

The Story of Mary in Brief

In Islam, Jesus is considered one of the five greatest prophets sent by God to mankind. Muslims' knowledge about Jesus is based on the two main sources of Islamic knowledge: the Quran and Hadeeth (prophetic sayings). In the Quran, Jesus is referred to as *Isa ibn Maryam*, or Jesus, the son of Mary. The story of Mary and Jesus is best described in the Quran in chapters 3 and 19.

Mary: A Precocious Girlhood

The story starts with Mary, who was blessed as a child with God's protection. Mary was born to the pious household of Aal Imran, or the family of Imran. Many people argued for the honor of taking care of the child, but the responsibility was given to Zechariah, an elderly and childless man, who immediately noticed that the young girl was special. One day, Zechariah noticed that the girl had in her possession certain provisions for which he could not account. He asked her how she came by the food and she answered,

“It is from God. Indeed, God provides for whom He wills without account.” (Quran 3:37)

This simple answer had a deep impact on the elderly man. Having long wished for a son, the devout Zechariah prayed to God for progeny. As the Quran relates in the verses below, his prayers were answered almost immediately, although his wife was barren and beyond childbearing age:

“At that, Zechariah called upon his Lord, saying, ‘My Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring. Indeed, You are the Hearer of supplication.’ So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber, ‘ Indeed, God gives you good tidings of John, confirming a word from God and [who will be] honorable, abstaining [from women], and prophet from among the righteous.’” (Quran 3:38-39)

The uniqueness of Mary, noticed by Zechariah, was spelled out to her by the angels:

“And [mention] when the angels said, “O Mary, indeed God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those bow [in prayer].” (Quran 3:42-43)

Here the story of Mary's upbringing and girlhood, as related in the Quran, ends.

The Miracle of Jesus

In chapter 19, entitled “Mary,” we hear more of this special woman’s story, best told by the Quran itself.

“And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east. And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel [i.e., Gabriel], and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man. She said, ‘Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of God.’ He said, ‘I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy [i.e., son].’ She said, ‘How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?’ He said, ‘Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed.’” So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place.” (Quran 19:16–22)

From the Quranic description of events, we can deduce that Mary spent most of her pregnancy alone. What happened to her during this period is not mentioned in the Quran. The Quran picks up the story at the moment that Mary goes into labor.

“And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of palm tree. She said, ‘Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten.’ But he called her from below her, ‘Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream.’” (Quran 19:23-24)

God, knowing the reaction of society, further guided her how to deal with the situation:

“And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates. (Quran 19:25)

When she carried the baby Jesus to her people, they questioned her; and as a baby in her arms, Jesus gave them the answer. The Quran describes this scene in detail:

“So eat and drink and be contented. And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, ‘Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man.’ Then she brought him to her people, carrying him. They said, ‘O Mary, you have certainly done a thing

unprecedented. O sister of Aaron, your father was not a man of evil, nor was your mother unchaste.’ So she pointed to him. They said, ‘How can we speak to one who is in the cradle a child?’ [Jesus] said, ‘Indeed, I am the servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakah as long as I remain alive And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and he has not made me a wretched tyrant. And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive.’” (Quran 19:26-33)

And so the baby Jesus defended his mother from any accusations of adultery, and in a nutshell, explained who he was and why he was sent by God.

Here ends the story of Mary and miraculous birth of one of the greatest prophets of God, Jesus.

“That is Jesus, the son of Mary – the word of truth about which they are in dispute.” (Quran 19:34)