

MARY of SCRIPTURE

An easy-format way to see everything that Scripture actually records.

1. INTRODUCTION – the sources

Refocusing

Whether Mary features a lot or little in your Christian life it is good to go back to the Mary of Scripture to refocus on what we reliably know of her. A response to Mary that is true to Scripture requires first that we look at her afresh *in* Scripture.

The Mud-before-Gates Error

An urban child visited a farm.

- ‘Why’, she asked, ‘do they put the gates by the muddy bits?’
She misunderstood because she failed to learn *which came first*.

Of all Scriptural topics it is over Mary that we are most likely to fall for the mud-before-gates error. It is for *that* reason that I have dealt with the Scriptures concerning her not in the order in which they are printed in your New Testament, but in the order in which they were written.

My First Century Approach

Christians have inherited 2,000 years’ accumulation of material about Mary from nativity plays to dogmas. This rich and varied heritage, some of it negative, some of it positive, makes it very easy to read *back into* Scripture things that are not there. We tend to interpret Scripture in the light of what we know in the 21st. century, not as the writers and readers in the 1st. century.

For some, who would *not* naturally be inclined to look at Mary in Scripture, the material concerning her is likely to strike them as richer and more varied than the well-known Christmas stories suggest. For those who know rather more about Mary, an impartial and fresh look at Scripture might well reveal facets rarely mentioned.

Let me now explain the different orders within the New Testament.

a) The ORDER OF EVENTS

The New Testament. books are printed in a sensible order.

Because the Life of Jesus Christ preceded the lives of the Early Christians, so the books about the life of Jesus are printed *before* the letters to the young churches.

Your New Testament has two main groups of books, the GOSPELS and the EPISTLES, and they are printed in that sequence, because the Gospels are about Jesus, while the Epistles are about living as Jesus' followers after his Resurrection

We are so used to the order

- GOSPELS – EPISTLES, that the order
- EPISTLES – GOSPELS seems back-to-front!

b) The ORDER WRITTEN

But the order EPISTLES-GOSPELS *is* a logical one, for it is the order in which (generally speaking) the two groups were written.

Thus, for instance, the earliest account of the Last Supper is that written by St. Paul in I Corinthians, rather than the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. [I Corinthians 11:23-26]

[I need to mention at this point that it is my practice in all my writing, unless discussing authorship, to use as author-names those that are most familiar and obvious to the majority of readers.]

c) The BOOKS IN ORDER

If the individual New Testament books were placed *in the order written* their existing order would also be radically changed. St. Paul's letter to the Galatians would come before the Gospels, and Mark would replace Matthew as the earliest Gospel.

- **I shall deal with the nine major Mary-passages in the New Testament in the likely order in which they were written.**

When we do this we come very much *closer* to the authors and their writings – as you will see! When the books containing the nine major Mary-passages are arranged in chronological order they come out not as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts and Galatians, but as:

- Galatians
- Mark
- Matthew
- Luke-Acts
- John

d) The NINE ‘MARY’ PASSAGES [1] to [9]

- For clarity I shall designate each of the nine Mary-passages by square-bracketed numbers, [1],[2],[3],[4],[5],[6],[7],[8] and [9] and will do so throughout this article.

The nine passages [1]-[9] vary enormously in length. [1] is a single verse, while [4] and [5] are each two chapters. The nine Mary-passages are as follows:

[1] [Galatians 4:4](#) ‘BORN OF WOMAN’

[2] [Mark 3:31-35](#) MOTHER & BROTHERS ARRIVE

[There is no need in this [1]-[9] list of Mary-passages to include Mark-based parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. (see Matthew 12:46-50 & Luke 8:19-21). But I shall later comment on any important differences.]

[3] [Mark 6:3-4](#) ‘SON OF MARY?’

[There is no need in this [1] – [9] list of Mary-passages to include the Mark-based parallel passages in Matthew and Luke (see Matthew 13:55-58 and Luke 4:22-24). But I shall later comment on any important differences.]

[4] [Matt 1:1–2:23](#) MATTHEW’S CHRISTMAS STORIES (5 incidents)

[5] [Luke 1:5-2:40](#) LUKE’S CHRISTMAS STORIES (6 incidents)

[6] [Luke 2:41-52](#) JESUS AGED 12 AT THE TEMPLE

[7] [Acts 1:14](#) MARY AWAITS THE SPIRIT

[8] [John 2:1-12](#) MARY AT THE WEDDING

[9] [John 19:25-27](#) MARY AT THE CROSS

[There is no need to list separately Matthew and Luke's use of [2] and [3].]

Some of the following **points about the nine Mary-passages** may strike you as surprising -

- in the Epistles there is no naming or any *direct* mention of Mary at all [1].
- Mark, the earliest gospel has *no* Christmas stories; Mary appears briefly only once [2] and is later named [3].
- Matthew and Luke each add to Mark’s story (which they both incorporated) two whole chapters of Christmas stories [4] and [5]. Each very different from the other.
- Mary appears in Luke's Acts awaiting the empowering of the Spirit at Pentecost [7].
- John tells no Christmas stories, but adds Mary-incidents at the start and end of Jesus’ ministry [8] & [9].

2. MARY IN THE EPISTLES

[1] ‘BORN OF WOMAN’, Galatians 4:4

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...

- This very important text about Christ says nothing about Mary. It is not a direct reference to her and does not name her.
- *Born of a woman* means that Jesus is **fully human**, not a divine spook as some thought (see e.g. 1 John.4:2, John 1:14).

[1 John 4:2 - **By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...**

John 1:14 - **And the Word became flesh and lived among us...**]

3. MARY IN MARK'S GOSPEL

[2] JESUS' MOTHER & BROTHERS ARRIVE, Mark 3:31-35

Then his [Jesus'] mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' ³³And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'*

*Other ancient authorities lack *and sisters*

Mark gave the reason for the family visit a little earlier in 3:20-21 ...*Then he [Jesus] went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'.*

- It was part of Jesus' natural teaching technique to use an interruption to his advantage as a means of teaching. When, for instance, a woman calls out in the crowd '*Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you*' Jesus uses the interruption to make the very same point: '*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!*' [Luke 11:27-28]
- *People were saying...* The Greek simply has *they said* that Jesus is mad. Translators sometimes retain the vagueness, others opt to interpret it either as the people or Jesus' family. You may feel that the context here and Mark's next Mary-passage [3] suggests which it is.

[3] 'THE SON OF MARY?' Mark 6:2-4

They said 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him.*

⁴ *Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'*

*Other ancient authorities read *son of the carpenter*.

- *The son of Mary.* Mark is the first New Testament writer to reveal **Mary's name**, and, most appropriately, it comes in Mark's description of her relation to Jesus.
- *The brother of James and Joses, etc.* Mark mentioned **Jesus' brothers**, but he was not the earliest writer in the New Testament to do so. Paul mentioned them in Galatians 1:19 and I Corinthians 9:5

[Galatians 1:19 –

I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

I Corinthians 9:5 -

Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?]

- ***and are not his sisters here with us?*** Mark mentions Jesus' **sisters**, but both Matthew and Luke do not copy that detail.
- Note that Mark records Jesus' teaching about a prophet's *triple* rejection –
 1. ***in their home town***
 2. ***among their own kin.***
 3. ***in their own house.***

Note specially the reference to his own **kin**. This will arise later when we see Matthew's and Luke's use of Mark.

Comment and summary of Mary passages [1], [2] & [3]

In the earliest written half of the New Testament we learn from the Mary-passages [1] in Paul, and [2] & [3] in Mark that

- Jesus's Mother was called Mary and she had a fair-sized family.
- During Jesus' ministry there was one incident which showed some tension between Jesus and his family, (perhaps even to the extent of their thinking him mad).

To us Christians after two thousand years of Christian history, it is difficult to put ourselves back into the year a.d. 60-70. Christians living at that time knew nothing of Christ's birth, and enjoyed only Mark's recently-written Gospel. The two points (above) were probably **all that was then widely known about Mary.**

There were no Christmas stories in wide circulation. But Matthew and, later, Luke began writing and all that changed! Let's see why.

Why the change?

- Mark set out to write about ***Jesus Christ, the Son of God*** (1:1). Mark began his story when Jesus was about thirty [Luke 3:23] at his Baptism in the River Jordan. On that occasion the Holy Spirit descended on him, and God affirmed '***You are my Son, the Beloved.***' [Mark.1: 10-11]

As the Holy Spirit led Christians ever more deeply into the truth of Jesus' person and work, so new and important questions arose.

- Did Jesus *receive* divinity, as a gift from God at his Baptism? - as Mark's story seemed to imply?
- Was Jesus a man who *became* God at the age of 30?
- Or was Jesus God himself?

Writers after Mark, sought to find the answer in Jesus' origins.

First a Jew (Matthew) and then a Gentile (Luke) found and collected the best material they could that ***threw light on Jesus' beginnings and made clearer who he was.***

- **THAT** was the new important topic in the 70's, 80's and 90's of the first century

4. MARY IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

[4] MATTHEW'S CHRISTMAS STORIES Chapters 1-2

This two-chapter Mary-passage has five sections as follows, and I shall later quote the main parts of each.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| [4] i. <i>Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham</i> | (1:1-17) |
| [4] ii. <i>Jesus' Spirit-conception & Birth</i> | (1:18-25) |
| [4] iii. <i>Jesus is worshipped by the 'Wise Men'</i> | (2:1-12) |
| [4] iv. <i>Jesus escapes King Herod's massacre</i> | (2:13-18) |
| [4] v. <i>Jesus is returned to Nazareth</i> | (2:19-23) |

In Matthew's Christmas stories three things stand out –

- These events **fulfil** Old Testament prophecy.
[Matthew has five quotes as from the Old Testament – 1:23, 2:6, 2:15, 2:18, 2.23.
They are :
 1. In [4] ii. : **All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel'. Isaiah 7:14.**
 2. In [4] iii. : **'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' ' Micah 5:2.**
 3. In [4] iv. : **This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' Hosea 11:1.**
 4. In [4] iv. : **Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.' Jeremiah 31:15**
 5. In [4] v. : **...so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'** Matthew uses the plural 'prophets' here and may be expressing the general theme that the Messiah will be *despised* (e.g.Psalm 22:6, Isaiah 53:3) which the town 'Nazareth' almost stood for. This is not an O.T. quotation as such. Another theory is that Matthew is writing on the theme of the *branch* on the basis of Isaiah 11:1.]
- Joseph is carefully **guided** by God in his care of the ***child and his mother***.
- Mary **obeys** in a passive role. (For instance, Matthew records no words of hers.)

Joseph

Matthew's account of Joseph shows that it is he who listens to God and obeys him. Mary has perhaps the more difficult task; her role is to obey Joseph whom God regularly guides at key times.

- Joseph is told to take Mary as his wife. [Matthew 1:20]
- Joseph is told of Mary's Spirit-conception. [Matthew 1.20]

- Joseph is told the child will be a son, to name him Jesus, and why. [Matthew 1:21]
- Joseph is told of Herod's intentions and how to escape them. [Matthew 2:13]
- Joseph is told when to leave Egypt for Israel. [Matthew 2:20]
- Joseph is then told to move to Galilee. [Matthew 2:22]

A) MARY IN MATTHEW'S FIVE CHRISTMAS SECTIONS/STORIES

[4] i. Jesus' genealogy to Abraham (Mt. 1:1-17)

The climax of the Matthew genealogy runs :

*Jacob the father of Joseph
the husband of Mary,*

of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. [Matthew 1:16]

- The point of the genealogy is that history is the outworking of God's purposes.
- Mary comes at the historical climax of God's plan for our redemption.

[4] ii. Jesus' Spirit-conception and Birth (Mt. 1:18-25)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²²*All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*²³'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,'
which means, 'God is with us.'*

²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

- Matthew's Gospel-subject is **Jesus Christ**, but a picture of Mary begins to emerge. Jesus is Spirit-conceived and Mary-born: a miracle for which Isaiah 7:14 begins to prepare us.
- What Matthew says about the marital relationship of Mary and Joseph, if we read with the eyes of his mid first-century readers, is perfectly clear.

[Note: My purpose here is to let the sacred **Scriptures speak for themselves**, not to raise 21st. century issues of which Matthew and his readers were unaware. I would make a mud-before-gates error if I read theories into Matthew's writing which only arose much much later!]

[4] iii. Jesus is worshipped by the Wise Men. (Mt. 2:1-12)

This familiar story tells of magi coming from the east to find the *king of the Jews*. King Herod gets details from them in order to annihilate the threat to his throne. Under the guidance of a star they come to Bethlehem –

...they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- This Gentile story comes surprisingly in the Jewish Matthew. Its message is that this child is worthy of **worship**! Used as we are to pictures entitled ‘The Mother and Child’, this truth of who Jesus was is underlined by the way both Matthew and God's messengers repeatedly speak of – *the child and his mother*.

[4] iv. Jesus Escapes King Herod's Massacre. (Mt. 2:13-18)

[4] v. Jesus is Returned to Nazareth. (Mt. 2:19-23)

- Joseph is guided to take *the child and his mother* to Egypt and returns to Galilee and to Nazareth. In these two sections *the child and his mother* are mentioned four times. [2:13, 2:14, 2:20, 2:21.]
- Mary undergoes persecution for the safety and sake of Jesus.

B) MARY IN THE REST OF MATTHEW

Matthew copied much of Mark but felt free occasionally to make things clearer if necessary. For example in the Mary-passage number [2] (above), he sensibly changes Mark's *those who sat around him* [Jesus] to *disciples*. It is shorter, simpler, and it replaces their *spatial* relationship to Jesus by their *spiritual* relationship to him. [Matthew 12:49-50. Because it is an occasion about relationships and kinship to Jesus, Matthew sensitively changes Mark's **God** to **Father in heaven**.]

Of real importance, however, are Matthew's very few but **deliberate omissions**.

- Of Mark's first 150 verses Matthew retained no less than 146 of them!
- He omits Mark's reference to the people/Jesus' family, saying '*He has gone out of his mind.*' [Mark 3:21] There was no pastoral or evangelistic reason for spreading it further. It ran contrary to his proclamation of who Jesus was.
 - Matthew also does not copy from Mark Jesus' triple-rejection statement in full, but omits Jesus' reference to his family, i.e. *...among his own kin* (as I noted in dealing with [3] above). [Compare Mark 6:4 with Matthew 13:57].

While these show Matthew is willing to edit Mark of embarrassing material, he feels no reason to adjust in any way the many references to Mary's later family.

Comment and Summary

Matthew's Mary

Before turning to Luke's Gospel, let's summarise the main points about Matthew's account of Mary.

- Mary's birth of Jesus is the culmination of God's workings in the Old Testament.
- Joseph has the active role in the Christmas stories.
- Mary is passively portrayed. She obeys Joseph. No words of hers are recorded.
- Jesus is Spirit-conceived in Mary's womb (note Isaiah 7:14).
- Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem fulfilling Micah 5:2.
- The child is no ordinary child but one to be worshipped.
- Joseph forgoes marital relations with Mary until after Jesus' birth.
- Jesus' parents suffer persecution because of him.
- Matthew 'softens' any hints of rejection by Jesus' family.

As we turn to sections [5], [6], [7], [8] and [9] we're on much more familiar ground for studying Mary in the New Testament.

5. MARY IN LUKE'S WRITINGS (Gospel & Acts)

[5] MARY IN LUKE'S GOSPEL CHRISTMAS STORIES, Luke 1:5 – 2:40

This two-chapter Mary-passage has six sections, and I shall quote the main parts of each

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| [5] i. <i>John's future birth is told to Zechariah</i> | (Lk.1:5-25) |
| [5] ii. <i>Jesus's future birth is told to Mary</i> | (Lk. 1:26-38) |
| [5] iii. <i>John's mother-to-be is visited by Mary</i>
(including Mary's Song, vvs. 46-55) | (Lk.1:39-56) |
| [5] iv. <i>John's birth and naming</i>
(including Zechariah's Song, vvs. 68-79) | (Lk. 1:57-80) |
| [5] v. <i>Jesus' birth and shepherds' visit</i>
(including the Angel's Song, v. 14) | (Lk. 2:1–20) |
| [5] vi <i>Jesus' naming and presentation to God</i>
(including Simeon's song, vvs. 29-32) | (Lk. 2:21-40) |

In Luke's Christmas stories two things stand out –

- The Births of John the Baptist and Jesus are very closely related.
- ***For nothing will be impossible with God.*** (Luke 1:37) The 'impossibility' of Elizabeth's birth of John paves the way for Mary – and Luke's readers – for the even greater 'impossibility' of Mary's birth of the Saviour.

A PENTECOST PREVIEW!

What is not obvious from the mere listing of topics but what becomes so clear when reading the passages is that these events are **primarily the work of the Holy Spirit.**

- John *even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit* [Luke 1:15]
- Both Elizabeth and Zechariah became *filled with* the Spirit. [Luke 1:41, 1:67]
- Of Simeon, we read *the Holy Spirit rested on him* and that it was by the Holy Spirit that it was *revealed to him* that he would not see death before seeing the Lord's Messiah. [Luke 2:25, 2:26] The Holy Spirit led Simeon to Jesus [Luke 2:27]
- Above all, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary that will result in the birth of Jesus. [Luke 1:35]

This is **doubly** emphasised by God's messenger in the two lines of verse running in parallel.
'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and
the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

The prophet Joel had written

***I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves, [handmaids]
in those days, I will pour out my spirit [Joel 2:28-29]***

Luke begins his Gospel with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as he would begin his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

Among the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in particular are:

- An outburst of songs and vision and prophecy among the key characters. There are the four great songs which 2,000 years later mean so much to Christ's followers – Mary's, Zechariah's, the Angels' and Simeon's. (They are often known by their Latin names: the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, the *Gloria* and the *Nunc Dimittis*).
[Mary's Song - Luke 1:46-55. Zechariah's Song – Luke 1:67-79. Angels' Song – Luke 2:14. Simeon's Song – Luke 2:28-32.]
- In addition there is Elizabeth's outburst in praise of Mary, and John's joyous leaping in Elizabeth's womb.
[Elizabeth's praise – Luke 1:42; John's dance for joy – Luke 1:44
Elizabeth's praise was used as the 'Hail Mary' until the 16th. century when an additional intercession, the 'Holy Mary' was added. Today there are moves towards using Elizabeth's Song in its original, shorter and wholly Biblical form.]

A. LUKE'S SIX CHRISTMAS INCIDENTS [5] (i) to (vi)

[5] i. John's Birth is Foretold to Zechariah (Luke. 1:5-25)

God's pattern of enabling the 'impossible' birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth is paralleled in his enabling the even more 'impossible' birth of Jesus to Mary.

We can see the way Elizabeth's story is in large measure echoed by Mary's.

- Elizabeth is a descendant of *Aaron*; Mary is a descendant of *David*. [Luke 1:5, and 1:27]
- Elizabeth is '*righteous before God*'; Mary is God's *favoured one*. [Luke 1:6 and 1:28]
- Elizabeth *had no children* and was *barren*; Mary says '*I am a virgin*'. [Luke 1:7 and 1:34]
- God's *angel* comes to Zechariah; God's *angel* comes to Mary. [Luke 1:11 and 1:26-28]
- Both Zechariah and Mary are – **afraid**, told **not to fear**, and **promised a son**. [Luke 1:12-13 and 1:29-31]
- Zechariah asks '*How will I know?*'; Mary asks '*How can this be?*' [Luke 1:18 and Luke 1:34]
- Zechariah is told to **name his son John**; Mary is told to **name her son Jesus**. [Luke 1:13 and 1:31]

- The angel tells Zechariah '*He will be great*'; The angel tells Mary, '*He will be great.*' [Luke 1:15 and 1:32]
- Before his birth John will be *filled with the Holy Spirit*; before Jesus' birth the Holy Spirit will *come upon* and *overshadow* Mary. [Luke 1:15 and 1:35]

After this long series of parallels **the similarity is shattered!**

While Zechariah doubts and cannot believe;

- Mary **believes and agrees!** [Luke 1:18, 20 and Luke 1:38]

While Zechariah is made divinely dumb

- Mary *rejoices in God my Saviour!* [Luke 1:20 and 1:47]

[5] ii. Jesus' Birth is Foretold to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38)

After seeing the very deliberate parallel and linking of Elizabeth's and Mary's experiences, it is particularly interesting that this famous passage begins by dating itself according to Elizabeth's pregnancy – *in the sixth month* – 'or in **her** sixth' month to be more precise.

²⁶*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,*
²⁷*to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* ²⁸*And he came to her and said,*
'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'

[The phrase '*full of grace*' derives from Jerome's (4th cent.) Latin error *gratia plena*. It has not been used in any English translation of the Greek New Testament since almost a century *before* the Authorised Version of 1611. Even the Jerusalem Bible has *you who enjoy God's favour.*]

²⁹*But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.* ³⁰*The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.*
³¹*And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*
³²*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.* ³³*He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'*

Then comes the earliest record of Mary's words in the New Testament.

[Mary's words throughout this article are in blue.]

³⁴*Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'* ³⁵*The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.* ³⁶*And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.* ³⁷*For nothing will be impossible with God.'* ³⁸*Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'* Then the angel departed from her.

- This is Mary's great 'YES' of affirmation and active co-operation with God's will (some use the Latin word '*fiat*'). While in Mark's earlier account (see [2]) Mary

seems somewhat separated from Jesus’ spiritual family who *do the will of God*, here, she is the one who obeys God’s will *par excellence*!

- Mary’s ‘yes’ has value only because she (like us) was free to say ‘no’. God has no puppets and does not manipulate us his chosen.
- God’s choice of Mary and Mary’s obedience to God must be held together. God placed his plans in the hands of Mary knowing that it is into his hands that she would choose to place her own!
- Mary’s ‘yes’ is a ‘yes’ to God; a ‘yes’ to Jesus; and a ‘yes’ to the Holy Spirit.

[5] iii. John's Mother-to-be is Visited by Mary. (Lk. 1:39-56)

³⁹*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,*
⁴⁰*where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*
⁴²*and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?*
⁴⁴*For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy.*
⁴⁵*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'*

- We have already noted the important role of the Holy Spirit in these stories.
- Note the lovely but too-little-used title of Mary ‘*the mother of my Lord*’.

Mary responds not to Elizabeth but to God in the words most readers will know as the **Magnificat**.

- Oddly there is no reference to Jesus.
- Mary, like us, sees God as her *Saviour*.

⁴⁶*My soul magnifies the Lord,*
⁴⁷*and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*
⁴⁸*for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹*for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰*His mercy is for those who fear him*
from generation to generation.
⁵¹*He has shown strength with his arm;*
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵²*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,*
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*
⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'*

- In verses 51-53 we see God's inversion of things: he rejects the powerful but he accepts the *lowly*.
- God's choice of Mary to be the mother of the Messiah is, of course, the supreme example of this.

[5] iv. John's Birth and Naming, (Lk. 1:57-80)

Mary is not mentioned in this section. Luke tells how -

- Elizabeth's child is born; how she names him John; how Zechariah's dumbness is broken and how, Spirit-filled, Zechariah prophesies and praises the God who has *raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David*.

[5] v. Jesus' Birth & the Shepherds' Visit. (Lk. 2:1-20)

Joseph went to his own town, Bethlehem.

⁵*He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

- *Firstborn* simply means the child that '*opens the womb*'
[See later in this chapter, 2:23. as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord']

It implies nothing either way about later children.

To pick up the familiar story later on when Mary is part of it.

After angelic guidance the shepherds find

¹⁶*...Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.*

After they have left

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

- Mary's reaction is private and important: Luke records Mary also doing this when Jesus was twelve years old. (See Mary-passage [6])
- None but the closest source to Mary could reveal this.

[5] vi. The Naming & Presentation of Jesus to the Lord (Lk. 2:21-40)

After Jesus' circumcision, Jesus is named and Mary & Joseph offer sacrifice. Being too poor to afford a sheep they take the option of *a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons*. [Leviticus 12:7-8]

The Holy Spirit prompts the aged Simeon to go to the Temple, where Mary and Joseph have taken the baby Jesus.

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God. [Luke 2:28]

His Song of Praise (the '*Nunc Dimittis*') makes no reference to Mary, but leads Mary and Joseph to be *amazed at what was being said about him*. [Luke 2:33]

- Then come the first-recorded human words addressed to Mary – words both of promise and of pain. Simeon *said to his mother Mary,*

'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Next, in this account, the aged Anna recognises the child as God's instrument of redemption; Mary and Joseph complete the religious requirements and then return home to Nazareth in Galilee. [This was a summary of verses 36-39]

B. MARY IN THE REST OF LUKE

[6] JESUS AGED TWELVE AT THE TEMPLE, Luke 2:41-52

In this, the sixth [6] of the nine Mary-passages [1] – [9], Luke gives us the only record of Jesus between birth and ministry.

Jesus' parents went annually to Temple Passover. [Luke. 2:41] They took the 12-year-old Jesus, but when they left, Jesus remained there, unknown to them. [Luke 2: 42, 44] Mary and Joseph return to find Jesus with the teachers ⁴⁶...*listening to them and asking them questions.* ⁴⁷*And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* ⁴⁸*When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.'* ⁴⁹*He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'* ⁵⁰*But they did not understand what he said to them.*

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.

His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

- This has the New Testament's *first* recorded exchange between Mary and Jesus.
- Mary is happy to call Joseph *father*, so it is quite Biblical to term Mary and Joseph Jesus' 'parents'.

- There is a fair degree of tension in this incident. Mary and Joseph are *astonished* at Jesus' behaviour. His mother asks him *'Why have you treated us like this?'* When Jesus explains Luke states bluntly that *they did not understand*.
- This last comment should be treated seriously because as Luke is very sympathetic to Mary and records that *Mary treasured all these things in her heart*, the obvious assumption is that Luke was close to a source that knew how Mary felt., and that he knew of the parents' misunderstanding from that same source – perhaps even Mary herself.

Luke concludes these six great events with a single verse which summarises the next eighteen years of Jesus' life from the age of twelve to thirty:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years,
and in divine and human favour. [Luke 2:52]

LUKE'S MARY DURING JESUS' MINISTRY

Luke, who has more knowledge of Mary than any other author, modifies Mark's material in the same way as Matthew does:

Like Matthew, Luke omits Mark's references both to Jesus' madness, and Jesus' rejection by his own family. [Luke. 4:24 **No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.** Mark's **among their own kin and in their own house** is omitted.]

When Luke retold the visit of Jesus' family [2] he summarised it, and in so doing he reduced the apparent contrast between Jesus' family and Jesus' followers. [Luke 8:19-21, compare Mark 3:31-35].

Luke adds no Mary incident to this Mark based Gospel, but alone of the Gospel writers adds the account of the woman in the crowd who shouts out to Jesus *'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you!'* It tells us nothing about Mary.

[Luke 11:27-28. As Luke had earlier related that **all generations will call [Mary] blessed** (1:48), it is surprising that he relates Christ's mild rebuff of a person who indirectly does so! **'Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it'** (11.28). Interestingly Christ makes the same point as when his family visited him [2].]

C. MARY IN LUKE'S ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

[7] MARY AWAITS THE SPIRIT, Acts 1:14

This is the last recorded event in Mary's life, but it comes here at [7] not [9], because I am listing the passages **in the order written**, not the order in which they took place.

All these [the apostles whose names had been listed] *were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

Only Peter is named in the Pentecost narrative that follows, and the natural meaning is that Mary was there. Luke thus places Mary at the start both of his first volume, Luke's Gospel and his second volume the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke thereby shows Mary's unique experience of being both -

- at the Spirit-birth of the Lord Christ
- and at the Spirit-‘birth’ of Christ's Church.

Luke, neither in his Gospel nor later in the Acts, sees reason to modify or explain in any way Jesus' brothers.

Luke's picture of Mary prior to Pentecost suggests that –

- now any family tensions are resolved.
- Mary's place among the leading Christians is sure but not dominant.
- With her sons, she awaits the Spirit.
- The result of Mary's initial ‘yes’ to God, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit is on the verge of total fulfilment.
- Scripture tells us no more of the historical Mary. The woman who gives birth to a son in John's vision in Revelation is widely regarded as telling us nothing about Mary herself.

[Revelation 12. Verse 5 reads **she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God...**]

6. MARY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL JOHN'S CONTRIBUTION TO UNDERSTANDING JESUS

While Mark started his story at Christ's adult **Baptism**.

Matthew and Luke sought to answer the question about Jesus' person and origin by each independently going back to Christ's **nativity**. Matthew's new source depicted events mainly from Joseph's point of view, Luke's from Mary's.

When we come to John – there are **no Christmas stories** at all!

John does not tell us Christmas stories and leave us to guess their meaning, he is Spirit-inspired to tell us the **meaning** of Christmas and leaves us to guess its stories!

- John pushes the question of Jesus' origin and person back as far as it is possible to go – to **before Creation !**

In words that deliberately echo Genesis John writes:

In the beginning was the Word

...and the Word was God

...and the Word became flesh.[John 1:1, 14]

Unlike Matthew and Luke, John does not rely on Mark's account, so does not repeat the incidents in Mark's Mary-passages [2] and [3]. Nor does John use the name *Mary* which Mark first revealed.

John instead gives us **two incidents not written about before**. Both of them are at the very extreme ends of Jesus' ministry –

- **Mary at the Wedding in Cana** (Mary-passge [8]) [John 2:1-12]
and
- **Mary at the Cross of her Son** (Mary-passage [9]) [John 19:25-27]

[8] **MARY & JESUS AT THE WEDDING IN CANA, John 2:1-12**

¹*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.* ²*Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.* ³*When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'*

⁴*And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'* ⁵*His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'*

- Mary's 'intercession' to Jesus on behalf of her host and her injunction to obey him stand out in any study of Mary because they are her **only recorded words during Jesus' ministry**.

This last-recorded exchange between Jesus and Mary has similar tension to their exchange when Jesus was a 12-year old boy in the Temple (see Mary-passage [6])

- John does not call Jesus' mother '**Mary**'.
- John never records Jesus addressing her as '**mother**'.
- John always has Jesus address her as *woman*.

Then followed Jesus' first '**sign**', that of turning water into wine.
John then tells us:

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples;

[John 2:12]

- John, like Paul, Mark, Matthew and Luke before him, felt no need to explain or modify the references to Mary's family. John mentions *brothers* four times altogether.
- Thus the New Testament has (if we discount Matthew and Luke's copying of Mark) **eleven mentions** of Jesus' siblings. You may see the references for yourself in more detail –
 - [Paul mentions one **brother**, James (Galatians 1:19) and the **brothers** (I Corinthians 9:5).
 - Mark mentions Jesus' **brothers** twice (3:31 & 32) and calls Jesus the **brother** of James, Joses, Judas and Simon (6:3). Mark also twice mentions Jesus' **sisters** (3:32, 6:3).
 - Matthew and Luke each retell Mark's first mention of the family and so each mentions **brothers** twice (Matthew 12:46-47, Luke 8:19).
 - Luke, in Acts, mentions **brothers** once (1:14).
 - John mentions Jesus' **brothers** four times (2:12, 7:3, 7:5 & 7:10)In view of later theories that Mary remained a virgin *after* the birth of Jesus, it is important to set out this Biblical witness.
These **seventeen** references were made by **five** major authors over a period of perhaps **50** years. Eleven mentions were made **independently**. This constitutes strong evidence. There is no indication whatever that any of the New Testament authors felt any reservation about mentioning the **brothers/sisters** of Jesus, or that any explanation was necessary to account for them.
As far as Mary is concerned, it seems that the first-century Christians took Matthew's statement at its face value – and had no reason to do otherwise. ...**he** [Joseph] **took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.**(1:24-25).]
- It is important to spell this out clearly, since those who have inherited beliefs in Mary's *perpetual* virginity may too readily get the impression that those who do *not* hold that view do so as some sort of negative stance against them, their denomination, or Mary.

The stance taken is not negative but **positive**. Our primary source for knowing anything historical about Mary is **Scripture**. (We would not even know her name without it!) It cannot be in any way anti-Mary to take as paramount what Scripture teaches about her.

[9] MARY AT THE CROSS, John 19:25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.'*

²⁷ *Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*

- Scripture only depicts Mary as **standing** at the Cross, not swooning as much later art would so often depict her.
- Jesus' first concern seems not to be that John should comfort Mary, for he addresses Mary first.
- Not only is Mary not named, John does not name the disciple either. Perhaps John wishes us to think of them both slightly symbolically (as we are quite accustomed to view Peter as ‘the martyr’, or Paul ‘the missionary’)

If so,

His mother may point to Mary but also beyond her to God’s People of the **Old Covenant** whose goal was the coming of Christ.

The disciple may typify God’s People of the **New Covenant** created by Christ’s coming.

- Christ calls those of the Old Covenant to adopt the New;
- Christ calls those of the New Covenant to embrace the Old.

Each meets at the **Cross** and each derives its meaning from it.

My omission of Old Testament texts which throw light on the *meaning* of these Scriptures, like Hannah's 'Magnificat', is because my aim has been to collate and **assemble the New Testament's witness to Mary**, not to expound it.

It is when Christians with different views of Mary look together at the **Scriptures** concerning her that their differences are seen in their true perspective, and, indeed, often diminish. This gathering of the Mary-passages in Scripture makes one thing clear. The New Testament writers, like Mary herself, do not focus on her. They, like Mary, point always to Our Lord, and bid us ***Do whatever he tells you.***