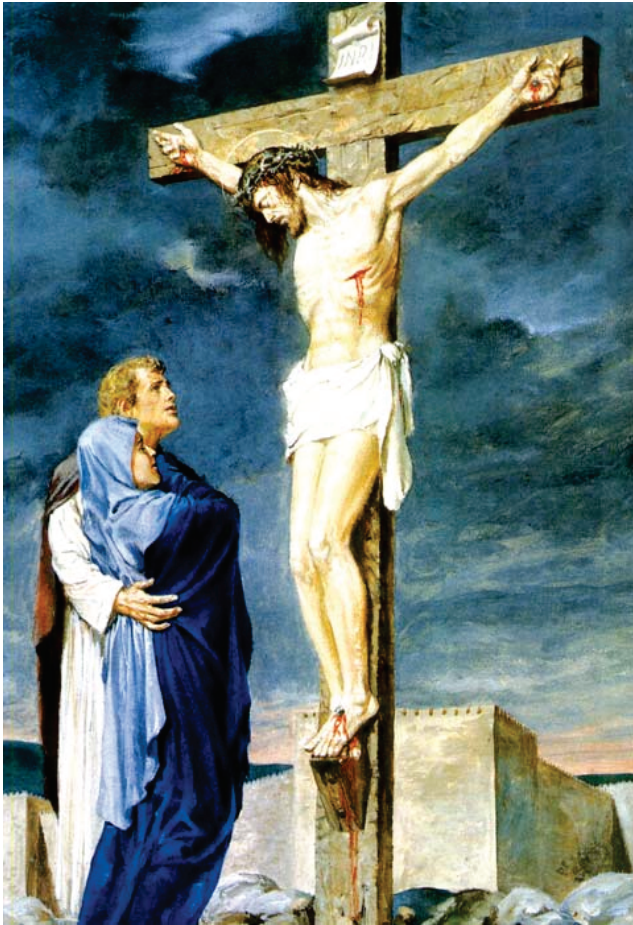


MARY, THE MOTHER AND MODEL OF THE CHURCH



Jesus completed his sacrificial life on mount Calvary. Even as he was hanging on the cross between two notorious thieves and being mocked by the soldiers around, his eyes were on some of his beloved ones, including his mother Mary, down there.

There were, standing beneath the cross, his own beloved mother, Mary, the sister of his mother and wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved, Jesus told his mother, **“Woman, here is, your son!”** Then he said to the disciple, **“Here is, your mother!”** (Jn. 19:25-27).

When Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of his beloved disciple and the disciple to his mother, Jesus was entrusting all of us to his mother and Mary, his mother, to us. For a Christian, the motherhood of Mary is a spiritual one. She became our mother by participating in God's salvific plan with Jesus and by enduring the pain and suffering associated with it.

The Mother, who Received the Word

At the time of annunciation, when the angel asked Mary to become the mother of the son of God, she naturally had her own doubts. So she asked the angel, “How shall this be, since I am a virgin?” Then the angel disclosed God's plan to her. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, he will be called Son of God” (Lk. 1:35-36). Mary said to the angel, “**Here, am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.**” (Lk. 1:38). As Mary was prepared to fulfill God's will, she became the mother of the son of God. In the Gospel, Jesus extols his mother for her ability to listen to the Word of God and obey it in her life (Lk. 11:28).



Mary, the Mother of the Church

After the death of Jesus, Mary gathered together the disciples of Jesus and prayed with them. “**All these (the disciples) were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers**” (Act 1:14). Mary lived with them meditating on the word of God. Thus Mary who gave birth to Jesus, the head of the Church, also participated in giving birth to the Church, which is the body of Christ. Thus she became the mother not only of Jesus, its head, but also of the Church, his body.



Mary the Symbol and Model of the Church

The Church is the community of believers who are on their pilgrimage to heaven. Mary's own life was a pilgrimage of faith. She started that pilgrimage when she said to the angel "Here, am I the servant of the Lord..." (Lk. 1:38). It was a journey filled with mixed experiences of misunderstanding, various difficulties, sacrifices, joys and satisfaction. In all these, she believed in God's love and providence and moved forward. Mary is the one who believed firmly that there is nothing impossible with God. The generations proclaim her name saying "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk. 1:45).

Mary is the symbol of the Church, the faithful bride of Christ. Mary is the model for the entire Church in faith, charity and total fidelity to the Lord. The life of Mary, who dedicated herself totally to God and carried on her life in fidelity to His Word, is a symbol of the Church who is called to dedicate herself in fidelity to the Word of God. Mary who was taken up in body and soul to heaven is the symbol of the Church to be glorified at the end of time.

Mary's Intercession and Protection

Mother Mary sought the help of Jesus when wine ran out at the marriage party in Cana. Though Jesus responded to her saying that His time had not come, Mary told the attendants, "Do what he says." Through this incident, Mary gives us an insight into her own life which was rich in holiness. She became a happy mother by bearing the Word of God in her heart



and pondering over it. Like Mary we can become happy and successful as well, if we do what Jesus wants us to do.

The Church has always been enthusiastic about seeking the intercession of Mary our Mother. Think of the great number of churches all over the world dedicated to her and the prayers composed and festivals celebrated in honour of her. Think of the number of individuals in the Church who bear the name 'Mary' or 'Maria'. It is worth remembering how the Popes in the Church encouraged, from time to time, Marian devotion.

The Different Forms of Marian Devotion

Marian devotion is seen in the Church starting from the very first century itself. All those most significant devotional practices to Mother Mary have originated from the liturgy or are integrated into liturgical celebrations both in the Oriental and Western Churches. (Marian Devotion, No. 15). Marian devotion is expressed through the recitation of the rosary, pilgrimage to Marian shrines, observation of fast and abstinence, and celebration of Marian festivals.

The recitation of the rosary is a very significant and universally, practiced Marian devotion. Pope John Paul II teaches on the importance and richness of the holy rosary in the Apostolic instruction "The Rosary of Holy Mother Mary." He calls the rosary 'an abridged form' of the Gospel.

The Mar Thomma Christians have always been eager to follow and advance in Marian devotion along with their liturgical practices. Every Wednesday was set apart for Marian devotion. In the Syro-Malabar liturgy 'Yama Prarthana' has a significant place. And it is in this prayer that Marian devotion is officially reflected. In our Church, the 'Yama Prarthana' of Wednesday is enriched with hymns and prayers in honour of Mary, our mother. All the festivals of Mary have been very faithfully observed and celebrated in all our churches from the very beginning. It is particularly worth remembering that Mar Thomma Christians observed fast and abstinence in preparation for the important Marian Festivals. They observed fifteen day's abstinence in preparation for the feast of Assumption and eight day's abstinence before the feast of Mary's Nativity.

Marian devotion enhances our love for Jesus. Let us live in Marian devotion and complete our pilgrimage to heaven along with Mary, our mother.

The Important Feasts in Honour of Mary

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| 1. The Feast of the Purification of Mary | : February 2. |
| 2. The Feast of the Annunciation | : March 25 |
| 3. The Feast of Mother Carmel | : July 16 |
| 4. The Feast of the Assumption of Mary | : August 15 |
| 5. The Nativity of Mary | : September 8. |
| 6. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary | : December 8 |
| 7. The Motherhood of Mary | : The Sunday after
Christmas |
| 8. The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary | : The day after the
feast of the Sacred
Heart of Jesus |

Word of God to Read and Meditate

Lk. 1:39-56

Word of God to Remember

“Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord”
(Lk: 1:45).

Let us Pray

Lord Jesus give us spiritual and physical health and protection through the prayers of your Mother Mary. Make us share the eternal banquet with your Mother.

My Resolution

I shall always seek the intercession of Mary, my heavenly Mother.

To Think with the Church

Mary has by grace been exalted above all angels and men to a place second only to her Son, as the most holy mother of God who was involved in the mysteries of Christ: she is rightly honoured by a special cult in the Church. From the earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honoured under the title of Mother of God, in whose protection the faithful take refuge together in prayer in all their perils and needs. (Vat. II, The Church, No. 66.)

To Know the Mother Church

The Syro-Malabar Church was raised to the status of an Archiepiscopal Church in 1992, and Mar Antony Padiyara was made the first Major Archbishop. A synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was held in 1993 to organize the activities of the Church in accordance with the identity of the Church. The head office of the Syro-Malabar Church was inaugurated at Mount St. Thomas in Kakkanad, in 1995. It was in 1999 the functioning of the diocese of Belthangady initiated. The dioceses of Trichur and Tellicherry were made Archdioceses in 1995, and Kottayam was raised to the status of an Archdiocese in 2005. In keeping with the Church's policy of taking care of the spiritual needs of the members of the Syro-Malabar Church spread out in the world, a new diocese was created in Chicago, USA (2001), for the members of the Church in America. The diocese as Melbourne in Australia (2013) and the diocese in great Briton for the Syro – Malabar faithful in England (2016), An Apostolic Exarcate in Missisaga (Canada) in 2015, Apostolic Visitation in New zealand and Europe for the pastoral and spiritual upliftment of the Syro- Malabar faithful are in their ministries in the respective places. In 2007 the diocese of Bhadravathi and in 2010 the Diocese of Mandya were also erected. The Syro-Malabar Church which is blessed with innumerable vocations to priesthood and religious life is actively engaged in the pastoral care of the faithful and missionary activities in various parts of India and abroad.

Questions

1. What part did Mary play in the birth of the Church?
2. Explain, how Mary is the symbol and model of the Church.
3. What is the basis in Gospel for the Marian intercession?
4. Write a short note on the Marian Devotion of the Marthomma Nazranies.
5. Which are the important feasts of Mary?