

VIRGIN MARY

An Icon of simplicity

Virgin Mary

An Icon of Simplicity

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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CONTENTS

About The Diocese	7
✧ Chapter One	
An Icon of Simplicity	9
✧ Chapter Two	
An Honored Lady of No Choices	19
✧ Chapter Three	
Who is St. Mary	23
✧ Chapter Four	
St. Mary Young Adult Life of Service	33
✧ Chapter Five	
St. Mary Adulthood	41
✧ Chapter Six	
St. Mary's Late & Heavenly Life	49
✧ Chapter Seven	
The Blessed Virgin Mary and The Love of Honor	55



His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch
of the See of St. Mark

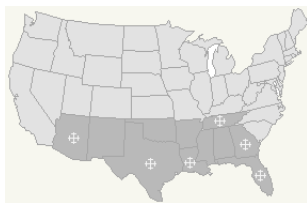


About The Diocese

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the 116 Successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. His Holiness' era is marked by a remarkable growth in the number of Coptic churches abroad. To address the needs of these churches, His Holiness felt the urgency to establish dioceses abroad. Thus the first Coptic Orthodox Diocese to be established in the United States is the Diocese of the Southern United States in 1993. H.H. Pope Shenouda III appointed His Grace Bishop Youssef to oversee this Diocese.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States is composed of the following states:

- * Alabama
- * Arkansas
- * Georgia
- * Mississippi
- * Oklahoma
- * Texas
- * Arizona
- * Florida
- * Louisiana
- * New Mexico
- * Tennessee



There are currently 33 priests serving the 27 churches, and 26 Coptic communities located in the Diocese.

www.suscopts.org



An Icon Of Simplicity

To write about the virtue of **Simplicity** is to write about St. Mary. Although many virtues found residence with the Mother of God, yet when it comes to Simplicity, St. Mary immediately stands conspicuous, and a sole source of inspiration and reference.

In the book of the Songs of Songs we read

“There are sixty queens

And eighty concubines,

And virgins without number.

My dove, my perfect one,

Is the only one,

The only one of her mother,

The favorite of the one who bore her.

The daughters saw her and called her blessed,

The queens and the concubines,

And they praised her.

Who is she who looks forth as the morning,

Fair as the moon,

Clear as the sun,

Awesome as an army with banners?” (Songs 6:8-10).

This verse illustrates the uniqueness of St. Mary, and is applicable to her and her alone, unlike all the other verses that could be alluding to the human soul in particular or the church of Christ in general.

What is Simplicity

By definition, Simplicity is freedom from cunning or duplicity. It should not be confused with naivety or superficiality. Our Lord Jesus Christ classified naivety, superficiality, and simplicity in His parable of the Sewer and the Seed.

Naivety has been likened to a sideways. Sideways are no good grounds for growing plants. When seeds fall on them, they remain there functionless until they find rest in the stomachs of birds and animals. So is the case with a naive person. People and events come across his way, but he cannot see through nor learn from them. A naive person lacks discernment and good judgment, as a result, he can get himself into trouble. More often than not, naivety is accompanied by ignorance and haughtiness.

Superficiality resembles stony places with no depth of earth. What happened to the seeds that fell on such stony places? They sprang up, but because they could not establish roots among those stony layers, they died shortly after. Superficiality characterizes a person who takes things

at surface value without delving deep into their meaning or essence.

Simplicity is the good ground, bound to yield crops regardless of size whether hundred, sixty or thirty. Simplicity defies and transcends both naivety and superficiality, because in essence simplicity is the spouse of wisdom, and the child of humility both being important protective weapons to the human heart.

Whereas Simplicity does not worry about the consequences of obeying God's Commands, where Naivety does not worry about the consequences of one's actions. Superficiality on the other hand, thinks about neither actions, nor their consequences.

Traits of Simplicity, (the Good Ground)

+ Obedience

St. Mary heard the message from the angel, although she was totally baffled by the seeming impossibility and absurdity of it, yet because the message was coming from God, she answered obediently "*Let it be to me according to your word*" without thinking of the hazardous, vague, and undefined consequences. Was it not because of her obedience perhaps we would still be hopelessly in bondage with no future nor destiny. St. Mary's obedience came like fresh water bringing satisfaction to the human race "*As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country*" (Proverbs 25:25). The outcome of obedience is always a hundredfold blessing. However St. Mary is revered by all generations.

+ Innocence

This trait is an essential requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven, *“Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:3). To be Christlike is to return and be childlike. St. Mary’s innocence is both concealed and manifested in her total obedience. She - in a childlike manner - followed Joseph in their flight to Egypt, accepted to give birth to her mysteriously begotten Son in a manger, and watched signs and wonders happen around her without questioning, freaking out, nor fainting.

Who would behave like that except someone with a childlike attitude? In her innocence, the beautiful dove was like Noah’s dove carrying the branch of Olive (Jesus Christ) bringing good tidings to Noah (the prototype of humanity that was in captivity) (Genesis 8:8-12). In many of her apparitions, St. Mary was seen by people as a beautiful dove hovering in the sky.

+ Modesty

Having been informed from heaven concerning her future status as the full of grace, blessed among women, found grace with God, and the mother-to-be of the Son of the most high, the King of kings and Lord of Lords, St. Mary was in a position to be psychologically and physically ready for grandeur and glamour. Yet, no artist portrayed her except in her ordinary attire of a humble, and as a middle class Jewish girl who was dedicated by her parents to God, and grew up in the temple.

David wrote about St. Mary's inner beauty and transparency saying, "*The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace*" (Psalm 45:13).

St. Mary in her modesty qualified for St. Peter's description of a modest woman whose beauty is not in "*arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel, rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God*" (1 Peter 3:3-4). Even with the entire honor her Son has bestowed upon her, the "*At Your right hand stands the queen*" (Psalm 45:9) still chooses modest people to visit, and simple churches to appear in.

+ Affability

The mother of God is recorded to have done lots of merciful acts to the extent of giving away her food (oral tradition). The little that the four gospels have recorded about St. Mary reveals her loving character to her relatives, neighbors, and her Son's disciples. As a prayerful, and sociable person, she did not miss being with the apostles the night of the descent of the Holy Spirit, thus receiving the Holy Spirit just like them, although she was not assigned the service of Evangelism.

+ Transparency

Having been purified by the Holy Spirit, the blessed Virgin became golden both in her inward and outward man. The Old Testament refers to her purity and transparency by

the Covenant tabernacle which was gilded from inside and outside. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary knew neither cunning, vile, duality, nor deceit.

+ Flexibility

A woman of no choices and preferences, the Blessed Virgin Mary was so flexible to all circumstances, and surprises. She traveled from one inn to the other, only to be met with closed doors, then later she gave birth to her Lord and Savior in a manger, nevertheless of a lot of other hardships where they were just means to strengthen her endurance and patience, and prepare her for the grand performance, that of seeing her Son go to the cross of His own accord for no crime He had committed.

+ Receptivity

No one can fathom the magnitude of the message delivered by a messenger from heaven to a fourteen year old simple Jewish girl. The only inquiry that the Virgin Mary allowed herself to make, was concerning the logical impossibility of such an event to take place “*How can this be, since I do not know a man*” (Luke 1:34). The angel’s answer to her question, if submitted to human logic and analysis, would not be much of a help to anyone who is not anchored in faith. Yet St. Mary was totally, obediently receptive. Again, she received the Prophetic Word from Simon the Elder concerning her anguish for her Son’s agony with receptivity and obedience “*Yes, a sword will*

pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:35).

That is why she has been rewarded with the Prophetic Word that she will be honored by all generations “*henceforth all generations will call me blessed*” (Luke 1:48).

+ Perceptivity

St. Mary’s perceptivity resulted from the wisdom the Holy Spirit had granted her. She was a woman of no idle talk. The four gospels have recorded only four phrases uttered by the Mother of God. She was more of actions than words, for the former speaks louder than the latter. In spite of the wonders that she saw and heard happened before her, she kept everything in her heart “*But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19). To no one, not even her Son’s disciples did she talk about her Son, and the time before He started His ministry at the age of thirty.

+ Readiness

The Mother of God is an emblem of genuine humility in genuine service. Any other woman, having known, who she was about to become because of who she was carrying in her womb, would have sat and rightfully expected myriads of angels to come and serve her. Instead, we found St. Mary forgot herself and was concerned about Elizabeth her relative, who was old bearing a child in her sixth month. She hurried to visit her and stayed almost three months there, only to disappear before the other women came, thus escaping mention, “*and Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house*” (Luke 1:56). St. Mary’s readiness got the hundred

fold reward. For before she had time to announce the glory that had been bestowed on her, the baby in Elizabeth's womb declared it bowing down in honor and worship to the King of Kings that she was carrying.

+ Vulnerability

In spite of the fact that she was the mother of God, St. Mary proclaimed her need for salvation just like any other human being *“my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior”* (Luke 1:47) calling herself maiden rather than queen, or lady of Honor.

+ Power

“Awesome as an army with banners”, St. Mary's powerful simplicity was functional before and after her departure to heaven. We see her exercising her maternal power when she went looking for her missing Son even in the temple, and in a very few authoritative words she let Him know how she felt about His disappearance from home (Luke 2:48).

A word from her convinced her Lord and Savior to go out of His way, divert His plan, and perform His first miracle at the Wedding of Cana. Mistaken are those who think that the role of St. Mary ended with her delivery of her Son. On the contrary the power of that Dove of Noah's Ark is still functional.

History records many stories of the Virgin Mary performing acts of power. One of the most interesting stories is when she repeatedly appeared to Caliph Maamoun, forcing him to write a letter to command the prince to stop ruining the churches

in Egypt. When he protested that he had no messenger to carry the letter from Syria to Egypt, she exercised her ultimate power by carrying it herself in a dovelike capacity.

Thousands of years before the appearance of St. Mary on the stage of history, the Old Testament's prophets prophesied about this simple, obedient, innocent, loving, receptive, perceptive, and powerful Jewish girl who deserved to be chosen to become the Mother of the Savior of humanity. She has been likened to Noah's dove (Genesis 8:8-12) bringing about good tidings, a cloud ridden by Christ (Isaiah 19:1), Golden Censor (Hebrews 9:4), Aaron's rod (Numbers 17:1-10), the Golden Lamp (Exodus 25:31-35) to mention just a very few.

May the prayers and supplications of St. Mary, the Mother of our God be with us all. Amen.



2



An Honored Lady Of No Choices

Virgin Mary was miraculously born to a rich man named Joachim and his barren wife, Anne. From the age of six months “undefiled” daughters of the Hebrews cared for St. Mary. At the very young age of three, St. Mary was then taken to reside in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Did St. Mary choose to live in the Temple?

St. Mary at the age of twelve would become engaged to St. Joseph. Zacharias the priest wanted to find a suitable man to assume the care for St. Mary. The priest gathered together the canes of her male relatives and placed the canes in the Temple. The following day, the cane of St. Joseph the carpenter budded, similar to Aaron’s rod in the Old Testament.

Did St. Mary choose to become a carpenter’s wife?

During the time of St. Mary’s engagement to St. Joseph, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she

would bear a son to be named “Jesus”, a royal successor to King David. When St. Mary objected that she had no husband, the angel explained, “*the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*” *the Child will be called holy, the Son of God.*”

Did St. Mary request to bear a son?

An enduring example of obedient faith, she replied, “*Behold the maidservant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38). God asked St. Mary to accept the Divine Incarnation. Indeed, this is an example of the free grace of God, but as we know St. Mary herself humbly accepted obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ’s great love for His mother, a lady of no choices was evident since on more than one occasion He stressed the importance of the command to, “*honor your father and your mother*” (Matthew 15:4).

In the familiar and endearing story of the Wedding of Cana of Galilee, St. Mary had a great opportunity to bring honor to her name. Through her conversation with the people of the wedding and informing the Lord Jesus Christ of lack of wine at the celebration St. Mary could have brought acclaim to her name. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ understood the love of His mother for His children and displayed the trust of His mother in Him. Also while not giving worship to her personality, St. Mary directed our hearts to secretly carry out the commandment of her only Son, “*Do whatever He tells you.*”

While holding His beloved mother in high esteem, as the Lord Jesus Christ was dying upon the Holy Cross He tenderly committed His mother to the care of the “*disciple whom He loved*” (John 19:26). This, was a mother who had no choice but to watch her only Son nailed to a cross, publicly endured suffering, and died.

St. Mary was a woman of great strength and fortitude. Having been given no choices to major events surrounding her, she continues until today to shine forth brilliantly. With her character and strength she overcame many emotional peaks and valleys. The threat of divorce from St. Joseph, a long foreboding trip to Bethlehem, giving birth in a stable, having to use an animal’s feeding trough for her newborn baby’s bed, angelic warnings that the King wanted her infant Son killed were more than enough to make the strongest of persons distraught.

Furthermore, the mother of our Lord had a prestigious lineage. She was, like St. Joseph, of the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David (Psalm 132:11, Luke 1:32, Romans 1:3). St. Mary had a sister, named like her, Mary (John 19:25), and she was connected by marriage to Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). Elizabeth was of the tribe of Levi and of the lineage of Aaron.

With such ancestry as this, did St. Mary ever asked the Lord why all these things must happen to her? Why was she not given choices related to her life?

St. Mary used her free will to submit to all the major events within her life. Through submission a harmonious disposition

was obtained. St. Mary was a “pure” virgin. Pure means that she loved good works, and did not want to be seen by men, but only by God. The Holy Bible displays her speech as calm and virtue steadfast. Her faith and devotion brought forth obedience to the Lord, respect from others, and a desire to live a retired family life.

Surely St. Mary desired the best gifts and more excellent way.

St. Mary’s love did not:

Envy	(1 Corinthians 13:4)
Parade itself, nor was puffed up	(1 Corinthians 13:4)
Behave Rudely	(1 Corinthians 13:5)
Seek its own	(1 Corinthians 13:5)
Allow anger, was not provoked	(1 Corinthians 13:5)
Think evil	(1 Corinthians 13:5)
Rejoice in iniquity	(1 Corinthians 13:6)
Fail	(1 Corinthians 13:8)

St. Mary’s Love:

Suffered long and was kind	(1 Corinthians 13:4)
Rejoiced in the truth	(1 Corinthians 13:6)
Bore all things	(1 Corinthians 13:7)
Believed all things	(1 Corinthians 13:7)
Hoped all things	(1 Corinthians 13:7)
And finally and most important endured all things	(1 Corinthians 13:7)

3



Who Is St. Mary

Awake, O my harp, your chords,
in praise of the Virgin Mary!
Lift up your voice and sing
the wonderful history of this Virgin,
The daughter of David,
who gave birth to the Life of the world!

St. Ephraim the Syrian

During my youth in an ever growing and expanding church in Egypt, it was counted an honor to have service requested of any individual. So much so, that a reply of consent to such an honorable request was often deemed redundant. To have been asked to serve God in any capacity was considered the ultimate, golden standard of honors, not a deed to be performed as “should I or shouldn’t I do it?”, “an extra work” that could possibly be scheduled in, a task to hurriedly be completed without giving priority to God through one’s best efforts, nor did it fall behind in importance

to work, social activities, collegiate aspirations, computers and TV programming, and fun times with friends and family gatherings. Rather, Service came as a guaranteed, readily understood, accepted-as-first-place in the life of those who were asked to serve. Service was viewed with anticipation and quiet humbleness, and foremostly considered and counted among one's greatest blessings in life.

Having felt the need to regain this fervor for service and to rededicate oneself to it I felt obligated to write about serving the Lord, the church, and one another. The Biblical representation that immediately emerges is the Blessed Virgin Mary and her life of complete devotion and service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unique Childhood

In the city of Nazareth where her parents lived, St. Mary was born to St. Joachim and St. Anna both righteous and prayerful parents who loved God. Our Coptic Orthodox church celebrates the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the first day of the blessed Coptic month of Pashons.

On the seventh day of the blessed Coptic month of Mesore we celebrate the Annunciation to St. Joachim concerning the conception with the Virgin St. Mary. On this seventh day, while St. Joachim was on a mountain praying, Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and announced to him that his wife Anna would conceive and bear a child who would please not just them but the whole world would also be glad rejoicing in their heartfelt thankfulness to God. When he came unto

his house after descending the mountain and told his wife of the annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel, St. Anna believed what the angel foretold without question.

Thus after many years of prayers and supplications night and day, the couple's dream came true and were in a position to fulfill their vow that should they be blessed with a child they would make her a steward of the temple. Tradition has it that St. Joachim's foremost reason for desiring a child was in order to present an offering to God, but "*he did not have any children*".

Giving birth to St. Mary elevated St. Anna, making her more honorable than all the women of the world at that particular time in history. Once mocked by the children of Israel for being barren, and having born the scorn of other women keeping themselves away from St. Anna in the temple, she now rose not only above people's hypocrisy, but above them all through the grace of God.

At the age of three, St. Mary was taken to the temple and dedicated to God in fulfillment of her parents' promise to God. Her mother's faith was so strong as to make her willing to give up to the temple her long awaited, for daughter at the age of three to live among the virgins. The Coptic Church celebrates the day of St. Mary's entrance into the temple in Jerusalem on the third day of the blessed month of Koiahk consecrated at the age of three. St. Mary spent nine years learning service within the temple receiving her food from the hands of angels until the appointed time of the Incarnation of the Word.

Since it was not allowed to keep girls in the temple after the age of twelve, Zacharias The priest had to find a suitable husband and care provider for St. Mary. To do so, he gathered the staffs of her male relatives twelve righteous men from the house of David of the tribe of Judah, and placed them in the temple. One account records that the staffs were taken inside the Sanctuary and a dove flew and stood on the staff belonging to Joseph the carpenter who was a righteous man. Another account records that... accepted as God's will.... the following day, the cane of St. Joseph the carpenter, budded just as Aaron's rod had in the Old Testament.

“Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.” (Numbers 17:8).

Some Biblical scholars believe that St. Joseph with the budding rod had been previously married, while other Biblical scholars believe he was united to St. Mary with chaste bonds as his one and only spouse. These scholars contend that St. Joseph was himself a virgin. Whatever the account chosen it is clearly denoted that St. Joseph was chosen to be the husband of St. Mary by God Himself.

St. Joseph's budding rod symbolized God's blessing upon St. Joseph and St. Mary and it was then understood that they were to become engaged. It pleased the Almighty God to select a man worthy of St. Mary. Thus they got engaged according to the custom of the law.

Distinct Lineage

St. Mary was of Davidic lineage through her own birth right. She was born into generations of family members that served the Lord.

Tertullian (c. 197) writes

“The prophet evidently asserts that the virgin of whom it behooved Christ to be born must derive her lineage of the seed of David. He says, “And there will be born a rod from the root of Jesse”, which rod is Mary.”

St. Joachim was of the seed of David, of the tribe of Judah. He was the son of Jotham, the son of Lazarus, the son of Eldad who ascended up in genealogy to Solomon the king, the son of David whom God promised that his seed should reign over the children of Israel forever. St. Joachim departed in peace when St. Mary was but three years old.

St. Anna was the daughter of Matthan, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, who was a descendant of Aaron the High Priest. Miriam, her mother was from the tribe of Judah. St. Anna had two sisters. The first (called Mary after her mother) was the mother of Salome, the midwife present at the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second was Sofia, Elizabeth’s mother, later the mother of St. John the Baptist.

The three cousins, St. Mary, Salome, and Elizabeth were to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition, St. Elizabeth would

bear a son that would not only serve, but set the climate favorably for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unique Service

The Commemoration of the Life Giving Annunciation is celebrated the twenty-ninth day of the blessed Coptic month of Paremhotep. When the appointed time of God since the creation, for the salvation of the world, had arrived, God sent the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin St. Mary to proclaim the plan of the Divine conception, and the glorious birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women!’

But when she saw him she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’ And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, therefore, also that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:26-35).

Further the angel gave her proof of this message and its discernment...

“Now indeed Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.’ Then Mary said, ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord!’ Let it be according to your word” (Luke 1:36,37,38).

At the Annunciation, St. Mary did not even give herself the legitimate right to stop and think about this dubious manner of conception planned by God, foreign to the natural course of things and which could possibly have jeopardized her family name and consequently ruined her life. The humble St. Mary did not question the role destined for her, but replied that she would willingly serve as the handmaiden of the Lord with no excuses such as “if I do not have to give up my regularly scheduled activities, my one day off, if it does not take too much time of my personal time, or if it somehow fits into my hectic over extended schedule.”

Rather, St. Mary replied...

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

St. Mary's greatness, unlike that of those counted by earthly measures as "Greats among the Greats", was procured through sheer total submission, obedience, and willingness to serve, not out of affluence, nor influence, but out of total unconditional love for God and others.

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:25-26).

St. Mary became great through her quiet service, willingness, and readiness, putting God first in her life. It is very doubtful that St. Mary desired greatness which makes her even more endearing as the focus of this point is related to serving.

St. Mary willingly, obediently, and agreeably accepted to serve God in the manner requested of her by Archangel Gabriel. Through this willing obedience, the Only Begotten Son of God came and dwelt in her womb. God, that very day, united with humanity a complete inseparable and unchangeable union. Therefore, this is the first of all celebrated Coptic feasts, for in it, was the beginning of all salvation of the world, which was ultimately fulfilled by the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, saving Adam and his offspring from the defilement and guise of Satan.

St. Irenaeus (c.180) writes,

“Mary the virgin is found obedient, saying ‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word.’ In contrast Eve was disobedient. For she did not obey when she was still a virgin... Having become disobedient she was made the cause of death, both to herself and the entire human race. Correspondingly, Mary, who was also a virgin (although betrothed to a man), by yielding obedience, became the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race... This demonstrates the corresponding reference from Mary back to Eve... So it was that the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.”

St. Mary willingly participated in this great mystery of Holiness without reservation, nor hesitation concerning service to God. That is why the angel addressed her, “*Hail, full of grace.*” Did this greeting inflate St. Mary’s feelings of self worth? No, St. Mary appears to be firmly rooted in humility and in her lowliness realizes that any grace she possessed belonged to God. This is the mark of a true servant.

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

St. Mary, and St. Mary alone, readily consented and willingly served in obedience to the Lord.

Many early church fathers believe the Annunciation to St. Mary may have been the first among all the great mysteries to be honored liturgically.

It is thought that the Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate on April 7th thereby making it scientifically correct to purport His birth on January 7th. The next chapter will begin with our beloved St. Mary's young adult service surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Whenever we stand in Your Holy Sanctuary, we are considered standing in Heaven. O Mother of God (Theotokos), you are the gate of Heaven, open for us the gate of mercy.



4



St. Mary Young Adult Life Of Service

The Most Immediate Family Member in St. Mary's Adulthood

In his Holy Gospel (1:16), St. Matthew writes that the Lord Jesus Christ was born only of St. Mary.

“...And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (Matthew 1:16).

“*Of whom*” in Greek, the language in which the text was originally written, refers to the female gender. Therefore St. Matthew is telling us that the Lord Jesus Christ, in the succession of his list of kings, was born only to St. Mary, and that St. Joseph acted as the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly father although the latter was not the former's seed.

“After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with Child of the Holy

Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

“But while he thought about these things, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins’” (Matthew 1:18-21).

It is here, in Biblical history, that St. Joseph becomes popularly known as “*St. Joseph the Righteous*”. In his abundant righteousness and exceeding mercy, St. Joseph is unwilling to expose the already implied breach in their betrothal commitment. His righteousness transcends the law of the land, the societal norms of his day, and further propels to action the idea that he would put St. Mary away secretly.

“Then Joseph being aroused from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus” (Matthew 1:24-25).

St. Joseph was an honorable man before God, and did as the angel had commanded him serving the Lord accordingly. In his nobility of heart, he consented to take as his wife a pregnant girl not by him, (but of his genealogy to be sure) and remained faithful to the Holy Family from its inception throughout his life. St. Mary remained chaste her entire life with him. A man of less faithfulness and goodness would have found this the

most trialing hardship. St. Joseph would have needed not only his strength of faith, but more than an angel's word in one dream to convince him of such a miraculous conception. But for St. Joseph, a dream and the words of a single angel were indeed convincing. St. Mary's reputation, while invaluable for her life of engagement, must have preceded her in order for St. Joseph to faithfully, willingly, and graciously without questioning her integrity accepts the word of an angel.

St. Joseph, of the royal house of David, would earn their daily bread through hand labor as a carpenter, fulfilling all the services as an earthly father to the Lord Jesus Christ thus becoming by Divine appointment, the head of the Holy Family's household. St. Mary and the Lord Jesus Christ would grow to love and cherish St. Joseph's unique relationship to them both.

St. Joseph's readiness to accept his wife's immaculate conception gives us insight into the fact that not only was St. Mary consecrated in the temple, but she must have been of good repute, sound moral character, high integrity, and above all a vessel worthy to carry the Lord Jesus Christ. All these traits were born and practiced not only during her years of consecration in the temple but continued and were perpetuated all along after her life in the temple.

The Most Prominent Events in St. Mary's Adulthood

• The Birth of our Lord

It goes without saying that the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ was the most conspicuous event in St. Mary's life. On the

twenty-ninth day of the blessed month of Koiahk, of the year 5501 of the world, we celebrate our Lord's birth from St. Mary the Virgin Mother of God. During that time, Caesar Augustus had issued a decree requiring a general census throughout all the Roman Empire. In compliance, St. Joseph of the city of Nazareth, along with St. Mary, traveled to Bethlehem the birth place of King David his ancestor. There, the Virgin Mary gave birth to her first born Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, wrapping Him in swaddling clothes and placing him in a manger, for there was no lodging in the Inn.

It was certainly Divine Purpose for St. Mary to bear a Son giving Him a human nature, capable of experiencing pain and suffering. The Holy Spirit through His intervention, rendered her young pure body capable of giving human life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Isaiah the Prophet foretold,

"Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

St. Mary would not give birth to another child. It is as Ezekiel the prophet foretold,

"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 44:2).

St. Clement of Alexandria (c.195) writes,

"As it appears, many even down to our own time regard Mary, on account of the birth of her Child,

as having been in the puerperal state, although she was not. For some say that, after she brought forth, she was found, when examined to still be a virgin.”

This supports the Coptic Church belief that St. Mary remained the Ever-Virgin.

• **The Circumcision of our Lord**

The Commemoration of our Lord’s Circumcision, occurs on January 14, the sixth day of the blessed month of Tobe. God had ordained the law of circumcision as a sign distinguishing His people from among all the others. In accordance, every male of the seed of Abraham was to be circumcised on the eighth day of his birth. God put every soul that did not obey this law under judgment.

As our Lord was born from the posterity of Abraham, according to the flesh, He was to be circumcised on the eighth day firstly in fulfillment of the Law of Moses, and secondly to relieve us from the heavy burden of this commandment, as St. Paul states,

“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Romans 15:8).

• **Presenting our Lord in the Temple**

Forty days after His birth, in fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, the Lord Jesus Christ was presented by both St. Mary and St. Joseph in the Temple. St. Luke, in his Holy Gospel, wrote that

when His parents presented Him to the temple, Simeon the elder took Him in his arms and blessed God saying...

“Lord now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon was one of the seventy elders who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek. This translation was to become the Septuagint, the oldest Old Testament translation present in the museum. St. Mary did not know the amount of blessings she had bestowed on Simon regarding this task. For, tradition has it that in the year 296 BC, Ptolemy Soter, sent by the will of God to Jerusalem, brought seventy men from among the learned Jewish scholars (Simeon the elder being one of them), and commanded them to translate the Old Testament. For the sake of ensuring accurate translation, he separated them in pairs so they would not be influenced by each other's translation. When he was about to translate the verse from *“Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14), Simeon was afraid to write that a virgin would conceive, lest the king might mock him. He instead wanted to translate *“virgin”* as *“a young lady”*. Since then he had no internal peace because of this inaccurate translation. So, in a vision God revealed to him that he would not die before he would see Christ the

Lord born of a virgin. He lived for three hundred years to see the fulfillment of that vision when the Lord Jesus Christ was born. By then, Simeon was well advanced in years and of poor sight. When he carried the child Jesus in his hands, his sight returned and the Holy Spirit told him, "This is the Child that you have waited for." He blessed God saying,

"Lord now You are letting your servant depart in peace according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:28-32).

The Presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ into the Temple and the purification of St. Mary, although she was not in need of purification, are celebrated on the eighth day of the blessed Coptic month of Meshir, the fifteenth of February, forty days after the shepherds had been summoned to the manger of the Lord Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

One must believe in God's plan for each of us, St. Mary is the most prominent example of God's plans and provision. With her having been consecrated at the very young age of three, to eventually becoming the True Tabernacle, God's dwelling place, at the innocent young age of twelve is mind boggling, but uplifting.

The Coptic Church, describes St. Mary as "the Holy of Holies" which contains the Tables of the Covenant, and the

Ten Commandments written by the very finger of God” (Sunday Theotokia, Holy Psalmody). St. Mary’s simple obedience molded her into a namesake of service and a precious name our lips could utter after the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We exalt you, the Mother of the True Light. We glorify you, O Saint, the Mother of God, for you brought unto us the Savior of the whole world. Glory be to God forever. Amen.



5



St. Mary Adulthood

St. Mary and Need

While quietly and uprightly serving the Lord during this period in her life, St. Mary flowered into adulthood when she became a mother. The law of God given to Moses ordained that a woman would be in a state of “uncleanness” for forty days after the birth of a son and eighty days after the birth of a daughter. In compliance with the same tradition, the Coptic Church baptizes a new-born boy forty days and a new-born girl eighty days after birth to allow the mother to attend the sacrament.

Following her pre-set time of uncleanness, a mother was to bring to the door of the tabernacle a lamb and a young pigeon, or turtle dove, the former for the burnt offering in acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty and in thanksgiving for her healthy delivery, and the latter for a sin offering. It was only after offering those sacrifices, at the end of the time of uncleanness, that a woman was considered cleansed of the legal impurity.

The poor were to offer two pigeons or two turtle doves, a lamb was not required of those who could not afford one. St. Mary's offering was that of the poor because she could not financially afford otherwise. Poor in spirit as well, St. Mary was ready to submit, humbling herself to every condition the law of her day had prescribed and all circumstances resulting thereafter, although she was pure and not in need for purification.

Following the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, the Virgin remained Virgin.

St. Mary and Her Ransom

According to the Jewish Law given to Moses, the first born was to be offered to God and ransomed with a sum of money. However, the Lord Jesus Christ, the first born to St. Mary and St. Joseph, was not to be ransomed like the entire first born, but to become the ransom to humanity. The meeting in the temple of Simeon and Anna with the Child Jesus and His parents was a foretelling of St. Mary's sorrows and an announcement of the salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ whose blood was to ransom all those who believed in Him as Savior. That was the other great futuristic mystery that surrounded the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple.

The foretelling of this prophesy coincides with the Coptic Orthodox contention that St. Mary is the censor, made of pure gold, carrying the blessed live Coal, taken from the Altar as

a ransom for us all in order to purge our sins and remove our iniquities, God who was incarnate of her, and offered Himself to the Father as incense. She too, St. Mary, has conceived in her womb the invisible Logos of the Father, who offered Himself a sacrifice upon the Holy Cross for the salvation of our race.

St. Mary in Egypt

Sometime following the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple, in a dream St. Joseph was warned of Herod's plan to murder the Child Jesus.

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’

When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son’” (Matthew 2:13-15).

On the twenty-fourth day of the blessed Coptic month of Pashons we commemorate the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the land of Egypt.

According to the Coptic Church doctrine, the two important reasons for the Holy Family's flight to Egypt were:

First, to prove that the Lord was too real and not a spirit or phantom to fall into Herod's cruel hands and be terminated

by him. Second, to bless the people of Egypt fulfilling the prophesy,

“And out of Egypt I called My son” (Hosea 11:1).

As well as

“Behold the Lord rides a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt, the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst” (Isaiah 19:1).

It has been written that the Egyptian idols tumbled down as soon as the Incarnated Word of God set foot into Egypt, just as Dagon had fallen down before the Ark of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:3).

The Lord Jesus Christ was approximately two years old when He entered the land of Egypt with St. Joseph, St. Mary, and Salome.

The Holy Family first passed by a small village called Basta in which they drank from a well, the water of which has since then become blessed healing water. From Basta, they proceeded to Meniet Samannoud, and crossed the Nile River to the western side of the vast country side. The western side of the land of Egypt boasts of the Lord Jesus foot print on a stone called Picha Isos (the heel of Jesus), where He trod. After that they traveled continuing westward to Wadi El-Natroun, and it was there St. Mary blessed the region knowing that many monasteries would be built here. This could perhaps be the reason for finding an icon of St. Mary in every Coptic monastery in that location.

From Wadi EL-Natroun the Holy Family traveled to El-Ashmoneen where they resided a few days, then continued onward to Mount Qosqam where the monastery of St. Mary would in the future be erected (El-Mohararak Monastery).

Tradition has it that in Egypt, the Holy Family passed along a watermelon field where the seeds had already been sown. To delude the soldiers searching for them, St. Joseph asked the farmer to inform them that the Holy Family had passed by the field at the time of seed sowing. By the time the soldiers of Herod arrived, the watermelons had miraculously blossomed and begun to show forth its fruits. This resulted in the soldiers believing that the Holy Family passed by the watermelon field months before, and so they stopped the search for the Holy Family.

After the death of Herod, the Holy Family returned to Nazareth having been directed by the Angel of God to...

“Arise, take the young child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead” (Matthew 2:20).

The Holy Family, along with Salome, returned to Cairo and lodged in a cave, (church of Abu-Serga in Old Cairo). They then passed by El-Mataryia, and there they blessed and sanctified a well solely by washing in its water. Beside the well there exists a distinguished balsam tree the oil of which is used to make the Holy Chrism used in consecrating new churches and their service utensils. From El-Mataryia the Holy Family walked

to El-Mahama and from this point returned to the land of Israel.

St. Mary and Her Son's First Miracle

On the thirteenth day of the blessed Coptic month of Tobe, the commemoration of the Miracle at Cana of Galilee is celebrated. It was the first of our Lord's miracles after His baptism in which St. Mary was not only present, but played an integral part in its occurrence. At the wedding of Cana, to which the Lord Jesus Christ was invited along with His mother, and some of His disciples, when the wedding party ran out of wine, the Virgin Mary said to the Lord, *“They have no wine.”* Jesus said to her, *“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come”* (John 2:3-4).

“His mother, said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (John 2:5). There were six water pots of stone and the Lord Jesus Christ directed the servants to fill the water pots with water. After they were completely filled, the Lord Jesus Christ said to the servants, *“Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast”* (John 2:8). The master of the feast, on tasting the water converted into wine, said to the bridegroom, *“Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior, you have kept the good wine until now”* (John 2:10).

The Cana of Galilee miracle, prompted by the Blessed Virgin Mary, is marked as the onset of the Lord Jesus Christ's miracles ministry.

St. Mary and Her Spouse's Departure

Though we do not know the exact date of St. Joseph's departure, yet it can be speculated to have happened some time prior to the Holy Crucifixion, as St. Mary was commended to the care of St. John at the Holy Cross (John 19:16-27). Many Biblical scholars believe St. Joseph to have been alive after the preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ had well begun. It has been rightfully believed through the ages that St. Joseph kept his Holy family united while on earth, and that they now in Heaven are partaking of its glory.

St. Mary and Her Son's Departure

The twenty-ninth day of the blessed month of Paremhotep is the Commemoration of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. St. Mary was alive and well during this crucial historical event of salvation, a ministry our Lord had started at the age of thirty, completed in three years and crowned with His glorious death and resurrection. On the eve of the twenty-seventh day of this same month, the Lord Jesus Christ suffered of His own free will upon a rugged, cruel cross at the foot of which the dear mother St. Mary stood, grief-stricken and heart-broken.

With His Resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ restored St. Mary's heart to a state of increased belief, faithfulness, and joy that only a mother, or the most faithful among us can understand and appreciate.

It can be said that both the living and the dead celebrated this day of glorious Resurrection. On the Good Friday, the living and the dead rejoiced in their salvation and on Sunday the living became certain and assured that “*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Because of St. Mary’s willing obedience to serve God she was made an integral part of it all.

St. Mary is the candle stick made of pure gold, carrying the Lamp of Ever-Giving Light. The unapproachable Light of the world, out of the Light unapproachable. By His manifestation, He gave light to us, who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death (Sunday Theotokia, Holy Psalmody).



6



St. Mary's Late & Heavenly Life

St Mary and Her Last Few Years on Earth

After the death and resurrection of her only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and according to His command, St. Mary lived under the care of St. John the Beloved. During that time she served the disciples and apostles with her love and prayers.

Around the age of sixty, while keeping vigil, praying in the Holy Sepulcher, an angel announced to her her departure from this earthly vain world three days later. The disciples and many of the faithful such as the virgins of the Mount of Olives-Zeitoun gathered around her. Lying on her bed, St. Mary stretched forth her hand and blessed each of the believers, and the room where she had reposed shone with heavenly glory. It is said that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself surrounded by a vast array of angels came to receive and ascend His mother's

blessed and pure soul to Paradise.

The disciples prayed upon her pure, unblemished body, shrouded it and prepared it for burial according to custom. On their way with her body to the grave yard in Gethsemane, a Jewish man named Rueben, tried to deter them and disturb the blessed Virgin's coffin. Immediately, on touching the coffin, the Jewish man's arms were severed from his body. Screaming in pain, the man had the apostles pray for him, and was instantly healed, his arms reattached to his body and his sin forgiven. Henceforth this man was counted among the faithful, received baptism at once and began to preach. Thus in her departure, St. Mary's service rose to the occasion.

St. Mary and Thomas the Apostle

Following the burial, the disciples turned their travels back to Jerusalem. On the way, they met St. Thomas who was absent at the time of St. Mary's burial. Upon informing him of St. Mary's departure, St. Thomas insisted that they take him back to see her blessed body, as he, typical of him, would not believe without seeing. When the disciples did as St. Thomas desired, they were perplexed, amazed, as they once again witnessed an empty tomb. St. Mary's body was missing. However, St. Thomas had the explanation and the answer. On his journey to Jerusalem, he saw St. Mary's body being transported by heavenly angels into Paradise. One of the angels had allowed St. Thomas to "hurry and kiss St. Mary's pure body" as it was transcending. Thus, the blessed St. Mary did not allow St. Thomas to have any doubts of her love for him.

St. Mary at the Right Hand of the King

The Holy Spirit had told the apostles “The Lord did not will her holy body to remain on earth.” According to the Lord’s promise to the apostles, to show them St. Mary in the flesh, on the sixteenth day of the Coptic month of Mesore, they did see her sitting on the right hand of her Son and her Lord, surrounded by the angelic Host, as King David the Prophet prophesied,

“At your right hand stands the queen” (Psalm 45:9).

Surely, the body of the blessed Virgin could not remain upon this earth, nor return to the dust thereof, since the Son she so willingly bore was not of the earthly dust. St. Mary’s dormition is celebrated on the 29th of January, and also on the 21st of each Coptic month.

As the Second Heaven on earth, the Mother of God, provided a vessel for the Son of Righteousness to shine.

St. Mary’s life on earth was sixty years. She spent twelve years in the temple, thirty years in the house of the righteous St. Joseph, and fourteen years with St. John the Beloved, as the Lord had ushered her into St John’s loving care saying, “*Woman behold your son*” (John 19:26), and to St. John, “*Behold your mother*” (John 19:27).

St Mary’s Service From Heaven

On the twenty-first day of the Coptic month of Paone, the Coptic Church celebrates the commemoration and

consecration of the first church built in St. Mary's blessed name. After St. Paul and Silas preaching among the Gentiles in the city of Philippi, a church in her name was built there for those who believed and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ.

On April 2, 1968 at 8:30 pm, the workers of a nearby Public Transit System garage across the street from St. Mary's church in Zeitoun, saw a young girl dressed in ethereal white walking over the dome of the church. Startled, since the dome's height made casual walking upon it impossible, they called the police as they thought the young girl would surely fall.

As people gathered to watch the phenomenal happening, the news rushed to the church priest Abouna Constantine who immediately sent word notifying His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI, the one hundred sixteenth Pope of the City of Alexandria and See of St. Mark. A young girl described as having a halo of light encompassing her, holding an olive branch in her hand, and bowing down in worship in front of the cross on top of the church dome.

Pope Kyrillos sent a delegation of bishops to witness the event, and scientifically explore and evaluate the occurrence. He then issued a declaration of the miraculous apparition of the Blessed Virgin.

The beloved pope stated,

“We thank the Lord for his great compassion.
The Blessed Virgin is still appearing in a very

clear way, and for long periods of time, that could extend to two hours without interruption. She has been seen by thousands, by Christians, and non-Christian alike. This event has caused many people to return back to their faith, and many others to convert. Numerous miracles have accompanied the appearances. People come from all walks of life came to record the different miracles that happened to them. Also, doctors testified about the miraculous healings which occurred to their patients.”

It is worth noting that St. Mary's church in Zeitoun, located on the way to Matareia, is on the same route the Holy Family had taken on their journey to Egypt.

St. Mary's apparition was also witnessed within St. Demiana Church, in Shoubra, Cairo. On March 25th, 1986, thousands of people witnessed the great and glorious event of her appearance. Father Pishoy, the Church priest commented that, “The apparition has already cured the blind and the handicapped.”

These two apparitions are not the only ones. Many other apparitions in different parts of the world over the six continents continue to witness to our Blessed Mother's love, concern for and service to humanity even while sitting at the right side of

the King. She has learnt this quality service from her Son who offered Himself unconditionally for us in order to liberate us from captivity. Not only does St. Mary serve us through these overt public apparitions, but she does manifest herself to individuals, talk to them, ask them to carry messages, just to mention a few of the things that she continues to do. Books and books have recorded her services to the sick and the needy who call upon her name time and time again.

St. Augustine summarizes the life of St. Mary's service in stating,

"Mary, sprung from Adam,
died on consequences of
sin,

Adam died in consequence
of sin, and the flesh of the
Lord, sprung from Mary,
died to destroy sin."

May the intercessions
and the prayers of the
Mother of God, the Ever
Virgin and pure in spirit
St. Mary be with us all.
Amen.



7



The Blessed Virgin Mary And The Love Of Honor

Whenever one tries to approach the Blessed Virgin Mary to understand the secrets behind her life, one's mind gets boggled and baffled by them. For, while a lot of women and leaders of women's movements fight to obtain rights and honor, this simple poor girl appeared on the scene of events to become not only higher than those on earth but also those in heaven.

As St. Isaac the Syrian said,

“whoever runs after honor, it runs away from him and whoever runs away from honor willfully honor chases him and lead people to him.”

That is why God had honored this girl and chosen her to become His Mother.

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from all fame and honor. Although she had lots of stories, news and words she had

known about and of her dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ that any human being yearns to listen to, yet she chose to keep all these things to herself pondering them in her heart. Had she uttered a word, all humanity would have surrounded her to record those things she knew about the Master Jesus Christ. However, she escaped all this glory and chose the life of silence and quietude.

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from all glory of praise choosing to live in the shadow of events. She exemplified this attitude in her visit to Elizabeth to serve her behind the scenes, and when it was Elizabeth's due time the Blessed Virgin Mary hurried quickly back to her house before people would gather in the house of Elizabeth and Zachariah, and get to see and praise her for having served the aged woman for three months.

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from the respect and privilege of defending herself and proving her innocence. For when St. Joseph the righteous questioned her purity, she submitted herself and her modesty to God who vindicates the wronged. In addition, after the angel had revealed her secret to St. Joseph, she never chastised nor rebuked him for his distrust in her. In fact, she chose to experience being wronged like her Son, *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet, He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers, is silent"* (Isaiah 53:7, LXX).

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from herself and her ego living a life of submission and selflessness, letting others to choose for her how to conduct her life. Her parents chose for her to live in the temple and the temple priests chose her spouse

and patron. She did not even think or dream of becoming the Mother of God, but when God chose her she immediately offered herself in complete obedience confirming “*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38).

Her life of total submission extended to include her lack of knowledge of the place of delivery, the baby’s name, the flight to Egypt, living in Nazareth or her future life companion with whom she was to spend the rest of her life after the crucifixion and death of her son. In spite of all the uncertainty and hazards of events in her life yet she lived a life free of complaint, full of joy, and simplicity of heart.

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from the glory of being the Mother of God and the honor entailed in this title. Consequently, she did not allow herself to be distinguished from the rest of the crowd, but more often than not she lived like the rest of the Jewish people and like them she asked and wanted to meet with the Christ as the evangelist recorded, “*and a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, ‘look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You’*” (Mark 3:32).

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from the glory of becoming the mother of the Messiah unlike the Old Testament women who sought marriage and motherhood in the hope of gaining the blessings of becoming the mother or grandmother of the Messiah. From her discourse with the angel we learn that she was satisfied with offering herself a bride to God feeling how undeserving she was to become His mother. That is why God has honored her humility and raised her above all

the women of the world to become the Mother of the creator full of admiration, and tribute.

The Blessed Virgin Mary ran away from the honor of being a wife and a mother for she had pledged virginity at a time when pledging virginity was not common. So, while she sought neither, she became the Mother of God and the whole creation, for she is indeed the Mother of us all.

While so many women these days run after priesthood, the Blessed Virgin Mary never sought it but was greatly and submissively satiated with the Deity order of assigning priesthood to men. Thus, although she was the Mother of God she never received any priesthood rank.

While so many women nowadays argue against the purification period for women (a practice that has its roots in the Old Testament), contending that such is against women's respect and dignity, we find the all pure, undefiled Blessed Virgin Mary who had given birth to her dear Son purely and without sin, respecting and fulfilling the Law of Moses. Forty days after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ she goes into the temple and offers the sacrifice required by the Law.

Truly awesome and worthy of all honor is the Blessed Virgin Mary who had chosen to escape from all dignity and earthly glory thus counted worthy by God, the Almighty, to receive the heavenly glory and privilege. The Lord God looked from heaven and could not find her like, so He sent His Son to be incarnated of her. The Magnificat of the Blessed Virgin Mary confirms that she did not steal to herself any honor but the Lord did wonders with her making her honored and glorified

from all nations and augmented and full of praise.

Many, many women received honor, respect, and admiration, but you O Mother of God exceeded them all, for you have become Mother to the Creator, and the Word of the Father.

May the blessings of the Blessed Virgin Mary who is enrobed with all tribute and admiration be with us all Amen.



Books by
Bishop Youssef

The Spiritual Meaning of Resurrection (English & Arabic)

The Nativity of Christ (English)

Meditation on the Cross (English & Arabic)

Virgin Mary An Icon of Simplicity (English & Arabic)

Fruit of the Holy Spirit (English & Arabic)

The Holy Spirit and The Pentecost (English & Arabic)

Communication Skills Among Couples (Arabic)

The Deep Psychological Needs (Arabic)

Marital Problems (Arabic)

Friendship in Marriage (Arabic)

Choose your Spouse (Arabic)

Train up a Child Part 1 (Arabic)

Train up a Child Part 2 (Arabic)

Anger Management (Arabic)

Inner Healing (Arabic)