFIXION

The next time we see Mary is at the foot of the cross for Jesus Crucifixion

- **Read John 19:25-27**
- What would have motivated Mary to go and see her son crucified?
- What emotions and feelings do you think Mary would have had at this time?
- In this passage do you see Jesus feelings for his mother? If so what were they?

MARY IN THE NEW ERA

Mary obviously became part of the burgeoning followers of Jesus. We read of her and her children meeting with the other apostles and disciples in the upper room.

- **Read Acts 1:12-14**

- Why do you think Mary became part of the new movement?
- Do you think she played a prominent role? If so what would be her position?

Beyond this reference we have no further writings in our scripture as to what happened to Mary. Other historical writings have Mary playing a major role in the development of the new church. As we know her son, James, become the first Bishop of Jerusalem and one of the main leaders of the church. We also hear of Mary being in Ephesus and this makes sense as John, the disciple who Jesus loved and the one he charged with looking after his mother from the cross went to Ephesus to lead the church there. Some legends have Mary not dying but being raised up to heaven.

CONCLUSIONS

From our look at Mary and her life as given in Scripture we can draw some conclusions as to the type of woman Mary was and what she was like as a wife and mother.

- How would you describe Mary as a woman?
- What type of wife and mother do you think Mary was?
- The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches hold Mary in very high esteem. Do you think we as Reformed Protestants do not give enough emphasis to the role of Mary?
- Do you think Mary is a good role model as a mother? If so why if not why not?