

Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ

By Sheikh Odeh A. Muhawesh

Mary the daughter of Imran (Hebrew Imram) is a name that brings peace and love to the soul of every Muslim. The Holy Quran speaks of a woman who was elected by the Almighty God to give birth to Allah's spirit, Jesus the Messiah. Mary, is a name so revered in the world of Islam that her name is given to women in most households.

In the second chapter of the Quran, Al-Baqarah, "The Cow", Jesus, who is a prophet in Islam, is honorably called "the son of Mary (2:87). In the next chapter in the Quran, The Family of Imran, Mary is given distinction over all women of the world (3:33-34). God tells us how Imran's wife prayed that the child in her womb would be dedicated to His service. That child was Mary. Imran's wife also prayed that Mary and her offspring would be kept safe from Satan. God answered this prayer. When Imran's wife brought baby Mary to the temple in fulfillment of her promise to God that the child in her womb would be dedicated to His service, a dispute occurred between the priests as to who will care for this holy child. Zechariah, who was the only present prophet, wanted to protect baby Mary so he requested that custody of the child is given to him (3:44). God tells us that it was by His will Zechariah was given custody of Mary after this dispute. Mary grew up "pure and beautiful". When Zechariah would see how Mary was doing at her place of worship (perhaps in the Temple of Jerusalem as is described in some apocryphal books not in the New Testament, such as the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary), he would always find fresh food that was often out of its season. When Zechariah asked Mary about the food, Mary responded that Allah had sent her the food (3:35-37). Upon hearing this, Zechariah himself prayed for virtuous offspring, so Allah granted him a son, John the Baptizer (3:38-41).

The Family of Imran chapter also relates how Mary was informed by the Angels that Allah had purified her and given her distinction among women. The Angels also directed Mary to pray with devotion to her Lord and bow down in prayer (3:42-43) for this lofty position is only given to those who are near to God, and who devote themselves to Him. The Angels also told Mary the good news that she would give birth to a son whom Allah called "His Word". His name would be The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary. Jesus would be an honorable man, "one of the righteous ones", and be one of the nearest to Allah. From the cradle, he would speak to people (3:45-46). The apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas tells of Jesus speaking from the cradle as well, although the character of the child Jesus differs in this apocryphal gospel from the description in the Quran.

Mary, of course, didn't understand how she could have a son when she was a chaste virgin. The Angels replied that Allah creates whatever He wants (3:47). The Angels continued that Jesus would be given wisdom by Allah, Who would teach Jesus about the book of Abraham, the Torah, and the Gospel. Mary also learned that Jesus the Messiah would be the Messenger of Allah to the Israelites, and how he would show Israel many miracles. (3:48-49).

The events described above in The Family of Imran chapter are similar though not identical to some events described in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, as well as the apocryphal Gospel of the Nativity of Mary and the apocryphal Infancy Gospel Matthew.

Chapter 19 of the Quran, titled Mary or "Maryam", begins by stating the story of the blessing Allah gave to Zechariah in his old age (19:2). After blessing Zechariah with a son, John the Baptizer (19:7), the Quran gives the story of how Mary, who had been taken care of by Zechariah, gave birth to Jesus. The story of how the Angel, who Allah calls "Our Spirit", and who was in the shape of a "well-formed human being" is mentioned again (19:16-21). After this, the Quran goes on to relate that Mary, before conceiving her son, left her family to a distant, solitary place in the East. When the labor pains of childbirth began, Mary, with only a palm tree for company, became sad. She declared, "*Would that I had died long before and passed into oblivion*" (19:22-23). But her baby, Jesus, declared to her "*Don't be sad*", and with those comforting words told her of the stream of water her Lord had just caused to flow at her feet. The infant went on to tell Mary that if she were to shake the trunk of the palm tree, fresh ripe dates would be provided for her. "*Eat, drink and rejoice*", exclaimed the baby Jesus to his mother. "*Should you see a person going by, tell him that on this day you have promised the Beneficent Allah to fast and not to talk to any human being*" (19:24-26).

For this reason, many Muslim women believe it is recommended to eat dates immediately after giving birth to a child. It is also a common Muslim practice for either of the parents to take a very small amount from a date and put it on the new born baby's tongue before it is given milk for the first time.

Mary then brought the baby Jesus to her people and they said, "*Mary, this is indeed a very strange thing! Sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother unchaste*". When Mary pointed to the baby, her people responded by saying "*How can we talk to a baby in the cradle?*" (19:27-29). Then, the baby Jesus declared to the people, "*I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and has appointed me to be a Prophet. He has blessed me no matter where I dwell, and commanded me to worship Him and pay the religious tax for as long as I live. He has commanded me to be good to my mother and has not made me an arrogant, rebellious person. I was born in peace and I shall die in peace, and be brought to life again in peace*". The Quran declares this to be the "*true story of Jesus the son of Mary, about which they dispute bitterly*" (9:30-34).

Chapter Al-Anbiya, the Prophets, states: "*Into the woman who maintained her chastity We breathed Our Spirit and made her and her son a miracle for mankind*" (21:91). This passage can be taken as a summary of what the Quran teaches about the Virgin Mary and

her boy child, Jesus the Messiah (Peace be upon them both). It is a statement on which both Muslims and Christians agree, and therefore the story of the Virgin Mary may be a place for Muslims and Christians to begin friendly dialogue.

Muslim scholars agree that Mary was spoken to by the angels. The Quran describes her as *Siddiqa*, which is one who believes and never tells a lie. The common belief in Sunni Islam is that angels only speak directly to Prophets; however, Shia Muslim scholars state that angels speak to prophets and other chosen humans if there is a purpose for such speech. They give the undisputed story of the angel speaking to Mary as proof of their argument.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, may the peace of the lord be upon her and her son, Jesus the Messiah who shall return to save all humans and establish the kingdom of God, and may she intercede for us with God on the Day of Judgment.