



URAVA



● THEOTOKOS - THE SECOND EVE ●

Cover Painting : By Anne Alex

The picture is adopted and inspired by the original drawing by Sister Grace Remington - Mary Comforts Eve.

St. Irenaeus quotes: "It was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith" Eve, whose fruit brought death because of her fallen nature is seen being comforted by Mary whose Fruit brought salvation because of her obedience to God.

Mary does not take a stand of pride because she was God's chosen vessel. Instead, Mary comforts Eve - the outcast - and helps her up by sharing the Salvation (Baby Jesus) with her.

The snake/evil that ensnared Eve - its head is seen being crushed by Mary fulfilling "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15). The light of the Cross shines equally for all - no matter how grievous the sin.

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Theotokos – The Second Eve

By: Fr Thomas P John (Vicar)

When Christ - the Second Adam and His Mother - the Second Eve came to be, it meant a second chance of hope and promise for mankind. The wrong of the first Adam had to be rectified; for this - the event of Incarnation of the Only Begotten Son in the fullness of God's Image and Likeness was necessary.

What was the sin committed by Adam and Eve who were created in the image and likeness of God the Creator? Why did they sin? Adam and Eve were God's creations with ample potential to grow into the fullness of the Creator. After placing them in the Garden of Eden, God's plan for them was revealed through His loving command- "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:28). God intended that Adam and Eve would be stewards of the garden. They were well-equipped and well-guided by God, to sustain and develop His creation.

Just as rulers and ministers play a vital role in protecting their land and people, Adam and Eve were bestowed with power and prowess to fulfill God's purpose. They only had to obey His commands. They had everything they needed; they lacked nothing. At some point when they chose to be daring, Satan seized the opportunity to reach for the forbidden fruit. He cajoled them saying, "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:5). Satan challenged them to be over-ambitious to become God-like, to become perfect so that they would be at par with God.

Thereafter, God would not have any extra or mysterious knowledge that they wouldn't have had access to. In today's context, we are surrounded by scandalous cases of tapping into secret codes which rock the world, while showing us that certain knowledge can make us gods! People are tempted to go to any extent to obtain it.

A similar greed (to become perfect as God) was the drive and cause of Adam and Eve's sin. They compromised their grace and gifts, thus losing their rights and privileges. Their ambition destroyed the eco-balance too thus bringing a curse to the rest of creation. Expected obedience and honesty were violated. God's sovereignty was questioned by His own creation. Paradise was lost.

How did the narrative get corrected by the Son and His Mother? Instead of looking for perfection and supremacy, they chose imperfection and simplicity. When Angel Gabriel visited Mary, she had two choices: 1) a traditional married life with Joseph the noble and to live a socially perfect and politically correct life. 2) to accept an extra/premarital embryo to be humiliated and rejected forever. She opted for the second and accepted an imperfect life where she was humiliated for a premarital conception which was thought to be from someone other than Joseph; he too doubted her conception. She was blamed for dishonesty and promiscuity and her son had to bear this shame throughout. Despite the promise that He was the Saviour the world was waiting for, she was rejected a shelter at the time of delivering her firstborn child; He had to be born a refugee.

Mary had to flee her land without support by citizens rights when the ruler was on hunt for her son. Later, when there was an issue at a wedding house, she was there for them. But when she was faced with obstacles, she had no one to turn to. Mary had the misfortune to hear that her son was insane or possessed, despite his gospel of love and miracles of healing. She witnessed him being treated as a convict as He was accused, ridiculed, beaten, agonised, and was crucified. Her humiliation helped her understand her son's humiliation; she chose to stay close to Him when He was deserted. Mary did not have support system-from social, political, legal or religious circles-thus making it nearly unthinkable for her to exist.

Her choice to remain imperfect for society and its culture, while being a perfect handmaid for the Lord, set the necessary backdrop to correct Adam & Eve's greed and ambition. Mary chose to be the second Eve thus becoming the initiator of redemption and salvation to the first Adam and Eve. The Son fulfilled the prophecy - 'His appearance was so disfigured....He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected...' (Isaiah 52:14, 53:2-5). Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection defied conventional concepts of a royal birth, a rich life, a dignified death and a fitting farewell. He chose to be unappealing for the sake of all the ugliness and distortion that resulted from man's sin. The pride of the first Adam was replaced by the humility of the Second Adam.

Through Mary, the lost Paradise was regained. She was elevated to be the second Heaven. May her life inspire us to find purpose in pain, healing in humiliation and correction in choices so that we may align ourselves and the world to our Creator's blueprint.

St. Mary - In light of Orthodox Liturgical Hymns

By: Thomas T Mathew

St. Mary who is revered as first amongst the saints signifies the view of Orthodox spirituality about Jesus as she is called Theotokos (God-Bearer) which implies that the son she bore is fully human and fully God. In our liturgical hourly prayers and sacraments, we compliment, honour and venerate the blessed Virgin St. Mary who was perhaps the most intimate person with Jesus on earth. We revere her in our hymns and doxologies using verses from the Holy Bible and tradition. We also meditate on some events that may not be recorded in the Holy Bible but are believed to have happened according to stories and legends shared over the years.

Let us look at some of the attributes of St. Mary and the facets of her life that are portrayed through commonly known prayers and hymns, as:

Based on verses from the Holy Bible

● **Her salutation and presence:** In the vespers of Sleeba Namaskaram we sing – “യാചിക്കുന്നു ഞങ്ങളോടൊപ്പം (Yachiykunnun Njangalodoppam...). St. Mary was the younger cousin of Elizabeth, the godly wife of priest Zechariah who had received a promise from Angel Gabriel that her son would be GREAT in the sight of the Lord (St. Luke 1:15). When they met in the days of their pregnancy, Elizabeth identified herself as someone of lesser status than Mary as if she was not deserving of the latter's serene salutation and divine presence because she knew that she was welcoming the mother of her Lord.

HH Pope Shenouda of Coptic Orthodox Church describes St Mary's greeting and presence as “It is an amazing greatness, that her mere greeting makes Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit!”. Perhaps, we would also like to feel the presence of the Mother with us which will prompt the Holy Spirit to come to us and fill us.

● **Her Eminence:** St. Mary excels everybody in her eminence: Many daughters have done well, but you excel and surpass all" (Prov. 31:29). It is probably from this divine text, that the hymn was taken: "ആരും ഉയർത്തപ്പെട്ടില്ലിത് പോൽ അതിനാൽ സ്പഷ്ടം (Aarum Uyarthappettillithu Pol Athinaal Spashtam.....) which means that: No one has ever been elevated as her, which clearly proves that no one has been humbled as her...

Based on Encounters, Traditions and Miracles

● **Her encounter with angels:** In the Shih'mo Namaskaram - Wednesday Vespers Quolo(ചൊന്നാൾ മരിയാം നിൻ ശക്ത്യാ ...Chonnal Mariyaam Nin Shakthya...), an endearing conversation is seen between St. Mary and Infant Jesus, wherein she asks Infant Jesus to command the Seraphims who were flying around the crib to lift their wings and cover their eyes so that she can inconspicuously feed the baby without feeling shy about being watched by the angels.

● **Her final journey:** Special hymns commemorating Mother Mary on the feast of Assumption “ഇന്ത്യയിൽ നിന്ന് എങ്ങനെ യേശുശലേം (Indiyaail Ninnengane Yerusalaem....)” outline an incident that occurred in her final journey. When St. Mary was about to finish her span of life on earth, all the Apostles except St. Thomas-our patron saint, were miraculously transported to Jerusalem to witness her parting. Thomas, who was in India at the time of Mother Mary’s passing and could not join the other Apostles, reached Gath-Shemon after her burial. The Apostles were sceptical about St. Thomas’ narration of how he had met the Holy Mother while she was being taken to heaven as they believed that they had buried her securely. To support his narrative of receiving the precious girdle as a precious relic from St.Mary as she was being taken to heaven, St. Thomas insisted to see her body. The Apostles opened the grave; to their surprise, the body of St. Mary was not there. This led them to believe Thomas as he presented the girdle to them.

● Her intercession: The miracle of the dissolution of iron, and the deliverance of the apostle Matthias that happened through St. Mary’s intervention is a story often narrated by parents and grandparents. It is believed that prayer was written by St. Matthias and dedicated to St. Mary, which was later used as a prayer for healing. Our grandparents continue to believe that such prayers that are prayed with water in a bowl will be rewarded with healing and blessings from heaven.

A detailed account of this story is available on: <https://www.stshenoudapress.com/the-miracle-of-melting-the-iron/>. There are hymns attributed to St. Mary on other feast days dedicated to her, where it is mentioned that dew and drizzle were sprinkled over the land of Ephesus when St. John brought the messages that the feast must be observed three times a year. It is now commemorated in January, May, and August.

“കതിരുകളെ ഓർത്തിടവത്തിൽ വിത്തിനു മകരത്തിൽ മുന്തിരിയെ പ്രതി ചിങ്ങത്തിൽ(Kathirukale Orthidavathil Vithinu Makarathil.....)”.

● **Her presence during the Holy Week:** Although we don’t venerate St. Mary during the Holy Week, we still meditate on her thoughts and conversations, especially on Holy Friday. In the matins of Gospel Saturday after the beatitudes, we sing “മാതാവിനു നിൻരാജ്യത്തിൽ ശിഷ്ടഗണത്തിൽ മുഖ്യ സ്ഥാനം നൽകുമ്പോൾ കർത്താവേ നീ ഞങ്ങളെ ഓർക്കണമേ..... (Mathavinu Nin Rajyathil Shishtaganathil Mukhyasthanam Nalkumbol Karthave Nee Njangale Orkkaname.....)” O Lord, remember us when you give the most important place to St. Mary.

As we move from Soonoyo perunnal to the Feast of Nativity, let it be our desire to have a fruitful life like St.Mary so that we may face the world with a cheerful countenance through interacting with the angels and maintain a brave outlook as we put our trust in God and intercede for each other.

Guest writer Profile: Thomas T Mathew, from Niranom, member and Choir Master at St George Orthodox Cathedral Abudhabi. Post graduate in Physics; served as teacher for ten years at various institutions in Bhopal and UAE. He is currently working with PWC Abudhabi and living with his wife and two children.

Mother Mary - Embracer of the Son of God

By: Reji Koduvath

While conducting the military funeral for a young Captain, when the body was brought to the home of the officer, his mother came to me and said "Sir, can you please place this pillow under his head? This is his favorite pillow and whenever he was home, he insisted on sleeping with this pillow under his head."

I was taken aback by her request. It gave me a shock. I perceived my mother holding the same pillow and pleading with our Commanding Officer. The image of Mother Mary flashed in front of me. The Mother who stood as a silent witness to the agony and ill-treatment her son endured through.

"When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother'" (John 19:26-27).

In a supreme act of generosity, our Lord, in His agony on the cross, gave His Blessed Mother to us. Mother Mary is an epitome of motherly love and an example for all mothers to follow. She gave birth to Lord Jesus in a manger, in the most difficult conditions, with only Joseph to help her.

Though there is hardly any account of Jesus' childhood in the Bible, it is easy to imagine her doing all the things mothers do for their children. The movie 'The Passion of The Christ' portrays the mother-son relationship of Jesus & Mary. Mary is shown calling Jesus to eat the food prepared by her.

Jesus walks in and Mary directs him to wash his hands prior to eating and extends a bowl in her hand. Jesus, while washing his hands, playfully splashes her with water. They both laugh at the mischief played out and Jesus kisses his mother. It is a light-hearted mother-son banter which happens to us humans.

Mostly Mother Mary is depicted in Nativity displays, Christmas cards and various other drawings holding baby Jesus affectionately in her hands, with love beaming out of her eyes. A true depiction of a great mother.

Another image that flashes in front of us is that of Pieta (Pity or Mercy in Italian) and its various versions. Michelangelo sculpted the Pieta in 1497 from a single block of marble, which he claimed was the most perfect block of marble he had ever worked with. French Cardinal Jean de Bilheres Lagrulas commissioned this sculpture for his future tomb in Old St. Peter's Basilica. The Pieta depicts the body of Jesus after crucifixion, draped across Mother Mary's lap as she is looking down upon His body. Michelangelo was deeply religious, and the Pieta is an expressive piece, inspired by his deep and abiding faith. Michelangelo's Pieta depicts a meditative Mother Mary, rather than a grieving mother as created by many painters and sculptors before and after.

Motherhood is not merely worshipped as divinity; it is all about respecting our mothers as Mother Goddess. Mothers are respected, loved and worshipped world over, in all religions as the mother is the source of life, the beginning of each and every life on earth.

It is a common saying that God couldn't be present everywhere, so He created mothers. Even the Gods required mothers to take birth on earth.

We have all listened to our mothers and have heeded to many of her advice. At times it may have been against our conscience and logic, at times may not be in accordance with the laid down norms of our profession. It was said by the soldiers in our Regiment that "In case you wanted anything difficult done through the Commanding Officer, put it in his mother's ears."

Mother Mary, for what she endured, from the birth of our Lord to his crucifixion, needs to be respected, praised, and held in high esteem. What better way to pay our respects than praying everyday to her – "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus..."

The prayer, also known as 'Ave Maria' (in Italian,) the first sentence is based on St. Luke's Gospel -1:26-38. "And he came to her and said: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." It describes Annunciation, the conversation between the Archangel Gabriel and Virgin Mary when the angel appeared to announce the birth of Jesus Christ. The second sentence of the praise comes from Visitation, also recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke 1:42. "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

*Drawing by:
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Thy Will Be Done!

By: Bini Sajo (Editorial Board)

The young bride felt the wings of her dreams leaving her soul
A myriad of emotions seeping through her skin
the despising frowns of her near and dear ones flashed in front of her eyes
Oh! She couldn't bear the thought of losing Joseph's trust
What she had treasured all her life – love, respect, dignity
would be condemned to humiliation hereafter

While her heart drowned in overwhelming gloom,
her thoughts ruminated on the divine encounter
The holy assurance lifted her from the bindings of the soil she knelt upon
“The Lord is with you”

It struck her in a way fire transforms gold
Her faith has earned and unfolded an ultimate path;
a path that's hers to slog, a path that cuts right through her heart to lead
the forsaken to salvation

A heavenly peace overshadowed the chaos of her mind
and the spirit strengthened her lips to proclaim her piety
“Thy will be done”

Since then, she felt 'blessed';
though the mortals would testify the contrary

She embarked upon a journey of unfathomable miseries
beginning with the exhausting trail from Nazareth to Bethlehem
and a strenuous labor in the most unappealing setting

The same streets that hailed hosanna a week ago
echoed the voices of her son's death mongers
she watched the tender face she had once covered with warm kisses
drenched in blood and spat upon
walking through the worst nightmares, she never digressed
her matchless faith elevated her soul up above all humankind
to undo the “defiance” from Eve

Did her son reach out for this strength at the Garden of Gethsemane?
in the hour of utmost agony, he repeated his mother's words “Thy will be
done”

Her devotion wasn't about passive acceptance;
it was all about actively choosing thorn over throne
it was about welcoming the darkness at Golgotha
for the hope of the rejoicing morning after

“Thy will be done” was never a ticket to comfort and prosperity;
it is a promise of heavenly reward for the altruistic offering to Lord's plan!

Life of Saint Mary

By: Jerusha Thomas (Grade 9, Sunday School)

Nothing comes close to the love Jesus Christ has for us except the love a mother has for her own child.

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” (John 19:26-27)

The Holy Gospel records 7 utterances of Jesus while He was on the cross. The third time He spoke words of affection for His mother. Even while dying, Christ did not forget her who conceived Him and cared for Him as an infant.

When it was announced to Mary that she, a virgin, would bear a son named Jesus, her response to this was “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). She obeyed it too. After Jesus was born, not much was heard about Mary. At the hour of her son’s suffering, she was with Him. When all were against Him, she stood next to her son where everyone could see her. When Jesus was mocked prior to his death, she did not say a word and watched it all in silence. She could’ve turned away, but she stayed strong because of her love for her son. So, we should love our mother, for she will never stop loving her child. What is our responsibility towards our God given mother? Let us, as children, take our responsibility seriously and truly care for our mothers. Let us acknowledge John’s obedience and accept our mothers with respect and reverence in accordance with the command, BEHOLD THY MOTHER.

*Drawing by:
Shweta Maria Saju
Grade 9, Sunday School*



Mary : The God-Bearer

By: Jadon Binu Koshy (Grade 8, Sunday School)

Virgin Mary, the Mother of God can be known by many names such as Blessed Virgin, Mother Mary, God-bearer, and the Queen of all angels. The life of Saint Mary is very sparse in the scriptures, but the New Testament places her humility and obedience on high.

Mary was born to Joachim and Anna. Joachim was a direct descendant of King David but lived a very modest and simple life. Both he and his wife were God-fearing and known for their humility and compassion. They did not have any children and they made a vow that if they had a baby, they would dedicate that child to serving God. Owing to their patience and faith, the Lord finally blessed them with a daughter who was named Mary, which means, 'Mistress-hope'. When Mary turned three years old, her parents prepared themselves to carry out their vow. They took her to the temple in Jerusalem in order to consecrate her to God. Mary was left to stay in the temple and got instructed by priests and scribes. There she, with the other maidens, was taught the Law of God as well as handiwork.

By the time Mary was about 12 or 13 years old, she was engaged to Joseph, a devout Jewish man. It was during Mary's engagement that she learned, through an angelic visitation, of the plans God had for her to serve as the mother of Immanuel. Mary responded with faithful obedience to God's plan, despite the personal challenges it had brought to her.

When Mary's cousin Elizabeth praised her faith, she responded with a beautiful reflection which was later used popularly as a song of praises sung during worship. It is called 'The Magnificat' which the Bible records in Luke 1:46-55. The song incorporates Mary's true love, devotion, and respect towards the Lord.

The first report of Mary is in the Gospel of Luke which portrays her living in Nazareth and being betrothed to Joseph. Her last mention can be found in Acts of the Apostles (1:14) which shows her praying with companions after Jesus' ascension.

The Bible has recorded many other instances of Mary with Jesus, including a time when Mary and Joseph lost track of Jesus and found Him teaching in a temple when he was 12 years old (Luke 2). When wine ran out at a wedding, she asked her son to help out the host (John 2). Mary was near the cross when Jesus was crucified and died for the sins of the world (John 19). Mary had a significant role in Jesus' mission.

Before Jesus Christ died on the cross, he asked John, the apostle to take care of Mary for the rest of her life. Many historians believe that Mary later moved to the ancient city of Ephesus (which is now part of Turkey) along with John and lived there till the end of her life.

Mary's life was truly significant and has influenced the Church greatly. We intercede through her and set her as a role model for the church.

Our Mother of Perpetual Help

By: Robin Philipose (Sunday School Teacher)

Each one of us, have strong memories and feelings towards our mothers. The mother and child relationship is a strong bond, a connection unlike any other. I am sure we all have our stories of memories with our moms that stand out in our lives. I remember, my mother has been the greatest appreciator of me, even at times, I acted mischievous. There were moments, I could see my near and dear ones giving up on me, and the only person who believed in me was my mom.

The reason I started with this introduction was to bring to context the kind of feeling Jesus had towards his mother, Mary. In a young age, the way one perceives how the world functions, will be immensely influenced by their parents. One of the rare childhood stories of Jesus could be of Him missing in the temple due to His preference in listening and learning the word of God (Luke 2: 41-52). In a parent's viewpoint, it was his parents Mary and Joseph who initiated Jesus to the temple-centered life that ignited his quest to learn more about God.

Jesus' parents spent more time with Him compared to anyone else including his disciples. Jesus lived with his parents for three decades until he started his public ministry around the age of 30. Since Joseph was not mentioned after their trip to Jerusalem (Luke 2), most scholars believe that Joseph died when Jesus was in his teens, and this brought Jesus closer to his mother. Since Mary knew Jesus better than anyone, it prompted her to make him perform his first miracle of turning water to wine (John 2: 1-12). She was aware of her son's divine power. Mary realized that it was the time for Jesus to act and start his public ministry. He did so with the first miracle in the New Testament. Jesus loved his mother dearly and before dying on the cross he was keen to entrust John to take care of her in his physical absence after his impending death (John 19: 25-17).

The mother-son relationship between Mary and Jesus is beautiful as seen through a few instances narrated in the Gospel. They reveal the depth and strong bond between the two. The humanity of Christ the Son can never be imagined without the role of his mother. Mother's affection and care for her children remain the most influential, universal and ever-enduring. It is this same relationship and bonding our church is fostering between us and our mothers as well as with Mother Mary. She is expected to be our advocate to Jesus, as she is close and dear to him. We want her to be our voice and support when everyone else gives up on us and be our intercessor when we need it the most. A Sunday school teacher once asked us, "You know what's the special bond that Mother Mary has with us?" The teacher broke the silence by answering, that it was Mary's closest and most functional intercession for us to Jesus. She taught us a simple abbreviation for the word 'Mary' that explains what she means for all of us, **MARY - Mother Always Requests for You!**

Behold, Thy Mother

By: Shweta Maria Saju (Grade 9, Sunday School)

Jesus Christ saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, so He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, Thy son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, Thy mother!" (John 19:26–27).

Of the seven phrases Jesus uttered on the cross, one of them was completely dedicated to His mother, Mary. This simple phrase holds more meaning than what was initially comprehended.

Jesus sympathised with Mary and desired to comfort her, hence he said so. Through His acts, it is evident that Jesus cared and looked after His mother in the darkest of times. Jesus, through His words, honored His mother, even when He was in agony, public torture, hung on the cross, and about to ascend. Therefore, He fulfilled His duty towards His mother, as it was His responsibility as the first-born son. He was fully aware that He would not be able to take care of His mother in human terms and so He gave the responsibility to John, believed to be "the disciple whom He loved".

Jesus' words, "Woman, behold your son," also have a symbolic interpretation. Christ's mission and ministry were centered on creating and expanding the family of God. Those who follow Jesus Christ enter into a new family and are united by that bond. The Lord's words to Mary, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother," as He concluded His earthly ministry, were powerfully symbolic of the creation of God's new family at the foot of the cross.

The concern that Jesus had for His mother's loneliness in the coming days while enduring the agony of the Cross and the weight of the world's salvation was very moving. He was always aware of the responsibilities at hand.

He was Mary's oldest child, and although being in the midst of a cosmic conflict, He was mindful of the everyday matters that were close to home. At the end of the day, even as He hung on the Cross, Jesus was more preoccupied with the woes of others than He was with His own. There are diverse ways we could apply this teaching to our lives. For example, we must always love and feel affection for our family. In many instances throughout Jesus' life, He was not always accepted in His extended family. The Bible verse "Even His own brothers did not believe in Him." (John 7:5) expresses this clearly. However, Jesus' statements signify how much He cares for His family and relatives. We must also feel responsible for our family. Even in His last moments, Jesus was able to think about looking after his mother, entrusting her to his loyal, faithful disciple. We should prioritize our family for making any decision in life.

The teachings of Jesus will always keep us in purity and committed to the kingdom of God.

Drawing by:
Beena Mathew,
MMVS

Orthodox Icon of Mother
Mary



Mary, the Theotokos (Greek for "Mother of God,") literally "God-Bearer" has been portrayed more than any other topic, aside from Christ, as the foundation of all iconography. No one more closely resembles Jesus Christ than His Mother, thus this shouldn't come as a surprise.

She is undoubtedly a good example of what it means to be "Christ-like" for us, and we believe that she prays for us constantly. According to Orthodox Church tradition, the evangelist Luke was the first iconographer, and the first image he painted while receiving heavenly inspiration was of the Virgin Mary carrying the Christ-child. Strong evidence for the truth of God's incarnation as a human being may be found in images of the Son of God with His Mother.

Mary is seen wearing a veil that was customary for Jewish women of the time, which is historically accurate but also shows us Mary's piety and humility. The clothing below the veil is blue, representing humanity, while the veil itself is red, symbolizing divinity.

The angel Gabriel informed Mary, as recorded by the evangelist Luke, that she would receive the Holy Spirit and the Power of the Highest (Luke 1:35) Mary's veil thus depicts this.

Three stars are embroidered on her veil, symbolizing her everlasting virginity - before, during, and after the birth of Christ as well as the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Mary gazes straight at us in this icon, but she also gestures with her hand to the Christ child. She directs our prayers to him and her interaction with us is always within the context of her relationship with Christ.

Jesus Christ is shown to us as that infant (abbreviated as IC XC). The three Greek letters in His halo, which stand for "I AM" attest to His deity, and even as a child, His right hand is seen bestowing blessings. This icon displays her piety, kindness, humility, and the suffering she underwent. A Mary icon that has been properly conceived and executed may genuinely convey Mary's love for us and bring us closer to her.

The term "Hodegetria" which means "guide" is beside her right shoulder, and it is obvious that her hand is leading us to her Son. He is revealed to be genuinely divine, genuinely intelligent, and genuinely the origin of all benefits. The Greek words "Mater Theos"—the Mother of God—are abbreviated as "MP OY"(short for MHTHP ΘEOY) above her head. The gold background symbolizes Heaven.

The reason we adore Mother Mary is because of what we know about her: through her, we get her Son, Jesus Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh and the Savior of humanity. These lessons and this love are shown in Mary's iconography.

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Intercession of Mother Mary

By: Nikhila Thomas (MGOCSM)

St. Mary has been a model for what we are to become in Christ. Mary is honored because she heard the word and kept it. She completely surrendered to the will of God and bore Christ in her womb physically; so that all believers now have the privilege of bearing God within themselves spiritually. From early times, the Church has called Mary - 'The Mother of God' (Theotokos), a title that implies that her Son, Jesus Christ, is both fully human and fully God. We honor Mother Mary as the first among the Saints. The angel Gabriel initiated this honor in addressing her, as seen in St. Luke 1:28, "Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women". Mary was the first person to accept the Savior into her heart and loved Him with all her heart, soul, strength, and mind.

What does it mean to intercede?

Intercession means pleading on behalf of another person. When we plead to Mother Mary, we are asking her to intercede with her Son on our behalf. We ask for guidance and protection. We venerate her, but we do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone. Our requests for her intercession do not diminish our devotion to Christ but rather enriches it.

The Power of Mother Mary

It has been argued that the intercession of Mother Mary is more powerful than anybody else's. Moreover, while Christ is the mediator of all grace between God and creation, Mary is the mediator of all grace between Christ and humanity. She is the person closest to God. No other human was as close to Jesus as she was, as she is.

This is made clear in the account of the wedding at Cana (John 2:2-3) where Mary performs her first intervention as an intercessor. Mary noticed that the wine had run out and mentioned it to Jesus. Jesus's initial response implies that he did not want to grant her request. He said, "O Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come". It seems clear that at the very least he did not want to help the situation because his "hour has not come". Although the circumstances stayed the same, he later did grant her request. We have to attribute his action here to Mary's intercession. Even though he was not ready to help, he acquiesced and granted his mother's request simply because she asked for it.

Due to Mary's motherhood of God, she knows our spiritual needs and is impelled by her great charity to intercede for us. As a mother is aware that her child needs her help, she comes to our aid and guides us to her Son.

In the iconographic tradition of the church, St. Mary is usually presented as holding in her arms the child Jesus. In every icon of the Theotokos, we see Mary's hand pointing towards Christ, so that we may love Christ more. Mary was the first person to love Christ more than herself and to trust His plan as greater than hers. And we see time and time again of Jesus' continued devotion to her.

New Eve

St. Mary was dedicated to the Temple since her childhood. Throughout Christ's ministry, Mary's presence was there, and she even stood at the foot of the Cross when he was crucified. St. Mary's faithful response makes her the highest model of obedience to God. Thus, reversing the disobedience and self-oriented character of the first Eve which paved for all humankind's fall into sin. Mary became the Ark of the Covenant for she bore God and was not harmed by it. The Orthodox Church venerates St. Mary for being the chosen vessel that was chosen out of all women to bear the Incarnate Word into the World.

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus' last words. They hold a special importance as Jesus knows he does not have much time left but struggles to say them anyway. Among these words we hear Jesus speak directly to his mother: "Woman, behold your son!" and to the disciple, "Behold, your Mother!" (John 19: 26-27). Jesus calls his mother "woman" because he is calling her like the first woman in the Book of Genesis: Eve. The spiritual mother of all who are born into the New Creation brought about by Christ. We are now at the foot of the cross of our Savior and beg him for mercy. Those who stand at the Cross with the Lord are, then, entrusted with His Holy Mother and he instructs us to love her just as he loved her.

Daily Practice

God has given us a great gift – his own mother as our companion and our great spiritual mother. Mary's intercession is part of this sharing of his love. She is an inspiration and example to us, and she is a comforting presence to us. The more we are united with Mary, the more we are united with Christ because she participated actively in the physical and spiritual life of Jesus.

We can ask Mother Mary to pray for us just as we ask family and friends to pray for us. There are many powerful prayers that can be said regularly for Mary's intercession, and we proclaim it when we recite the Hail Mary. We should turn to Mary in both good times and troubled times. She is always ready to assist us, always there for us, constantly prepared to seek her Son's guidance and support for all her children. We have to keep in mind that Mary's intercession is not a loophole around for us to ask God to grant our requests. We should not expect everything we ask through her to be done for us. Nevertheless, she is a powerful intercessor with her son, the most powerful one there is, and we should take advantage of that intercession as often as we can.

Here I Am

By: Chris Daniel Varghese (MGOCSM)

Our Lord's involvement in each and every one of our lives is the only way to gain true joy and satisfaction. This is actively reflected by the statement made by Isaiah in his book as he remarks "Here Am I, Lord". Through this, Isaiah devoutly offers himself to God and gives the Lord complete authority over his being to do works of righteousness. By extension of Isaiah's virtuousness, God allowed Isaiah to experience visions that were of the future and allowed him to see the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, we must also submit ourselves to the Lord and allow him to carry out deeds of righteousness through us.

"Here Am I, Lord" was a statement made eloquently by Isaiah which is referenced in Isaiah 6:8. In order to determine the underlying message behind this remark, it is important to note the context behind it. To begin, God revealed himself to Isaiah. Being a God-fearing man, Isaiah was filled with fear and awe as he remarked "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty". In response, however, a seraphim of the Lord flew towards Isaiah with a live coal and touched Isaiah on the lips taking away his guilt and making atonement for his sins. Following this, the Lord said "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" referencing the stubborn and wicked people. To this, Isaiah replied, "Here Am I. Send Me!"

After many generations, in a future world, we would see a woman, resonating the same as a visiting angel. She knew what she had to say and what she intended to do. Her utterance changed the course of history when she said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

Maybe it was a sheer coincidence or divinely intended that ages ago, prophet Isaiah had foretold, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.' (Is 7:14). Mary did it.

Both responses of Isaiah and Mary to the Lord heavily correlate to our role in today's secular world. We must acknowledge that God has called each and every one of us, as believers, to carry out his work and preach his word. Our response to God's call should be similar to Isaiah or Mary, as we reply, "Here I Am, Lord" or "May it be to me as the Lord wishes". Through this affirmation, we are freely giving ourselves into God's hands in the hope that he will use us to transform our secular world into a society that befits the glory of God.

Hail Mary Full of Grace

By: George M George (Seniors Forum)

According to the Gospel versions of St Matthew and St Luke, Mary was a Jewish Woman of Nazareth during the reign of "Herod the Great", the wife of Joseph and the mother of Jesus. Mary was called Miriam, which is a Hebrew name, while Mary is a New Testament blend of two Greek names Miriam and Maria. Her parents were Joachim and Anne.

When the archangel Gabriel was sent to Mary by God the father, he greeted her with respect and reverence, "Hail Mary, full of grace " (Luke 1: 28), a salutation used for royalty and to proclaim God's abundant life and love. In Latin 'full of grace' constituted by two words 'plena gratia'. In Greek it is just one word 'kecharitomene'.

Mary has the highest position in Islam among all women. She is mentioned in the Holy Quran more often than in the Bible where two of the longer chapters are named after her and her family.

Orthodox churches call Mary Theotokos, Mother of God, the ever virgin, the highest of saints, the sublime holiness of Mary, and attribute her share in universal redemption and her role as the mediator of Grace. They also hold high her assumption to heaven.

Mary was a tough woman: She could live in constraints while engaging in daily hard labor at home, walk the hill country of Judea while pregnant, making four- or five-day journey on foot to Jerusalem once a year or so as a pilgrim especially when she was full term, resting comfortably in a stable when in birth pang and delivering her child and so on. From birth to crucifixion Mary followed her son. As we discuss Mary, we might wonder why the Orthodox Christians adore and follow Mother Mary. What could be the qualities in her that are different from others?

- **Profound Humility:** Mary was Free from pride and arrogance. She demonstrated the deep meaning of humility at its best and submitted herself to God's will. When the angel told Mary that she would become the mother of Immanuel, her humility prompted her to respond humbly "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled." Luke 1:38. The question is how can we live out this virtue?
- **Immense Faith:** Faith is an inevitable virtue every human should hold and develop further relying on God. Trust that there is a Living God, not a man-made concept.
- **Blind Obedience:** When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would become the mother of Immanuel; the way she received his message was her perfect submission to the will of God. Even when we do not understand fully, we should trust in God's plan. Mary was able to confidently give her fiat of the Annunciation, and in every circumstance after that.

- Continual Prayer: Mary placed herself in the presence of the Lord at every moment of her life. How do we do it? Our dealings with others, day-to-day living, and our actions can serve as prayers.
- Divine Purity: Everything in Mary was of God. She kept herself unadulterated for her mission. Her mind and heart were pure. Mary was an example of virtuous submission to the command 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' (Deuteronomy 6:5).
- Ardent Charity: Every action that Mary performed for those around her was done out of love for her Lord. Can we carry this type of passion and love for Christ within us and to show people around us?
- Heroic Patience: Mary gave a "yes" to the angel. Her endurance helped her to accept all the consequences patiently. There was not a question of "no" in her. What is our response to Christ in our life? Can we readily and patiently follow his Call? It is worth evaluating.
- Angelic Sweetness: Mary demonstrated and radiated joy and peace to everyone she encountered. We can be kind, friendly, and alert to the needs of others.
- Divine Wisdom: In every moment Mary was able to see the beauty of God's will. Her divinely inspired wisdom enabled her to appreciate the good fruits of it.

These virtues and qualities may be overwhelming, however, Mother Mary practiced them in her everyday life by God's grace. Can we strive to imitate these qualities? As Orthodox Christians, when we adore Mother Mary and her qualities, it is our duty and responsibility to practice these virtues in our personal, family, professional and social life.

The overall life of Mary illustrates how God can choose and use the lowliest, the humblest to accomplish His purposes. Lessons from Mary's life can help us to renew our sense of gratitude for whatever God has been doing in our lives. We can learn from Mary's examples of trusting God and obeying Him could lead us to greater attempts for the Kingdom of Heaven.

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St. Mary - The Initiator of Miracles

By: Mariamma Alex (Seniors Forum)

"Henceforth all generations will call her blessed." (Luke 1:48)

Mary is the Blessed mother, The Second Eve, The Holy Theotokos, The pride of our race.

Mary can be viewed as an initiator of Miracles in the New Testament. Miracles cause wonderful achievements. They serve as signs pointing to greater reality. Miracles are extraordinary events attributed to the presence of a Divine Power that are conceived in a personal form.

God chose Mary as one of the primary contributors for His redemptive work - the incarnation. Mary initiated the first miracle of her son, and it became the first among Miracles of Jesus Christ in His Messianic Mission. St. Joh 2: 1-11, depicts Mary and Jesus attending the wedding at Cana. As the evening progresses, wine runs off. The stress and agony of the host in such a critical situation could be beyond words. It was a crucial problem that would remain a disgrace to the family in the society. Mary sensed the dilemma the family was facing. She could have ignored the matter or given some suggestions and stood aside but Mary took it as her own problem and sought solution and help. This sheds light to her greater qualities such as compassion, empathy, and attentiveness towards the needs of those around. She took this opportunity to reveal and glorify her son as the Son of God, which she has been waiting for, and to fulfill her desire to help Christ in His Mission.

Though Jesus said, it was not his time to act, without losing her faith she encouraged the servants at the wedding house to obey Jesus. She evoked them "do whatever He says." What great trust! She turned out to be a perfect devotee who fulfilled God's commandments,

"Love the God with all thy heart, all thy mind, all thy soul and with all thy strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Mark 12: 30-3).

Thus, Mary initiated Jesus to do the first miracle of the Messianic Mission, his Public ministry followed by many miracles. Jesus did miracles not to claim fame. Rather, out of his compassion, to manifest the glory of God and to provide his people with the glimpse of the future heaven, a perfect Eden. Mary had to witness her son's death and his resurrection too.

Mary's death also was miraculous.

The Miracle of Dormition

The traditional belief is that Mary died naturally, and her soul went to heaven. Legends say, her body stayed on earth for three days after which it was taken up to heaven.

The Miracle of Assumption

There exists a school of thought which says, her body and soul ascended to heaven when she was still alive. Many miracles have been reported after her departing which are known as the *Marian apparitions* - supernatural appearances of St. Mary. Believers say that Mary miraculously appeared on earth to deliver messages, to encourage people to believe in God and to call them to repentance. Such appearances of Mary took place in Lourde, France, Portugal, Japan, Mexico, Ireland, and in India (reported to have occurred in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu). During the 20th century, 387 cases of Marian apparitions have been reported.

Mary is the spiritual mother of all people, the unifying thread that provides solutions to our problems that we can practice even in the 21st century.

Drawing examples from Mary, how can we mothers modify our motherhood to glorify God through our lives? As Mary did, the foremost responsibility of a mother is to offer fervent prayers, praying on our knees with tears for our children and the children of the world. To pray is to seek God's mercy upon everyone, ask for help when we are faced with troubling moments, practice the obedience to listen and follow His guidance.

Mother Mary, prophet Samuel, John the Baptist and others of greatness were the results of long endured prayer and waiting of their parents. Children tend to imitate their parents by constantly watching their day-to-day life, all actions, how the chores are done, and how the will of God seeked in all matters. God graciously privileged us to collaborate with Him in the creation, nurturing and bringing up of each child as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Grandparents can contribute towards the creative role through interactions with grandchildren. They can bring awareness about Bible heroes who are greater than celebrities and a keen interest in learning the word of God. They can initiate the young generation to an eternal God who is the refuge for all and for generations to come. Through sharing their life experiences, seniors can teach the importance of dependence on God and not to get shattered by worldly illusions. If a quest be instilled for seeking the truth, knowing the purpose of life, searching for the will of God in each one's life, then our parenthood will be fruitful.

As we celebrate the Assumption of St. Mary, the second Eve, we reflect on her obedience to God's will, by which we are freed from bondage of sins caused by the first Eve due to her disobedience. We are entitled to seek St. Mary's powerful intercession to lead a life pleasing to God. May she be blessed forever!

'Mary', More Than A Shell

By: Mickey Chacko (OCYM)

"Maryam, Maryam..." the call woke her from sleep.. her head ached, her heavy heart whined, she whimpered and it took her some time to gather her bearings. It had been days now, she could hardly sleep, ate almost nothing and felt very weak.

As she sat up on her bed she could see a crowd gathering outside. Some discussing, some whispering and a few crying and sympathizing "Oh dear Maryam! How could this happen to you? Who can bear this pain as you do!" '33 years!' she thought and remembered the bright light, the heaven's visit that changed her simple life forever and for good. She was very young and full of faith and the 'precious seed' she received was without a pinch of doubt; the Savior to be born from her.

Though she knew her calling, the mother in her strayed innumerable times. The very first time the creator leaped in her womb, the instance she embraced him and nursed him. She was filled with awe at the aura of the child cuddled in her bosom - the infant who was to change humankind's fate forever!

As he grew, the admiration in her grew too. She remembered spending hours observing her miracle child and cringed at the thought of having to lose him one day; the sword that was waiting to rip her heart. There were times she would be confused, 'what am I to him?', 'does he love me?', 'does he know my pain?' And she remembered the times she took care of him when he fell ill, cooked his favourite food, tried to answer his endless queries, the many hugs and kisses and the unending prayers for her son who was destined to bear immense pain.

Seldom had she asked her son for anything but whenever she did or whatever she longed for, he gave. That realization was her strength & she knew it was going to be her strength for the rest of the days of her life - a life without her dearest with her.

"Maaa...." she thought she heard him and looked around teary eyed. Oh! How she longed to embrace him one last time.

"Come Maryam, it's time..." and with wavering steps she joined the crowd to see off the Savior of the world... her baby, her son, a part of her body and soul going to be crucified.....

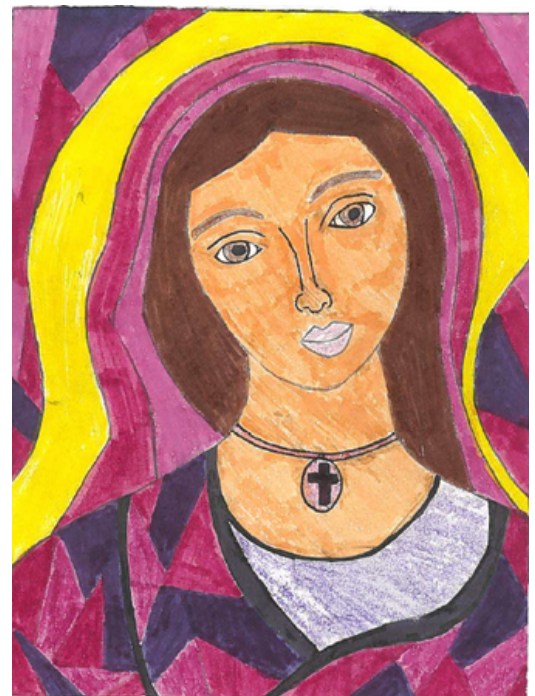
Maryam had never questioned God's decision for her. She was the most fertile soil to bear the best fruit the world has ever seen. She lived-in self-consuming fire and gave a diamond to the world. Her lineage, her personality and her upbringing, together made it possible for the Son of God to be the true Son of Man. So much beyond comprehension is her value that, even after her death, through her ascension she was made the most fragrant flower in heaven's garden, her body never to be food for maggots.

● Theotokos - The Second Eve ●

Mother of our Lord! Please pray for us, for he adored and respected you like any son would or even more, and we believe your prayers cannot go unheard. The blessed womb, the blessed woman, not a mere shell but whose blood ran through our sweet Jesus, which made up the human nature and character of his whole being. If not you, who else would be worthy of being called 'blessed' by generations to come?!



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'ജോസഫ്'- സ്ത്രീ ശാക്തീകരണത്തിന് ഒരു പുരുഷ മാതൃക

By: Soney John (OCYM)

'കന്യകയുടെ കാവൽക്കാരൻ', 'വന്ദ്യവയോധികൻ', 'കർത്താവിന്റെ വളർത്തു പിതാവ്', 'ഉത്തമശീലൻ'

നമ്മുടെ ആരാധനയിൽ വിശുദ്ധ ജോസഫിനു നൽകിയിട്ടുള്ള ചില വിശേഷണങ്ങൾ ആണിവ. ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് ദൈവശാസ്ത്രത്തിലും ആരാധനയിലും വിശുദ്ധ ജോസഫിന് നൽകിയിട്ടുള്ള സ്ഥാനം എന്താണ്? കത്തോലിക്കാ വിശ്വാസത്തിൽ കാണുന്ന തിരുകുടുംബം എന്ന സങ്കല്പം ഓർത്തോഡോക്സിയിൽ ഇല്ല. "സ്ത്രീയുടെ സന്തതി സർപ്പത്തിന്റെ തല തകർക്കും" (ഉൽപ്പത്തി 3:15) എന്നത് നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവിനെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഒരു പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട പ്രവചനം ആണെന്ന് പണ്ഡിതർ ചിന്തിക്കുന്നു. ഇവിടെ സ്ത്രീക്കും, അതായതു മറിയാമിനും സന്തതിയായ ക്രിസ്തുവിനുമാണ് പ്രാധാന്യം. അതിനാലാണ് നമ്മുടെ സഭ കർത്താവിന്റെ കൂടെത്തന്നെ വിശുദ്ധ ദൈവമാതാവിനും വലിയ ഒരു സ്ഥാനം ജഡാവതാരത്തിൽ നൽകിയിട്ടുള്ളത്. മാതാവിനു കൊടുത്തിട്ടുള്ള ഈ വലിയ സ്ഥാനമാണ് സത്യത്തിൽ ഓർത്തോഡോക്സിയുടെ അതുല്യത.

വിശുദ്ധ മാതാവിന് കൊടുത്തിട്ടുള്ള തിയോടോക്കോസ് സ്ഥാനമാണ് നമ്മുടെ വിശ്വാസത്തിന്റെ കാതൽ. പക്ഷെ ഇതുപോലെയുള്ള ഒരു അതുല്യ സ്ഥാനം വിശുദ്ധ ജോസഫിന് ഓർത്തോഡോക്സിയിൽ നൽകിയിട്ടില്ല. പിന്നെ എന്താണ് ജോസഫിന് സഭയിൽ ഉള്ള സ്ഥാനം?

സഭ ജോസഫിനെ നീതിമാനായ ജോസഫ് എന്നാണ് വിളിക്കുന്നത്. ഓർമ്മകളുടെ വലിയ ഒരു കുമ്പാരമാണ് ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് സഭ. ആ സഭയിൽ ജോസഫിന് നൽകിയ വലിയ ഒരു സ്ഥാനമാണ് നീതിമാനായ ജോസഫ് എന്ന നാമം. എന്തുകൊണ്ടാണ് ജോസഫിന് ഈ നാമം ലഭിച്ചത്?

ദൈവം തന്നെ ഏല്പിച്ച ഒരു വലിയ ഉത്തരവാദിത്വം വളരെ ഭംഗിയായി നിർവഹിച്ച ആളാണ് ജോസഫ്. അതായതു, ദൈവമാതാവിനെ പരിരക്ഷിക്കുക, സംരക്ഷിക്കുക എന്ന ഭാരിച്ച ഉത്തരവാദിത്തം ആണ് ദൈവം കൊടുത്തത്. ആ ഉത്തരവാദിത്തം വിശ്വസ്തതയോടു പാലിക്കുക എന്ന ദൗത്യം ഒരു വലിയ ത്യാഗമാണ്. അതാണ് നീതിമാനായ ജോസഫ് ചെയ്തത്. ആരാധനയിൽ നാം പാടുന്ന, "മറിയാമിനെ ഞാൻ വേശ്യസമം വെടിയുമുഷ്ണിയിൽ" എന്ന് തുടങ്ങുന്ന ഗാനം ഏറെ പ്രാധാന്യമർഹിക്കുന്നു. മറിയാമിനെ ഉപേക്ഷിക്കാൻ ആലോചിച്ച ജോസഫ് ദൈവഹിതം അറിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ കന്യാവ്രതക്കാരിയായ മറിയാമിനെ ലോകത്തിനു മുൻപിൽ വേശ്യസമം ആകാതെ കാത്തു സൂക്ഷിച്ചു. ഇതാണ് സഭ ജോസഫിനെ നീതിമാനായ ജോസഫ് എന്ന് വിളിക്കാനുള്ള കാരണം.

തനിക്ക് വിവാഹനിശ്ചയം കഴിഞ്ഞ കന്യകയായ മറിയാം ഉദരത്തിൽ ഒരു ശിശുവിനെ വഹിക്കുന്നു എന്നുകണ്ട ജോസഫ് അവൾക്കു ലോകാപവാദം ഉണ്ടാകാതെ രഹസ്യത്തിൽ ഉപേക്ഷിക്കാനാണു ആലോചിച്ചത്.

ഇവിടെ നാം ഒരു നല്ല മാതൃകയാണ് കാണുന്നത്. തന്റെ കുടുംബത്തിനകത്തുണ്ടായ വലിയ ഒരു പ്രയാസം ലോകമുനാകെ കൊണ്ടുവന്നാൽ അത് തന്റെ ജീവിതപങ്കാളിക്ക് വലിയൊരു ദുഷ്പേര് ആകുമെന്നും അത് അവളുടെ ജീവഹാനിക്ക് തന്നെ ഹേതു ആകാമെന്നും അറിയാവുന്ന ജോസഫ് ആ പ്രയാസം രഹസ്യത്തിൽ കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യാനുള്ള ഒരു മാതൃകയാണ് കാണിച്ചത്. ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ നാം നമ്മുടെ കുടുംബങ്ങളിൽ ഉണ്ടാകുന്ന പ്രയാസങ്ങൾ എങ്ങനെയാണു കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നത് എന്ന് ചിന്തിക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട് . ജോസഫ് കാട്ടിയ ഈ മാർഗം നാം നമ്മുടെ കുടുംബങ്ങളിൽ പിൻപറ്റേണ്ടതായ ഒരു മാതൃകയാണ്.

ശിശുവായ യേശുവിനു ജീവാപായം ഉണ്ടാകും എന്ന് കണ്ട ജോസഫ് ശിശുവിനെയും അമ്മയെയും കൊണ്ട് രക്ഷപെടാനായി വീണ്ടും ഒരു വലിയ അപകട സാധ്യതയുള്ള ദൗത്യം ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നതായും വചനം നമ്മെ പഠിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

ദൈവ കല്പനയെ പരിപൂർണ്ണമായും വിശ്വസിച്ചു നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവിന്റെ മനുഷ്യാവതാരത്തിൽ വിശുദ്ധ മറിയാമിന്റെ സ്ഥാനം ശരിക്കും മനസിലാക്കിയ ജോസഫ്, തന്നെ ദൈവം ഏല്പിച്ച ആ വലിയ കർത്തവ്യം പ്രതിഫലിച്ചു കൂടാതെ ചെയ്തു നല്ലൊരു മാതൃക നമ്മൾക്കു തന്നു. മറിയം ഒരു സാധാരണ യുവതി അല്ല എന്നും തന്റെ ജനത്തെ രക്ഷിപ്പാനായുള്ള ദൈവപുത്രന് ജനിക്കാനായി ദൈവത്താൽ തെരഞ്ഞെടുക്കപ്പെട്ടിട്ടുള്ള ദൈവജനനി ആണ് എന്നുള്ള തിരിച്ചറിവാണ് ജോസഫിനെ മറിയാമിന്റെ കാവൽക്കാരനായി തീരാൻ കാരണമാക്കിയത്.

നീതിമാനായ ജോസെഫിന്റെ പിൻകാല ചരിത്രം നമ്മുടെ മുൻപിൽ ഇല്ല എങ്കിലും സഭ അദ്ദേഹത്തെ ഒരു വിശുദ്ധനായി ദൈവമാതാവിന്റെ സംരക്ഷകനും നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവിന്റെ വളർത്തുപിതാവുമായി കണ്ടു ബഹുമാനിക്കുന്നു, ആദരിക്കുന്നു. നീതിമാനായ ജോസെഫിന്റെ പ്രാർത്ഥന നമ്മൾക്കു കോട്ടയായിരിക്കട്ടെ.

*Drawing by:
Abel Kottuvilayil Boban
Grade 7, Sunday School*



Sword Through the Heart

By: Saumya Varghese (MMVS)

For a beginner on a great mission, Mary had to hear Simeon's message, "Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:35) It was indeed a painful and disturbing message for her. However, she discovered that for those who trust God, he uses soul-piercing events to unleash more grace, salvation, and joy into life situations than one could ever imagine.

Simeon told Mary the means by which Jesus would bring salvation and cause the world to be divided. The division comes between those who put their faith in him as Christ and those who reject him. Though some may look righteous outwardly, He will reveal their hearts before God and in public. This message must have inflicted pain in Mary's heart because, as foretold in prophecies, it could lead to betrayal, rejection and death of her son.

The most wonderful, gracious event in human history was God sending his Son into the world — to the cross — to "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), and this gracious event caused unfathomable agony for Mary.

It is worth noticing that, as God works out his salvation for sinners, he leads us along unexpected paths that might result in unexpected pain and trauma. Whenever such events or incidents occur, we can remember Mary as one who has already gone ahead of us through all pains in most severity. The darkest moment of her life - when the sword of her only son's passion and death that pierced deep into her soul, was the moment that God used her most to bring salvation and joy to the world and personally to her too!

That is how he works with us too. At times we feel terrible pain not knowing the reason and purpose, get confused or panic, and only later we discover that our deepest wounds often become channels through which the most profound love and grace flow in.

Every image of mother and child reveals deep love and affection between them. Mary and Jesus are no exception - especially being a mother is not an easy task. Though she might not have comprehended the full meaning and purpose of her life and of Jesus, she believed in God and was ready to take the big leap of faith. There are three important virtues that we as Christians could adopt for ourselves as revealed in the character of Mary - her humility, her commitment to God and her brevity.

Everything may not always work the way we think it should be. However, God always has a plan for us, thus we should believe. Trials and tribulations in our life often feel like swords through our heart. It will be painful, but the joy and fruit that follows after could be beyond our understanding and perception.

Women Leadership Towards Salvation

By: Mrudula Philip (MMVS)

Women play a significant role in our day to day lives. We see them in various roles as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. We also see them in roles like teachers, nurses, workers, drivers, cleaners, librarians, doctors today. Women take lead in all fields of sports, invention, leadership and so on. Do we have women who led us to Salvation? Yes - the one and only St Mary – Mother of Jesus.

Mary has been into the roles of daughter, mother and wife. She played a major redemptive role as the Mother of Jesus Christ. To be in the redemptive mission, one must become a leader. It is to understand the undisclosed difficulties of a person and help them in ways of strengthening and resolving them. A leader's responsibility could be really hard when it is actually carried out. How did Mary contribute towards leading the whole creation to salvation? Let us visit two biblical scenarios where Mary had demonstrated her exemplary leadership.

First instance is the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth who were cousins. Elizabeth had gone through a long period of barrenness. In her old age, she conceived John the Baptist. Pregnancy is no easy task, especially in old age. Even for youngsters, some may have smooth sailing while for the rest it could be very complicated. During the visitation of Angel Gabriel to Mary, the good news of Elizabeth's conception was also shared. Mary, being a considerate person, went out to meet Elizabeth, in spite of her condition of bearing Christ in her womb. Long journeys on foot in those days were more tiresome than we could imagine as we now enjoy all luxuries of transport and other facilities. What was the outcome of her visit? Two gestational babies John the Baptist and Jesus Christ communicated with each other through the Holy Spirit.

Both mothers were joyous while experiencing the heavenly moment. Elizabeth was glad and humbled herself to confess that the mother of the Creator had come to visit her. Mary lowered herself and went out to meet another human in whom a child of promise was growing. Mary herself had God in her womb too. Mary's visit gave way to a meeting space for the Creator (Jesus) and his forerunner (John) who also represents humankind.

Second is the wedding banquet at Cana. At the outset it looked merry and enjoyable, in reality there were issues. Mary understood the unseen or the untold and reported it to Jesus. She took lead and simply asked the servants to obey whatever Jesus instructed them to do. Jesus was reluctant and told Mary that his time has not come yet. Mary took this opportunity to reveal Jesus and his role in the scheme of salvation. Deep in her heart, Mary was aware of both hers and her son's mission. By nudging her son, here Mary represented the whole human race who had to take responsibility and put to action for the establishment of universal redemption.

In a world of too many challenges and struggles, especially regarding faith in God, how could we lead our community and ourselves towards salvation? Let us summarize - 1) It is primarily the personal submission to God, for us to be utilized as tools in His divine hands in accordance with His plan. 2) We should yield to the will revealed through messages from God. 3) It requires willingness or readiness to accept challenges and responsibilities even at a cost or some loss. 4) Another prerequisite is the awareness of our calling and prioritising everything for the glory of God who is calling. 5) There should be a complete trust and conviction that, when we accept challenges to take up responsibilities (mission) according to the will of God, there will always be a Divine Providence that surpasses all human reasoning and logical understanding.

Mary submitted herself to God's plan, ready to be the handmaid of God. She raised her son up and proved herself a responsible mother. As required from her, she was ready to let go of him to change the course of history and never tried to hold him for her personal benefit.

*Drawing by :
Ann Varughese, MMVS*

One of our most popular Virgin Mary icons features the Madonna and Child painted in the classic style of Byzantine icons of the Theotokos, known as the Hodegetria ("Guide" or "indicator of the way").

I chose this Icon because it shows Mother Mary in a very simple attire. Her face is so calm and serene and she looks at us and gestures with her hand towards Jesus, her son guiding our attention to Him.



*Drawing by :
Liza Thomas, MMVS
Theotokos - Hodegetria*



Theotokos is the icon that represents both Christ and Mary. She often wears two different colors which represent two different aspects of Mother Mary. Her veil is often portrayed as red which signifies her divinity.

However, under her veil, her clothes are blue which symbolizes humanity. There are five main types of representation of the Theotokos in Orthodox iconography, and this picture mostly represents, Hodegetria type, means, The guide, it's an iconographic depiction of the Theotokos, holding the child Jesus at her side while pointing to him as the source of salvation for humankind.

The icons of Mary, the letters MP ΘY, short for "MHTHP ΘEOY", are usually placed on the upper left and right of the head of the Virgin Mary. In Greek this represents the word Mater Theo which means the "mother of God". In short, this icon tells us more about Mary. She keeps guiding us back to Christ, and how we can receive Christ through her.

മറിയത്തിന്റെ പാട്ട് - ഒരു വിപ്ലവാത്മക ഗാനം

By: Santy Binu (Choir)

“ബലികുടീരങ്ങളേ..ബലികുടീരങ്ങളേ
സ്ഥരണകളിരമ്പും രണസ്ഥാരകങ്ങളേ ..
ഇവിടെ ജനകോടികൾ ചാർത്തുന്നു നിങ്ങളിൽ
സമരപുളകങ്ങൾ തൻ സിന്ധുര മാലകൾ”

മലയാളത്തിലെ ഏറ്റവും പ്രശസ്തമായ ഒരു വിപ്ലവഗാനം ആണിത്.1957-ൽ ശ്രീ വയലാർ രാമവർമ്മ എഴുതി, ദേവരാജൻ മാസ്റ്റർ സംഗീതം നൽകിയ ഈ ഗാനം, തിരുവനന്തപുരത്തെ രക്ത സാക്ഷി മണ്ഡപത്തിന്റെ ഉദ്ഘാടനത്തോടനുബന്ധിച്ചുള്ള ചടങ്ങിൽ, ഏകദേശം 50 പേർ ചേർന്നാണ് ആദ്യമായി ആലപിച്ചത്. 65 വർഷങ്ങൾക്കിപ്പുറം ഇന്നും പുതുമ നഷ്ടപ്പെടാത്ത ഒരു ഗാനമായി മലയാളിയുടെ മനസ്സിൽ നിറഞ്ഞു നിൽക്കുന്നു.

ലോകചരിത്രം പരിശോധിച്ചാൽ, മിക്ക വിപ്ലവാത്മക ഗാനങ്ങളുടെയും ഉത്ഭവം വിജയകരമായ ഒരു വിപ്ലവത്തിന്റെ അഥവാ മാറ്റത്തിന്റെ തുടർച്ച ആണെന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കാം.എത്ര കാലങ്ങൾ കഴിഞ്ഞാലും അവയുടെ ആവിർഭാവത്തിനു കാരണമായ 'മാറ്റങ്ങളെ ' കുറിച്ച് ജനങ്ങളെ എന്നും ഓർമ്മിപ്പിക്കുന്നവയും അവരെ പ്രചോദിപ്പിക്കുന്നവയും ആയിരിക്കും ഈ ഗാനങ്ങൾ.

പ്രശസ്ത സുവിശേഷകനായ E. Stanley Johns ന്റെ അഭിപ്രായത്തിൽ 'The magnificat is the most revolutionary document in the history of the world'.വിശുദ്ധ ലൂക്കോസിന്റെ സുവിശേഷത്തിൽ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്ന 'കന്യകമറിയത്തിന്റെ പാട്ട് ' എങ്ങനെയാണ് ഒരു വിപ്ലവാത്മക ഗാനം ആകുന്നത്? ഒരു യഹൂദപ്പെൺകൊടി ആയ മറിയ, തന്റെ ചാർച്ചക്കാരി എലിസബേത്തിനെ സന്ദർശിക്കുമ്പോൾ ആത്മാവിൽ നിറഞ്ഞു പറയുന്ന വാക്കുകൾ മനോഹരമായ ഒരു ഗാനരൂപത്തിൽ ചിട്ടപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുകയാണ് ഇവിടെ. ഈ 'ഗാനത്തെ ' പല ചരണങ്ങളായി വേർതിരിച്ചു നമുക്ക് ഒന്ന് നോക്കാം. ഇതിന്റെ ആദ്യ ചരണങ്ങളിൽ (വാക്യം 46-50) മിശിഹായെ വഹിക്കാൻ തന്നെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ദൈവത്തെ പുകഴ്ത്തുന്ന മറിയയെ ആണ് നാം കാണുന്നത്.

എന്നാൽ തുടർന്നുള്ള ചരണങ്ങളിൽ (വാക്യം 51-53) തനിക്കു ചുറ്റുമുള്ള ലോകത്തെക്കുറിച്ചാണ് മറിയ പറഞ്ഞിരിക്കുന്നത്. തന്റെ ഉദരത്തിൽ ഉരുവായിരിക്കുന്നത് ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പുത്രൻ ആണ് എന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കിയ മറിയ, അവന്റെ ജനനത്തിന് ശേഷം ലോകത്തിൽ ഉണ്ടാകാൻ പോകുന്ന മൂന്നു വിപ്ലവകരമായ മാറ്റങ്ങളെ കുറിച്ചാണ് ഇവിടെ പ്രതിപാദിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്.

1.Moral Revolution - ധാർമിക വിപ്ലവം
യേശുക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ വരവ് അർത്ഥമാക്കുന്നത് ദൈവം ലോകത്ത് ഒരു ധാർമ്മിക വിപ്ലവം സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നു എന്നാണ്. അധർമ്മം പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവരെ ഒടുവിൽ നിയമത്തിന് മുന്നിൽ കൊണ്ടുവരുന്ന ഒരു വിപ്ലവം. ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ വരവ് മനുഷ്യന്റെ എല്ലാ അഹങ്കാരങ്ങളുടെയും പൊങ്ങച്ചങ്ങളുടെയും അവസാനമാണ്. അവന്റെ വരവ് അടങ്ങാത്ത അത്യാഗ്രഹത്തിന്റെയും അധികാരത്തോടുള്ള അനിയന്ത്രിതമായ മോഹത്തിന്റെയും വിരാമമാണ്. കർത്താവിന്റെ ബലമുള്ള ഭൂജങ്ങൾ വീരന്മാരെ വീഴ്ത്തുന്നു. അഹങ്കാരികളും ധീരരുമായ മനുഷ്യർ സർവ്വശക്തനെ വെല്ലുവിളിക്കാൻ തല ഉയർത്തുന്നു, പക്ഷേ അവൻ അവരെ പൊടിയോളം താഴ്ത്തുന്നു

2. Social Revolution -സാമൂഹിക വിപ്ലവം

സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ ഘടനയിലും സ്വഭാവത്തിലും പെട്ടെന്നുണ്ടാകുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങളാണ് സാമൂഹിക വിപ്ലവങ്ങൾ. ഈ വിപ്ലവങ്ങൾ സമൂഹത്തിലെ സമ്പദ്‌വ്യവസ്ഥ, സംസ്കാരം, തത്ത്വചിന്ത, തുടങ്ങിയവയെ മാറ്റിമറിക്കുന്നു.

ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ വരവ് സമൂഹത്തിൽ വലിയൊരു മാറ്റമാണ് കൊണ്ടുവന്നത്. അവൻ അഹങ്കാരികളെ താഴ്ത്തുകയും താഴ്മയുള്ളവരെ ഉയർത്തുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. എളിയവരെ അധികാരത്തിലേക്ക് ഉയർത്തുന്നതിലൂടെ ദൈവം ലോകത്തെ ജയിക്കുന്നു. ചരിത്രത്തിലെ ഉയർച്ച താഴ്ചകൾ യഥാർത്ഥത്തിൽ ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനം ആണ്.

3. Economic Revolution -സാമ്പത്തിക വിപ്ലവം.

"അവൻ വിശക്കുന്നവരെ നന്മകളാൽ നിറച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു, എന്നാൽ സമ്പന്നരെ വെറുതെ പറഞ്ഞയച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു". മറിയയുടെ പാട്ടിലെ ഏറ്റവും വിപ്ലവകരമായ ഭാഗമാണിത്. ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ വരവ് ഈ ലോകത്തിന്റെ അഭിമാനത്തെ അസ്വസ്ഥമാക്കുകയും എളിയവരെ ഉയർത്തുകയും മാത്രമല്ല ചെയ്യുന്നത്. യഥാർത്ഥത്തിൽ അവന്റെ വരവ് വിശക്കുന്നവർക്ക് ഭക്ഷണം നൽകുകയും സമ്പന്നരെ ശൂന്യമാക്കി മാറ്റുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

അതാണ് ദൈവരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ ക്രമം. അത് ലോകത്തിലെ ദരിദ്രരിലേക്കാണ് ആദ്യം എത്തിച്ചേരുന്നത്... ഒപ്പം മനുഷ്യരാശിയുടെ മറന്നുപോയ വിഭാഗങ്ങളിലേക്കും.

ഇപ്രകാരം നോക്കുകയാണെങ്കിൽ Stanley Johns പറഞ്ഞത് നൂറു ശതമാനം ശരിയാണെന്ന് നിസ്സംശയം പറയുവാൻ സാധിക്കും. ലോകത്തെ ആകമാനം മാറ്റിമറിച്ച, വളരെ അസാധാരണമായ ഒരു വിപ്ലവത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കമായിരുന്നു കന്യകയുടെ ഗർഭധാരണവും യേശുക്കുഞ്ഞിന്റെ ജനനവും... അവൻ ഈ ലോകത്തിൽ കൊണ്ടുവരാനിരുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങൾ അഥവാ വിപ്ലവങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചു മനോഹരമായി പ്രതിപാദിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന 'കന്യകമറിയാമിന്റെ പാട്ടു ' (Magnificat) തന്നെയാണ് ലോകം ഇന്നു വരെ കണ്ടിട്ടുള്ള ഏറ്റവും മനോഹരമായ വിപ്ലവാത്മക ഗാനം.

Drawing by:
Binta Joshua
Grade 7, Sunday School



O Blessed Mother Mary

By: Eva Ann Mathew (Choir)

St. Ignatius of Antioch has said, "He who is devout to the Mother of God will certainly never be lost." In A.D. 431, the ecumenical Council of Ephesus decreed Virgin Mary as 'Theotokos', the Mother of God. Orthodox churches honor and revere St. Mary for her humility and obedience to the will of God by remembering her in the liturgical hymns which glorify her as "second eve" and "second heaven." As she has a unique relationship with her Son, we seek her intercession while believing Mary as mother of God, the ever-virgin, in every liturgy, through hymns.

The mystery of the virgin birth, prophecies and symbols from the Old Testament have been recalled in various hymns of the daily offices of prayer. The Mavurbo hymns which are part of the night vigil, teaches us about the Magnificat and also commemorates Theotokos, saints and the departed. The main emphasis of Mother Mary hymns are: 1) As she has said "every generation will call me blessed," she must be revered and blessed. 2) Mary expresses profound humility and understanding that God is the source of all grace, as she attributes the glory of the Incarnation to God and not to herself. 3) Incarnation proclaims God's strength, holiness, goodness and sacrificial love.

Wednesday 'Shemo' third hour prayer centers on the Theotokos, comparing various forms of virgin births, demonstrating God's dominion over nature.

"The tree did bring forth a lamb
The rock did flow with water
The fish did bring forth a coin."

During the sixth hour, we recognize the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, which is beyond our comprehension and similar to the mystery of virgin birth. She is titled as the 'Veil of the Spirit', who was hidden from the public by the miracle work of the Holy Spirit in her womb. She is also titled the 'living waters', the water that miraculously came forth from the rock in the desert and the 'strong city' establishing her as a refuge of God's presence and victory for Israel.

While seeking prayers of the saints through the hymns called Quqlion, the first commemoration will be of Theotokos. She is the most exalted among all the saints. In Syriac hymnography, 'ship' is a common example of both the Theotokos and the church. She carried Christ, the captain of the ship. It represents surrender and trust in Christ, as well as safety from all harm and drowning. We ask Mother Mary to intercede for us to the only begotten Son of God and thank her for willingly bearing Him in the womb. Through her, the age-old curse was uprooted, saving Adam's children. We seek the intercession of Theotokos so that Christ may be with us and enable us to follow her life of sanctity and prayer.

During Pre-Anaphora, the hymn "O blessed mother" remembers and praises Mother Mary for her humbleness. She is represented by the bush and her guarded virginity by the unburned leaves. Mary, compared to the bush, would not be burned or destroyed when Christ the fire dwells in her. Through remembering angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, the church affirms and acknowledges her perpetual virginity even after the birth of Christ. St. Mary is mentioned when the liturgy begins, and the curtain is drawn open - 'Mariam who brought Thee forth'. She is referred to in hymns as the "pure virgin" and "Holy and magnificent Theotokos."

Theotokos is the best image of Christian holiness, purity, and humility. Without a doubt, St. Mary represents what it means to gain God's favor. The church acknowledges that by honoring St. Mary, we have fulfilled the prophecy of the Magnificat. The hymns in the liturgy are intended to demonstrate virgin Mary's high standing in the church and in the hearts of the faithful.

*Drawing by:
Elvis Binu George
Grade 10, Sunday School*



LIFE OF SAINT MARY

She is the mother of Jesus, Saint Mary.

A simple and young woman who said YES to God and willingly obeyed God, She who happily accepted the special message that the angel gave her, Got to be part of God's amazing plan for redeeming the world. The Life of Saint Mary teaches us that when we trust and believe God's promises, great things can happen!

Mary: As Seen Through Icons

By: Lian Gijo (Acolytes)

Among all other saints, St. Mary has a prominent place in our faith. She is the mother of God, frequently referred to as Theotokos, which comes from the Greek words Theos and tiktein. Theos signifies "God," and tiktein means "to give birth." To put it simply, Mary is the Theotokos, the one who gave birth to God.

Mary is represented in the church in numerous ways. She has various symbols and icons that represent her close relation with our Saviour. She often represents humanity as a whole and our relationship with Christ. She is even compared to Eve and is known as the second Eve who redeemed the human race. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, who is the grace and salvation of humanity, is born of Mother Mary, the New Eve. We can most definitely look upon her to see what it means to be Christ-like.

She is often represented well through icons. Mother Mary has many different depictions in icons that represent different theological views. One of the most popular icons is known as the Hodigitria, which means guide. Mary is personified and shown in this icon in a unique way. She is seen with a veil, emphasizing both her humanity and divinity. She often wears two different colors which represent two different aspects of Mother Mary. Her veil is often portrayed as red which signifies her royalty and divinity. However, under her veil, her clothes are blue which symbolizes eternity and humanity.

In addition, on the icon of Hodigitria, Mary is looking directly at us. However, her hand points to the Saviour in her arms. The Saviour is Jesus Christ. He is represented with a scroll in His hand which symbolizes the Word and Wisdom of One True God. Above the infant Christ, we see the Greek letters IC XC which means 'Jesus Christ- Jesus the Anointed'. Therefore, this represents His godliness and purity, and He is shown giving us a blessing with His right hand even as an infant.

This icon of Mother Mary portrays her humility, purity, and the suffering she endured being the mother of God. Mary guides us to salvation by pointing to God and Saviour. Above Mother Mary the Greek letters MP OY are written representing Mater Theo, which means 'Mother of God'. In short, this icon tells us more about how Mary keeps guiding us to Christ and reveals how we can receive Christ through her.

Model for Diakonia- Serving from Altar to Street

By: Jeffin Tom Jacob (Acolytes)

The bible teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves, in the gospel of St. Matthew 22:37-39. The word Diakonia is derived from a Greek word which means service to others. Serving at the Holy Altar is considered sacred. It should be carried out with utmost diligence. However, altar service is not meant to be limited to the four walls of the temple.

The duties of an altar assistant or a deacon include assisting the priest or bishop in the Holy Qurbana, leading the congregation in collective prayers, and reading scriptures. These duties should not be limited within the church. Can these duties and responsibilities of an altar assistant be beneficial to the wider society? As altar assistants, there are many ways to bring these duties and responsibilities from church out to the communities around us.

Around the world, there are people suffering from depression, poverty, financial crisis, and family issues. Rather than being ignorant of the issues faced by people around us, we can start interacting with those who are facing crisis or in need of help. In this technology-driven era, sometimes all a person needs could be a companion or a moral support to overcome the sorrows they are facing in life. Moral support can prevent people from giving up on life and learn to deal with the problems in their lives.

Furthermore, rather than staying away, contented as an altar assistant, we need to start caring for the people around us in our day-to-day life. Just like an altar assistant who leads prayers in church, we should also take the lead in caring for our society and loved ones. Henceforth, let us start looking at the people around us and help them out in any way possible, be it moral or financial support. A small step or initiative from us can help turn people's lives or mindsets.

*Drawing by:
Christa Joshua
Grade 5, Sunday School*



The Theotokos – Icon and its Meaning in Christian Life

By: Jason Varghese (Acolytes)

Orthodox churches had icons depicting the divine mysteries in practice since the fifth or sixth century. When we look back into the history of the icons of the ancient Orthodox church specifically depicting Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of God), one of the most famous icons that comes to mind is the icon 'Our Lady of the Sign'. This icon is one of the most beloved and ancient Christian icons of the eleventh and twelfth century and continues to be a devotional focus in many of the Orthodox churches today.

The icon shows Mary facing us, with her hands raised in a prayerful posture to God (hands lifted up to the level of her head and elbows bent), and with the image of Jesus (as a child) depicted in a circle of light at her bosom. Looking at this icon from a basic viewpoint, it shows Mary being presented in a prayerful stance and draws our attention to her Son and Our Saviour Jesus.

While researching this icon in more detail, I learned that the icon depicts the Theotokos during the Annunciation at the moment of saying, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word," (Luke 1:38 ESV). This verse not only represents a deeper significance on which we are to reflect our lives upon, but it also highlights the importance of icons in our Orthodox faith. They serve as mediums of instruction in our daily Christian life and help in keeping our mind focused on worshiping God. Therefore, if we look at the Theotokos 'Our Lady of the Sign' icon, we see that the represented verse of Luke 1:38 reminds us that we are to model our lives around Mary. For instance,

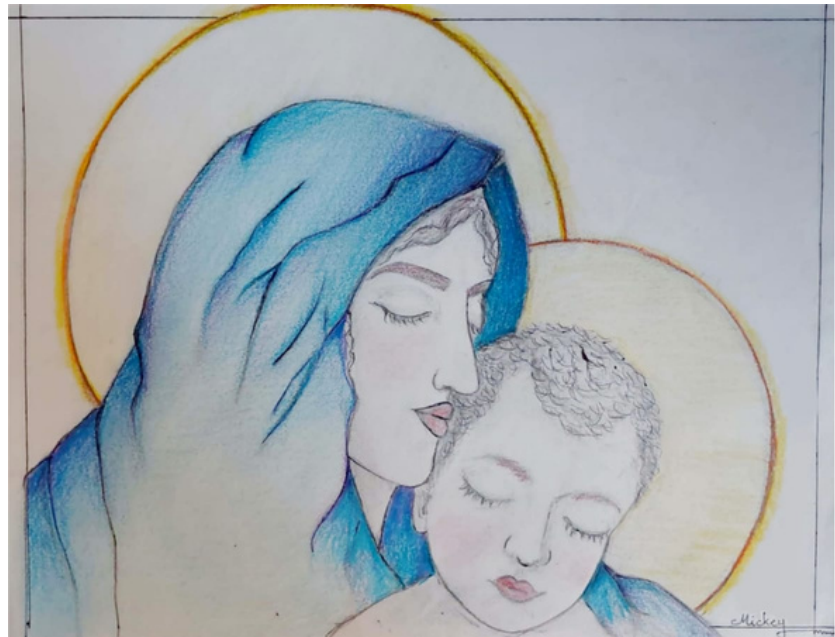
- Mary was called for a specific purpose by God
- Mary served as God's messenger throughout her life
- Mary fulfilled her role to bring forth the Son of God on earth
- Mary was humble and fully submissive to God's plan

By modeling our lives around the above mentioned points, we could infer that,

- We too are called for a specific purpose by God.
- We too have been commissioned by God to carry His message (not in our wombs), but rather in our hearts and through our words and actions
- Each of us are called by name for our role to shine the light of Jesus in our homes, workplaces, friendships, and in all our daily interactions with others.
- We must also live a life of full submission to Christ – humble and faithful to whatever God asks of us – in praise and worship always.

The Theotokos “Lady of the Sign” icon also shows us that Jesus must be the center of our life’s focus, for He gave Himself fully for us, and we must do the same just as Mary did in her life – giving Him our whole life and to submit to whatever task He calls us. Our past experiences (good or bad), our present circumstances, our future goals and aspirations, our blessings and burdens, our hopes and fears – all to Jesus, we must surrender. As Mary lovingly showed us, humility is simply a matter of saying to Jesus: “Here I am, just as I am, all of me, and I surrender all to You, my blessed Saviour.” Let us all pray for God’s blessing by living a life of faith, trust, and servanthood to the glory of God, just like our Blessed Mary, Mother of Our God (Theotokos). Amen.

Drawing by:
Mickey Chacko
MMVS



ഒരമ്മയുടെ സ്നേഹത്തിനു പകരമായി മറ്റൊന്നില്ല. ആ സ്നേഹം ഒരു തടാകം പോലെയാണ്.. പുറമേ ശാന്തവും, അകമേ ജീവന്റെ തുടിപ്പ് അടങ്ങുന്നതും, നൊമ്പരവും, പരിഭവവും, ലാളനയും, പ്രാർത്ഥനയും, അതിലുപരിയായി ഒരുപാട് വേദനയും ഇടകലർന്നു നിൽക്കുന്ന ഒരു ഒഴുക്കാണ് മാതൃസ്നേഹം.. മാതാവിന്റെ സ്നേഹം ആ തടാകം പോലെയാണ്.. എത്ര ശാന്തമായ മുഖഭാവം! എന്നാൽ തന്റെ മകൻ ഒരുനാൾ തന്നെ വിട്ടുപിരിയും എന്ന വേദനയിൽ ഉരുകിയ ഒരു തിരിനാളമാണ് അമ്മ.. ‘അമ്മയും കുഞ്ഞും’ - ഏറ്റവും ശക്തവും, വിമലവും വികാരനിർഭരവുമായ ഒരു കാഴ്ചയും, ചിത്രവും, അനുഭവവുമാണ്. എത്ര വളർന്നാലും അമ്മയ്ക്ക് മക്കൾ വിധേയപ്പെട്ടവരും, അനുസരിയ്ക്കുന്നവരുമാണ്. മാതാവിന്റെ അപേക്ഷ ഒരിയ്ക്കലും ഉപേക്ഷിക്കപ്പെടുകയില്ല. നമുക്ക് ആ സ്നേഹത്തണലിൽ അഭയം പ്രാപിയ്ക്കാം..!

Symbols of St. Mary in the Temple of God

By: Cleemis Vaidhyan (Acolytes)

Mary is regarded as the greatest Saint in the Orthodox Church. Even as early as the first century, St. Ignatius of Antioch declared. "He who is devout to the Mother of God will never be lost". The Church addresses Mary as "Theotokos" which means Mother of God. We venerate and honor her and seek her intercession before the throne of God.

Tradition says that as a child, Mary was dedicated to the temple where she was raised and lived a life of prayer. The Church is the Temple of God and Mary as the person in whom God dwelt, is symbolic of this Church. There are many objects in the church that can be attributed to the symbol of Mary.

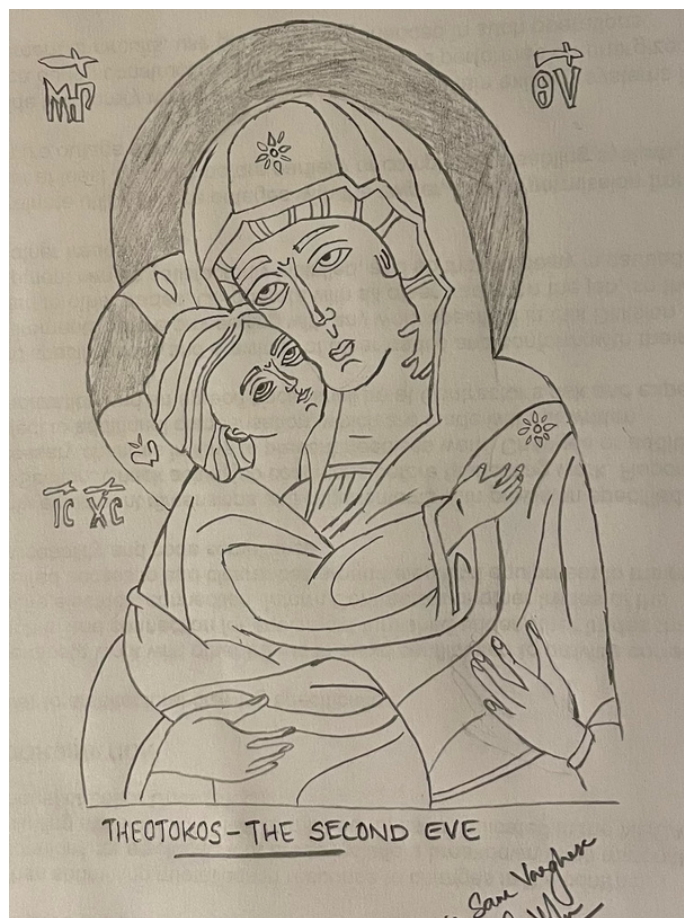
- The Church is referred to as the bride of Christ, and Mary is the royal daughter who is the true bride of the Lord.
- The Holy Sanctuary or 'Madbaha' is a representation of Heaven where God dwells.
- The Altar or 'Thronos', upon which Christ, the Living sacrifice is placed.
- The Veil of the Sanctuary or 'Thirasheela' is a symbol of the miracle in Mary's womb that was hidden to the world.
- The Altar steps or 'Dargah' is representative of the ladder which connects heaven and earth.
- The Paten or 'Peelaasa' and Chalice or 'Kasa' that hold the Body and Blood of Christ.
- The Tablet or 'Thablitha' on which the Paten and Chalice are kept
- The Golden Candlesticks that bear the Candles which give light to the world.
- The Censer or 'Dhoopakkutti' is symbolic of the womb of Saint Mary where divinity was united with humanity. St. Mary carried the great mystery, Christ, in her womb. The rising of the incense from the censer symbolizes the prayers of the faithful including the saints and departed, ascending to Heaven.
- The Dove brings good news of deliverance to the world (like the dove that brought an olive branch to Noah) and proclaims Mary's simplicity, purity and fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- Lectern or 'Evangelion Mesha' on which is placed the Book of the Holy Gospel (Word of God).

● Theotokos - The Second Eve ●

- The Reliquary or 'Arulika that holds the Holy Communion (Body of Christ).
- The Baptismal Font or 'Mamodeesa Thotti' where we experience our second birth in Christ. She is the womb from which the 'Water of Life' overflows.

The above list is by no means exhaustive. The visualization of Mary is all around us in objects and icons. She is an intercessor and refuge for the faithful. Mary is the perfect example of humility, purity and holiness for a Christian. She obeyed God's will completely. We sing in the third hour prayer "For no one was ever so humble as Mary and none was ever as exalted as she was". Yet Jesus clearly said, "For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). By doing the will of God, we who are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16) can become true symbols of Christ and His Kingdom as St. Mary does.

*Drawing by:
Ashwin Sam Varghese
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“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” (St.Luke 1:38)

With this utterance, God entered as a child into a human womb. A young girl initiated heaven into ordinary human situations. Let us take good courage to bring God into the present ‘too secularised world’ for His will to be carried out.

With Warm Regards,
OCYM Team & Editorial Board

'Urava' is conceived to provide a platform to interact and share views on various themes of relevance from time to time.

This journal is a product of the brilliant contributions from all our Spiritual organizations during the post-resurrection season.

'Urava' means an ever-flowing source of water. It could be the beginning point of a large stream that can quench the thirst of whoever is approaching. This literary initiative by OCYM aims to provide enlightening thoughts and ideas to thirsty souls for their spiritual edification.

This will serve as a hub for writers and thinkers to express their views and share their insights into the vibrant life of our community.

This project showcases what more we could achieve when our entire Church comes together to create something unique. Through these pages, our beloved members share their musings, reflections, and testimonials for this issue's theme 'Theotokos - The Second Eve'

Initiated by SGOCT OCYM





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With Warm Regards,

OCYM Team & Editorial Board