

BETWEEN THE LINES™

DEEPER LOOK STUDY GUIDE

MARY: BLESSED AMONG WOMEN

The “Real” Mary

Without much fanfare or extended explanation, let me share with you a bit more of what recent historical and archeological studies have taught us about this one who was selected to be the one approached by the angel in Luke 1:26-38. These represent the statistics that we know of the average woman of her world.

Vital Statistics

Height:	It is unlikely that she was more than 5’00” tall.
Weight:	She probably did not weigh 100 lbs. at any time in her life.
Age:	It is almost certain that she was 14-15 years old at the most.
Education:	No formal education. As an illiterate, only what she had absorbed.
Vocation:	It was rare for any woman to have any role beyond wife/mother.
Complexion:	Clearly Mediterranean— olive to darker complexion, hair and eyes.
Economic Status:	Poverty level in a mostly impoverished society.
Life Expectancy:	After an infant mortality of 25+%, perhaps an average of 44 years +/-.

In Conclusion...

Does this surprise you? Does this shatter a bit of the image created by cards and carols through the years? Sorry about that, but this is the reality of her world as we know it from several centuries of scientific archeology exhaustive research.

Evolution or Deterioration?

On our broadcast, I briefly referred to Tim Perry’s recent (2006) book entitled *Mary for Evangelicals* published by *Intervarsity Press*. I shared that the progression of the chapter titles is, in itself, a telling listing of the changing attitudes about Mary throughout the centuries and continuing in our own time.

Without comment let me just list the thirteen chapter titles in order and allow you to see if the progression represents to you a higher evolution regarding Mary or a spiral of theological decline in the light of the Bible.

Progression/Regression?

Chapter 1:	“Anonymous Mother of the Heavenly Man: <i>Mary in the Letters of Paul</i> ”
Chapter 2:	“Ambiguous Protector of the Family: <i>Mary in the Gospel of Mark</i> ”
Chapter 3:	“Scandalous Mother of the Messiah: <i>Mary in the Gospel of Matthew</i> ”
Chapter 4:	“Poor Prophet, Pondering Mother, Persistent Disciple: <i>Mary in Luke/Acts</i> ”
Chapter 5:	“Woman of the Hour: <i>Mary in the Johannine [John’s] Literature</i> ”
Chapter 6:	“New Eve: <i>Patristic Roots of Mariology</i> ”
Chapter 7:	“Mother of God: <i>Formalizing the Patristic Heritage</i> ”
Chapter 8:	“Queen Mother: <i>Mary and the Medieval Imagination</i> ”
Chapter 9:	“Decline and Exaltation: <i>Mary from the Reformation to the Nineteenth Century</i> ”
Chapter 10:	“Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Church, Sister in the Struggle: <i>Mary Through the Twentieth Century to Today</i> ”
Chapter 11:	“Virgin Mother: <i>Mary in the Mystery of the Incarnation</i> ”
Chapter 12:	“Chosen One: <i>Toward a Doctrine of Mary’s Person</i> ”
Chapter 13:	“Advocate: <i>Toward a Doctrine of Mary’s Work</i> ”

Multiple, Varied Voices

Certainly history is replete with claims about this woman. In a previous *Deeper Look Study Guide* I spent some time reviewing various claims about Mary from a litany of Christian authors from all sides of the discussion.

Let's close this *Study Guide* with voices beyond the boundaries of mainstream Christianity. I believe you'll find this provocative and, perhaps, not at all what you might expect.

Islam

Mary, it may surprise you, is the only woman directly named in the Qur'an. She is declared to be *Ayat Allah* ("Sign of God") to humanity in 23:50. 66:12 declares that she was an "obedient one" who "guarded her chastity" (66:20) and was dedicated to Allah while still in her mother's womb. (3:36) It also affirms that she was cared for by Zakariya/Zacharias (3:37) and was protected and provided for by Allah as a "chosen one" in 3:37-42.

More than this, she is claimed to be a "purified one" (3:42), a "Truthful one" (5:75), a fulfillment of Prophecy (66:12), and "a vessel for the Spirit of God breathed into her." (66:12)

Curiously, Mary's "virgin birth" is also affirmed in the Qur'an...

*... Mary, when she retired from her family in an eastern place;
and she took a veil (to screen herself) from them, and we sent unto her our spirit;
and he took for her the semblance of a well-made man.
Said she, 'Verily, I take refuge in the Merciful One from thee, if thou art pious.'
Said he, 'I am only a messenger of thy Lord to bestow on thee a pure boy.'
Said she, 'How can I have a boy when no man has touched me, and when I am no harlot?'
He said, 'Thus says thy Lord, It is easy for Me!
and we will make him a sign unto man, and a mercy from us; for it is a decided matter.'
So she conceived him...*

-Sura 19:16-22

Deism

In 1823 Thomas Jefferson said,

"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus Christ by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classified with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

Judaism

Geza Vermes was born Jewish (1924) was baptized into Roman Catholicism (1931) but his parents died in the Holocaust anyway. Geza became a priest and a major scholar, but in 1957 he renounced Christianity and returned to Judaism. In 2004 he wrote:

"Matthew's gospel was written in about A.D. 80-90 for Christians who were not of Jewish provenance - that is, Gentiles who had no knowledge of Isaiah's original Hebrew. For them the passage announced, unambiguously, the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy: the miraculous birth of a divine being. But the prophet himself and readers of his original Hebrew sentence... would have found its mutation in Greek into one of the foundations of Christian doctrine quite baffling."

Discredited

Hans Kung remains a priest, but has been disallowed to teach "Catholic Theology" by the Vatican. In 1984 his book "On Being a Christian" stated,

"Although the virgin birth cannot be understood as a historical-biological event, it can be regarded as a meaningful symbol at least for that time."

In Conclusion...

Should we be surprised that claims about Mary are "all over the map"—more than any other woman?