

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

مريم، والده عيسى عليهما السلام

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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 chose 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 Hannah¹. 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

¹ From the Tafseer of Ibn Katheer.

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 mentioned² 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 Jesus³, 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

2 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

3 Saheeh Muslim.

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.

Esteemed and loved by all Muslims and known as a pious and devout woman, Mary, the mother of Jesus was chosen above all other women. Islam rejects the Christian notion that Jesus is part of a trinity that is God, and denies emphatically that either Jesus or his mother, Mary, are worthy of worship. The Quran categorically states that there is no god but God.

“Such is God, your Lord! None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Creator of all things. So worship Him ...” (Quran 6:102)

Muslims are required, however, to believe in and love all of the Prophets, including Prophet Jesus, who holds a special place in the Islamic creed. His mother, Mary, holds a place of honour. As a young woman, Mary went into the House of Prayer in Jerusalem, her entire life dedicated to the worship and service of God.

Mary Hears the News of Jesus

While she was in seclusion from everybody, a man appeared before Mary. God said:

“She screened herself from them; We sent to her Our Spirit, and he appeared before her in the form of a man in all respects.” (Quran 19:17)

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

Mary was afraid and tried to flee. She appealed to God saying:

“Verily! I seek refuge with the Most Gracious (God) from you, if you do fear God.” The angel said: “I am only a Messenger from your Lord to you, announcing the gift of a righteous son.” (Quran 19:18-19)

Mary was amazed and puzzled by these words. She was not married, rather a virgin who kept chaste. She asked incredulously:

“O my Lord! How will I have a son when no man has touched me?” He said, “So (it will be): for God creates what He wills; when He has decreed something, He says to it only ‘Be’ – and it is.” (Quran 3:47)

God created Adam from the dust of the earth, without either mother or father. He created Eve from Adam's rib; and Jesus, He created without a father, but with a mother, the pious Virgin Mary. God, who has only to say ‘Be’ to a thing in order to bring it into existence,, blew the spirit of Jesus into Mary via the Angel Gabriel.

“And We breathed into it⁵ through Our Spirit, and she testified to the truth of the Words of her Lord ...” (Quran 66:12)

Although the stories of Mary in the Quran and in the Bible have many aspects in common, the view that Mary was betrothed or married is totally rejected by Islam. Time passed, and Mary became afraid of what the people around her would say. She wondered how they could possibly believe that no man had touched her. The majority of scholars in Islam agree that the duration of Mary's pregnancy was normal.⁶ Then, as the time came for her to give birth, Mary decided to leave Jerusalem, and

⁵ This is explained in commentaries as an opening in her garment, though the verse itself speaks of “her chastity” (i.e. guarding herself from opening up to marriageable men). Thus God blew into what she guarded by means of the angel Gabriel.

⁶ Sheikh al Shanqeeti in (Adwaa' al-Bayaan, 4/264)

travelled towards the city of Bethlehem. Even though Mary must have recalled the words of God, for her faith was strong and unwavering, this young woman was anxious and uneasy. But the angel Gabriel reassured her:

“O Mary, Verily God gives you glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary – held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and will be one of those who are near to God.” (Quran 3:45)

Jesus is Born

The pains of childbirth drove her to clutch at the trunk of a date-palm tree and she cried out in anguish:

“Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!” (Quran 19:23)

Mary delivered her child right there, at the foot of the date tree. *She was exhausted after the birth, and filled with distress and fear, but nevertheless she heard a voice calling out to her.* .

“Grieve not! Your Lord has provided you a stream of clear water under you; and shake the trunk of palm tree towards you; it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink and be glad...” (Quran 19:24)

God provided Mary with water, as a stream suddenly appeared beneath the place she was sitting. He also provided her with food; all she had to do was shake the trunk of the date tree. Mary was scared and frightened; she felt so weak, having just given birth, so how could she possibly shake the immense trunk of a date tree? But God continued to provide Mary with sustenance.

The next event was indeed another miracle, and as human beings we learn a great lesson from this. Mary didn't need to shake the date tree, which would have been impossible; she only had to make an effort. As she attempted to follow God's

command, fresh ripe dates fell from the tree and God said to Mary: “...eat, drink and be glad.” (Quran 19:26)

Mary now had to take her new born child and go back to face her family. Of course she was afraid, and God knew this well. Thus He directed her not to speak. It would not have been possible for Mary to explain how she had suddenly become the mother of a new born child. Since she was unmarried, her people would not believe her explanations. God said:

“And if you see any human being, say: ‘Verily! I have vowed a fast unto the Most Gracious (God) so I shall not speak to any human being this day.’” (Quran 19:26)

Mary came to her people carrying the child, and they immediately began accusing her; they exclaimed “What have you done? You are from a good family, and your parents were pious.”

As God had directed her, Mary did not speak, she merely pointed to the baby in her arms. Then Jesus, son of Mary, spoke. As a newborn baby, Jesus, the Prophet of God performed his first miracle. By the permission of God he said:

“Verily! I am a slave of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet; and He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer, and alms, as long as I live, and to be dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant, unblest. And peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!” (Quran 19:30-34)

Mary is referred to in the Quran (5:75) as a *siddqa* (truthful one) but the Arabic word *siddiqa* implies more than just speaking the truth. It means that one has achieved a very high level of righteousness. It means that one is truthful, not only with themselves and those around them, but also with God. Mary was a woman who fulfilled her covenant with God, Whom she worshiped with full submission. She was pious, chaste, and

devout; the woman chosen above all other women to be the mother of Jesus was Mary, the daughter of Imran.