

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS (PART 1 OF 2): WHO IS MARY?

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Description: Christians know her as Mary, the mother of Jesus. Muslims also refer to her as the mother of Jesus, or in Arabic, Umm Eisa. In Islam Mary is often called Maryam bint Imran; Mary, the daughter of Imran. This article gives some background about her adoption by Zachariah so she could serve in the temple.

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It may surprise many people to learn that Mary is one of the most esteemed and respected women in Islam and that the Quran gives her great importance. Maryam is the name of chapter 19 of the Quran, and Chapter 3 is *Aali Imran*, named after her family. Islam holds the entire family of Imran in very high regard. The Quran tells us that:

“God chose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of Imran over all others of world’s of mankind and jinn.” (Quran 3:33)

God choose Adam and Noah individually, but He chose the *family* of Abraham and the *family* of Imran.

“Offspring of one another.” (Quran 3:34)

The family of Imran are from the descendents of Abraham, the family of Abraham are from the descendants of Noah and Noah is from the descendents of Adam. The family of Imran also includes many people known and respected in the Christian traditions – Prophets Zachary and John (known as the Baptist), Prophet and Messenger Jesus and his mother, Mary.

God chose Mary above all the women of the world. He said:

“And when the angels said: ‘O Mary! Verily, God has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the worlds of mankind and jinn.’” (Quran 3:42)

Ali ibn Abu Talib said:

“I heard the Prophet of God saying Mary, the daughter of Imran was the best among women.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

In Arabic the name Maryam means the maidservant of God, and as we shall see, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was dedicated to God even before she was born.

The Birth of Mary

The Bible is unable to give us any details of Mary’s birth; however, the Quran informs us that the wife of Imran dedicated her unborn child to the service of God. Mary’s mother, the wife of Imran, was Hannah^[1]. She was the sister of Prophet Zachary’s wife. Hannah and her husband Imran had believed they would never have children, but one day Hannah made a sincere and heartfelt supplication to God begging for a child, and vowing that her offspring would serve in God’s House in Jerusalem. God heard Hannah’s supplication and she fell pregnant. When Hannah realised the glorious news she turned to God and said:

“O my Lord! I have vowed to You what is in my womb to be dedicated for Your services, so accept this, from me. Verily, You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knowing.” (Quran 3:35)

There are lessons to be learned from Hannah’s vow to God, one of which is caring for the religious education of our children. Hannah was not thinking in terms of this world at all, she was trying to ensure that her child was close to God and in His service. These chosen friends of God, such as family of Imran, are the parents whom we should take as our role models. God says many times in the Quran that He is the One who supplies provision for us, and He warns us to save ourselves and our families from the fires of Hell.

In her supplication, Hannah asked that her child be free from all worldly work. By promising that her child would be the servant of God, Hannah was securing her child’s freedom. Freedom is a quality of life that every human being strives to attain, but Hannah understood that true freedom comes from complete submission to God. This is what she aspired to for her yet unborn child. Hannah wanted her child to be a free person, a slave to no man and no desire, but a slave only to God. In due time, Hannah gave birth to a girl, again she turned to God in prayer and said:

““O my Lord, I have delivered a female child,’ and the male is not like the female, and I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge with You for her and her offspring from Satan, the outcast.” (Quran 3:36)

Hannah named her child Mary. With reference to her vow to God, Hannah now found herself facing a dilemma. Serving in the House of Prayer was not acceptable for women. Mary’s father, Imran had died before she was born, so Hannah turned to her brother in law, Zachary. He comforted Hannah and helped her to understand that God

knew that she had delivered a girl. This girl child, Mary, was from the best of creation. Prophet Mohammad mentioned^[2] that whenever a child is born Satan pricks him or her and therefore the child cries loudly. This is a sign of the great enmity between mankind and Satan; however there were two exceptions to this rule. Satan pricked neither Mary nor her son Jesus^[3], due to the supplication of Mary's mother.

When the time came for Mary to go into the House of Prayer, everybody wanted to take care of this pious daughter of Imran. As was the custom of the time, the men drew lots for the privilege, and God ensured that her guardian was Prophet Zachary.

“So her Lord accepted her with goodly acceptance, and made her grow in a good manner, and put her under the care of Zachary.” (Quran 3:37)

Prophet Zachary served in the House of God and was a wise and knowledgeable man devoted to teaching. He had a private room built for Mary so that she was able to worship God and go about her daily duties in private. As her guardian, Prophet Zachary visited Mary daily, and one day he was surprised to see fresh fruit in her room. It is said that in winter she would have the fresh fruits of summer and in the summer she would have the fresh fruits of winter.^[4] Prophet Zachary inquired about how the fruit got there, to which Mary replied, it was indeed God Who provided her sustenance. She said:

“It is from God. Verily, God provides sustenance to whom He wills without limit.” (Quran 3:37)

Mary's devotion to God was at that time unparalleled, but her faith was about to be tested.

Footnotes:

[1] From the Tafseer of Ibn Katheer.

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari.*

[3] *Saheeh Muslim.*

[4] Based on the work of Al Imam ibn Katheer. *The Stories of the Prophets.*

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