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A Virgin Girl (Mary) and Jesus' Birth

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THE PHYSICAL BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST A VIRGIN GIRL (MARY) AND JESUS' BIRTH

THE MARY FILE

STATISTICS ON HER LIFE

Spouse: Joseph

Sons: Jesus, James, Joseph, Simon, Judas (Luke 2:7; Matt. 13:55)

Daughters: Several unnamed (Matt. 13:56)

First mention: Matthew 1:16

Final mention: Acts 1:14

Meaning of her name: "Bitter"

Frequency of her name: Referred to 19 times

Biblical books mentioning her: Four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts)

Place of birth: Probably Bethlehem

Important fact about her life: She was God's chosen vessel to give birth to the Savior of the world.

STORY OF HER LIFE

- Of the 3500-plus individuals who walk across the pages of scripture, none is more controversial than Mary, mother of Jesus. It seems she is either worshipped or ignored by millions of Christians! Two articles give sad testimony regarding the first error:
 - A. Roman Catholic teaching on Mary includes four dogmas: Mary's Immaculate Conception, which is seen as guarding her from original sin; Mary's sinlessness; Mary's perpetual virginity; and the Assumption (the ascension of her body to heaven directly after her death). Only one of these dogmas—Mary's perpetual virginity—is taught as dogma in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church generally rejects the Immaculate Conception; most Orthodox believe in the Assumption but consider it not necessary to have a dogma about it, and though the Orthodox regard Mary as the most sinless natural human being ever, they feel it's not necessary to reiterate the issue of her sinlessness. As one Orthodox theologian puts it, some Orthodox writers have offered the opinion that during her lifetime, Mary probably did display some of the human foibles tracing to the fall, like impatience and anger. Protestants have a wide variety of opinions on Mary, as on most other theological issues, but in general they regard her role as a good mother to the Lord, but little else. (Jon Kennedy, *The Everything Book*, Adams Media, Avon, Massachusetts, p. 7)

- B. The August 25, 1997 *Newsweek* magazine reported the growing interest (indeed, demand) among millions of devout Roman Catholics to elevate Mary in an unprecedented way. Note the details:

“This week a large box shipped from California and addressed to ‘His Holiness, John Paul II’ will arrive at the Vatican. The shipping label lists a dozen countries—from every continent but Antarctica—plus a number (40,383), indicating the quantity of signatures inside. Each signature is attached to a petition asking the pope to exercise the power of the papal infallibility to proclaim a new dogma of the Roman Catholic faith: that the Virgin Mary is ‘Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God.’ Such a move would elevate Mary’s status dramatically beyond what most Christians profess. But in the last four years, the pope has received 4,340,429 signatures from 157 countries—an average of 100,000 a month—supporting the proposed dogma. Among the notable supporters are Mother Teresa of Calcutta, nearly 500 bishops and 42 cardinals, including John O’Connor of New York, Joseph Glemp of Poland and half a dozen cardinals at the Vatican itself. Nothing like this organized petition drive has ever been seen in Rome. But then, it isn’t often that Catholics beg a pope to make an infallible pronouncement.”

If the drive succeeds, Catholics would be obliged as a matter of faith to accept three extraordinary doctrines: that Mary participates in the redemption achieved by her Son, that all graces that flow from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ are granted only through Mary’s intercession with her Son, and that all prayers and petitions from the faithful on earth must likewise flow through Mary, who then brings them to the attention of Jesus. This is what theologians call high Mariology, and it seems to contradict the basic New Testament belief that “*there is one God and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5). In place of the Holy Trinity, it would appear, there would be a kind of Holy Quartet, with Mary playing the multiple roles of daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit.

In many ways, the twentieth century has belonged to Mary. From almost every continent, visionaries have reported more than 400 “apparitions” of the Virgin—more than in the previous centuries combined, Miravalle estimates. Taken together, these vision point to what the Marian movement believes is a millennial “Age of Mary,” which will produce a final dogma that confirms her ongoing material mediation between God and humankind.

Tracking Mary has become a cottage industry. In the ripening apparition subculture, magazines and newspapers—not to mention illustrated books and pamphlets, plus graphic videotapes—showing weeping statues, miraculously bleeding communion hosts and visitations with prophesying hometown seers. Mary has her web sites, too, where devotees post the latest messages from visionaries abroad and provide chat rooms to discuss the meaning of it all.

- The concept of a “heavenly, holy quartet” is both tragic and totally unbiblical!

- Several facts demolish this false teaching:
 - A. The Bible strongly presents *all* humans needing redemption for their sins with Mary being no exception! (Rom. 3:10, 11, 23; Isa. 53:6)
 - B. The first person who called Jesus “my Savior” was His mother (Lk. 1:47).
 - C. Scripture declares that Jesus—and He alone—to be the Mediator between God and man:

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).
 - D. The major theme in all of the apostle Paul’s epistles is that of redemption. He refers to it in the following passages:
 1. Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:9
 2. Gal. 3:13; 4:5
 3. Eph. 1:7
 4. Col. 1:14
 5. Titus 2:4

- As can be seen, on no occasion does the apostle mention Mary. This is also the case in the writings of Peter (1 Peter 1:18, 19) and John the apostle (Rev. 1:5; 5:9).
- Finally, the last scriptural reference to Mary is found in Acts 1:14. On this occasion she was one of the 120 (Acts 1:15) praying that God would direct them in selecting a man to take the place of Judas.

Here it should be noted Mary was interceding *with* the rest, but not receiving prayers *from* them!

- But what of the other extreme? Is she all but ignored by non-Catholics? Sadly this seems to be the case. Should she be simply listed along with any number of godly women in the scriptures, such as Ruth (Ruth 1:16, 17), or Hannah (1 Sam. 1:20, 24-28; 2:1), or Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), or Dorcas (Acts 9:36)?

Certainly Mary should not only be included in this list, but actually heading it up! Note her own prophecy concerning herself:

“For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48).

Then, consider the reaction of a certain woman some thirty years later upon hearing Mary’s Son speak: *“And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’”* (Lk. 11:27).

- In light of all the above, we should *never* pray *to* Mary, but rather *often* thank God *for* Mary!
- Now for some details concerning the all-important role played by Mary in the incarnation story:

A. The reassurance to Mary

1. The question

"Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?'" (Lk. 1:30, 31, 34).

2. The answer

"And the angel answered and said to her, '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'" (Lk. 1:35).

Why did the angel Gabriel rebuke Zacharias for his question and not rebuke Mary for her question?

Zacharias: *"Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years"* (Lk. 1:18).

Mary: *"How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"* (Lk. 1:34)

Answer: Zacharias had for many years been praying for a son (Lk. 1:13), but when the announcement came, he doubted God's power to do this. When something wonderful happens sometimes the most surprised individual on earth is that very Christian who has been fervently praying for it to happen. However, there is no reason to believe that Mary had been praying to become the mother of Jesus.

Another classic example is found in the book of Acts. Peter was in prison awaiting execution, and when the Jerusalem believers heard of it, *"prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him"* (Acts 12:5). At God's command an angel staged a spectacular jailbreak. Upon being set free, Peter hurried to the prayer meeting to announce the good news. Note the amusing account: *"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished"* (Acts 12:12-16). Peter had a harder time getting into that prayer meeting than he had had getting out of prison.

3. The promise

"For with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk. 1:37).

Some twenty centuries previous to this, another woman had heard similar words: *"Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son"* (Gen. 18:14).

This little chorus perhaps says it best:

*“Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can’t tunnel through?
Listen! God specializes in things thought impossible.
What He’s done for others, He’ll do for you!”*

4. The submission

“Then Mary said, ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Lk. 1:38).

Mary’s attitude here was similar to that as expressed by the prophet Isaiah some seven centuries prior:

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isa. 6:8).

In fact, her words on this occasion can be likened to her instructions to some servants over three decades later during the wedding at Cana:

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (Jn. 2:1-3, 5).

- Mary’s thoughts regarding the incarnation:

- A. “Visited by an angel of God!”
- B. “My Son, yet to be conceived in my body, will eventually rule over Israel forever!”
- C. “My Son will have no earthly father!”
- D. “He will be worshipped by shepherds and wise men from afar!”

- Little wonder we are told:

“But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).

Without a doubt this young mother had more to ponder than any other person in human history! Consider:

- A. As she held the newly born baby, she knew He was already infinitely older than His mother and as old as His Father.
 - B. As she fed the tiny infant, she realized she was nursing the One who had once fed the animals in the Garden of Eden, and her ancestors in the wilderness of Sinai. In essence, she was providing food for the Bread of Life.
 - C. As she washed His soiled diapers, she might have pondered, “This is incredible; I am doing this thankless, unpleasant task which only a mother might do, for the One who made the sun, moon, and stars, including both my husband and myself!”
- In light of all this, Luke 2:7 might well be the greatest single verse in all the Bible!

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

- In the latter part of 1971 an American astronaut named James Irwin wrote a book entitled, *Moon Walk*, which described how he had once left a beautiful and hospitable planet called “Earth” (on July 26, 1971), and by way of a special vehicle (*Apollo 15*), had, thirteen days later, touched down upon a dangerous and totally inhospitable planet known as the moon. For three days he walked its rough surface and then returned home. If rightly understood, the incarnation could well be entitled, *God’s Earth Walk*, for it relates the amazing story of how Jesus Christ once left a beautiful and blessed place known as Heaven, where He had constantly enjoyed being worshipped by all the angels (Heb. 1:6), and by way of a special vehicle (the body being prepared for Him in Mary’s womb), had touched down upon a sin-loving and God-hating planet called Earth. For the next thirty-three-plus years, He traveled its dusty roads, agreeing to eat our food, to drink our water, to breathe our air, to go to the cross and have His face covered with our spittle, and His ears filled with our curses in order to save us from our sins! THIS IS THE STORY AND GLORY OF THE INCARNATION !

- To rephrase the familiar nursery rhyme:

*Mary had a little Lamb, His life was pure as snow.
And everywhere the Father led, the Lamb was sure to go.
He followed Him to Calvary, one dark and dreadful day,
And there the Lamb that Mary had washed all my sins away.*

- A half century later the Apostle Paul was doing a little “pondering” of his own concerning the promised regenerating and ultimate restoring of his beloved but unbelieving Israel. Surely his glorious conclusion would be in total harmony of that of Mary in regard to the incarnation:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Rom. 11:33-36).

- Well-known Christian author, Max Lucado, poses twenty-five questions for Mary in his book, *God Came Near*:

1. What was it like watching him pray?
2. How did he respond when he saw other kids giggling during the service at the synagogue?
3. When he saw a rainbow, did he ever mention a flood?
4. Did you ever feel awkward teaching him how he created the world?
5. When he saw a lamb being led to the slaughter, did he act differently?

6. Did you ever see him with a distant look on his face as if he were listening to someone you couldn't hear?
7. How did he act at funerals?
8. Did the thought ever occur to you that the God to whom you were praying was asleep under your own roof?
9. Did you ever try to count the stars with him . . . and succeed?
10. Did he ever come home with a black eye?
11. How did he act when he got his first haircut?
12. Did he have any friends by the name of Judas?
13. Did he do well in school?
14. Did you ever scold him?
15. Did he ever have to ask a question about Scripture?
16. What do you think he thought when he saw a prostitute offering to the highest bidder the body he made?
17. Did he ever get angry when someone was dishonest with him?
18. Did you ever catch him pensively looking at the flesh of his own arm while holding a clod of dirt?
19. Did he ever wake up afraid?
20. Who was his best friend?
21. When someone referred to Satan, how did he act?
22. Did you ever accidentally call him Father?
23. What did he and his cousin John talk about as kids?
24. Did his other brothers and sisters understand what was happening?
25. Did you ever think, *That's God eating my soup?*

REFLECTIONS FROM HER LIFE

How wonderful this time of prayer has been! Kneeling here in this upper room I think of Joseph. If only he could have lived to see the day. He would have certainly stood alongside me at the cross and then shared my joy over the empty tomb. (Jn. 19:25; Acts 1:13, 14)

I know the relief that would have been his concerning the conversion of his other sons. Of course, it was that glorious resurrection appearance to James that opened their eyes. But who knows, perhaps he is aware of all things anyway. (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7; Jas. 1:1; Jude 1:1)

What memories are mine. The angelic announcement. The shepherds and those very interesting men from the Far East. Simeon's strange prophecy—which now I understand all too well! The Temple episode when Jesus was but 12. And that wedding of all weddings in Cana. (Mt. 2:11; Lk. 1:28-35; 2:15, 16, 34, 35, 46-50; Jn. 2:1-10)

John has been so kind, providing for my every need as he was instructed to do. I think I'm beginning to understand the special attachment my Son felt for him. (Jn. 19:25-27)

But enough of memories. Back to prayer: Dear Father, how can a mere mortal even begin to thank you for the priceless privilege of giving birth to the world's blessed Redeemer? As I once helped raise Him, accept my vow to totally serve Him till the day of my death. My prayer to you as a young virgin in Nazareth is still my prayer today: I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever He wants. (Lk. 1:38; 2:7, 40, 51, 52)

People are beginning to move about. Apparently the prayer session is over. I see Simon Peter standing to his feet, ready to address us. I must give him my undivided attention. (Acts 1:15)