

“My soul praises the LORD and my spirit rejoices in GOD my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed...”

- (Luke 1:46-48).



Blessed and Full of Grace

On August 13, God sent His archangel Gabriel to announce the blessed birth of St. Mary, the mother of the Incarnate God. St. Mary's parents were stricken in years and had no children, for her mother Anna was barren. Joachim and Anna prayed that God bless them with a child and vowed that their child would become a steward of the temple.

❖ While Joachim was praying, he fell into a deep sleep. Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and announced that his wife Anna would conceive and bear a child, who would delight the eyes and please his heart; likewise, the entire world would rejoice and be glad. When Joachim awoke from his sleep, he told his wife about the vision. Anna conceived the child and brought forth our Lady, the Virgin Mary, whose name means “Royal Incense,” signifying that she would later become God's chosen vessel.

Theotokos: Mother of God

The honor we bestow upon St. Mary is rooted in the privilege of giving birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. God first honored St. Mary in that, when the “fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). Throughout history, the Coptic Orthodox Church has named her the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). St. Mary is also called the “*golden censor*,” because she carried and bore the Incarnate God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The union of charcoal and fire in the censor used in the Divine Liturgy symbolizes the unity between the Divinity and Humanity of our Lord, the “Sweet Aroma.”

❖ In the Gospel of St. Luke (1:26-38), the annunciation of the birth of Jesus Christ, as announced to St. Mary by the archangel Gabriel, is recorded. The Virgin was betrothed to Joseph and was greatly troubled by the news. Archangel Gabriel explained to her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. St. Mary found such favor in the Lord and obediently humbled herself as “the maidservant of the Lord.” She became the source of His human nature, though the One she bore in her womb was the eternal God.



❖ Because of her role in God's plan of salvation, we appropriately honor St. Mary as the first among the saints. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. Mary herself predicted the esteem given to her: “*Henceforth all generations will call me blessed*” (Luke 1:48).

Virginal Womb

The Coptic Orthodox Church believes in the perpetual virginity of St. Mary. In the Divine Liturgy, the priest recites, “*She being virgin, gave birth to Him, and her virginity remained sealed.*” We believe that St. Mary's virginity existed before, during, and continued after the birth of our Lord until her death. Ezekiel prophesied about her virginity and said, “*Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me, ‘This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut’*” (Ezekiel 44:1-2).

Life of Abandonment

We all have an impulse to ask God, “why,” and resist various events in our life; some of us even discount God completely when we feel life takes a turn that feels too “unfair.” However, St. Mary completely abandoned her life so that God could direct her in any way which pleases Him. This characteristic of St. Mary is well summarized when she said: “Behold the

maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). St. Mary was raised in the Temple. She never asked—why did my parents abandon me? She just obeyed. Likewise later, when the priest asked her to leave the temple to be betrothed to St. Joseph, without protesting she yet again obliged. She never asked to become a mother, for she sought to remain a virgin. God granted her wish by allowing her to be the Mother of God and a virgin forever. After giving birth to her son, she was commanded to go to Egypt and stay there for three years. Think about how much a man may complain of such a difficult trip, yet St. Mary did not complain for a single moment. Obediently she followed the commandment and she traveled on a donkey to Egypt. While there she and her family received mostly adverse treatment from the Egyptians who were frustrated with the fact that whenever Christ went the Egyptian Idols would fall. Even so, St. Mary followed the commands given by God with joy.

Commemoration of St. Mary

For two thousand years, the Church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary as the prototype of Christians. As the bearer of Christ, St. Mary exemplifies who we are called to become through Christ. While she physically bore Christ in her womb, all Christians are encouraged to bear God within them spiritually.

❖ The Coptic Orthodox Church recognizes the virtue of St. Mary through numerous feasts, among which include:

- ✘ Annunciation of the birth of St. Mary - August 13
- ✘ Birth of St. Mary - May 9
- ✘ Entry into the temple - December 12
- ✘ Departure of St. Mary - January 30 (21st of the Coptic Month of Tobe)
- ✘ Monthly feast - 21st day of each Coptic month, recalling her departure on the 21st of Tobe.
- ✘ Assumption of the body of St. Mary - August 22/Mesore 16. This feast marks the appearance of St. Mary to the disciples after the assumption of her body and is preceded by the fast of the virgin Mary, which lasts for two weeks.

In obedience to God's intention, our Church honors St. Mary through icons, hymns, and feasts. We entreat St. Mary to intercede to her Son on our behalf. We ask her, as the first believer and mother of the Church, for guidance and protection. We venerate her, but do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone.

The Virgin Mary in the Coptic Church



"Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30)