

# Who are you, Mary?

A woman and a mother

## I- Introduction

No one today can dispute the importance of Mary's motherhood, nor the greatness of her "yes" at the Annunciation, nor the dignity of her attitude at the foot of the cross, because all these events quoted about Mary are found written in the New Testament. The Evangelists and their Christian community inform us of them.

For some Christians in this context of the third millennium, Mary is not always an easy woman to understand... Among the young Jewish girl from Nazareth who is expecting a Messiah, the impressive Mother of God, the Virgin and sometimes this "goddess Mary" who some, because of their practice, would take as the 4th person of a heretical Trinity, **Mary is still sometimes an enigmatic figure.** Talking about Mary today is a challenge for certain theologians, catechists, pastors and many committed Christians. They do not know what place to give her, nor what role to give her in their lives as Christians. And yet we can see with new eyes that the landscape of Mariology and Marian devotion are changing.

Let us not forget that after the renewal of Vatican II, it was normal for theology to look first at the Essential, that is: **Christ**, the Church, the Mission of the Church in the world, the Commitment to the poor. **But we also notice that Mary has her place within these different realities.**

The recent documents about Mary, elaborated by the International Anglican-Catholic Commission: *"Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ"* or in the ecumenical dialogue among the Churches (Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox) *"Mary in God's plan"* **show us the importance of Mary's place in the search for full communion among the Churches.**

Together they claim to agree on many points of faith, and I quote them: *"We agree that there can be only one mediator between God and man and we reject any interpretation of Mary's role that would obscure this claim.*

*We agree that the Christian understanding of Mary is inseparably linked to the doctrines about Christ and the Church.*

*We agree to recognize the grace and unique vocation of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate God.*

*We agree to recognize in Mary a model of holiness, obedience and faith for all Christians.*

*We accept that it is also possible to see her as a prophetic figure of the Church of God before and after the Incarnation".*

This search common to the Churches shows us the place of Mary in the History of Salvation carried out by Christ.

The object of Christian faith is not Mary, but Jesus, the Christ! And for Montfort, Mary is only the privileged way that leads to Jesus Christ, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom.

One of the keys to Mariology, a door that gives access to the mystery of Mary and allows us to understand her role in the life of the Church, would be the phrase of Elizabeth when, filled with the Holy Spirit, she cried out: *"Blessed is she who believed that the words of the Lord would be fulfilled". "(Luke 1:45).*

Here there is a close relationship between Mary and the Word at work.

## II - Mary is linked to the two Testaments.

### She is the Daughter of the People of God (Israel) and the Mother of Christ and of the Church.

The first testimony about Mary comes from St. Paul in his Epistle to Galatians 4:4. It is only a fragile and tenuous statement. He writes: "born of a woman". This epistle was written several decades before the Gospels.

About the mother of Jesus, this disciple says nothing more. It is a sign, notes the theologian Joseph Stricher, "*that the early Christians did not ask themselves any particular questions about Mary.*"

It is with "the childhood evangelists", Matthew and especially Luke that we learn more about Mary: Mary of History, daughter of Nazareth, and a spiritual woman who is attentive to the Law of the Lord her God.

I invite you to approach from the New Testament this progressive discovery of Mary by the first Christian communities.

The Gospel names Mary 19 times. But more than the number, it is the way in which she is named that guides us to understand her particular place in the mystery of our faith and of the faith of the Church: Woman (Jn)-Mother - Virgin – young girl of Galilee...

### By reading the entire New Testament we can identify 4 characteristics:

- For the early Christians, everything is centered on Christ.
  - The teaching of the New Testament on Mary is placed under the sign of discretion and sobriety. What is said is essential for the faith of the Christian communities.
  - The discovery of Mary's role and place in the History of Salvation occurred progressively in the first Christian generations, that is, over time. Mary was known very early as the mother of Jesus, but only at the end of the New Testament, along with John, she will appear as the mother of the beloved disciple representing all believers.
  - Finally, the first communities, on discovering Mary, discover and tell their own mystery.
- You know that the texts of the New Testament bear the mark of the community in which they were written: Jesus' message was interpreted, lived and re-actualized, and for Mary it was the same dynamic.
- To speak well of Mary is not necessarily to speak of her often and in depth; it is necessary to adhere to the truth of the Gospels. It is more solid and more demanding.

## III. Let us see now the texts in chronological order

### 1- The first missionary teaching around 35 year A.D.

#### Missionary speeches

<u>Acts:</u>	<u>Mary</u>	<u>Observations</u>
- Peter's speech: 2, 14-36 3, 12-26 4, 9-12 10, 34-43	There is no reference to Mary, nor to the infancy of Jesus.	The first sermons have as central goal: the preaching of Jesus, his death and Resurrection...
- Esteban's speech: 7, 2-53		
- Paul's speech: 13, 16-46 20, 17-35 22, 1-21 26, 1-23		

## 2- Paul writes his letter to the Galatians around 50 (that is, 20 years after Jesus' death)

### Galatians 4:4:

*“But, when the proper time arrived, God sent his Son, born of a woman and subject to the law”.*

### Mary

Just three words! *“Born of a woman”*. The name of Mary is not mentioned and nothing is said of the virginal conception of Jesus. But she is the guaranteeing woman of the Incarnation, of the humanity of Christ.

### Paul

He does not insist on the particular birth of Jesus, but on the fact that he has been a complete man, born of a woman... and subject to the law. That is, for Paul, Jesus shared the slavery of humanity, even to the cross. He belongs to a people, the Jewish people. Paul insists that Christ came to the world as any other man!

## 3- Gospel of Mark (written around 65 A. D.)

**Mark 6:3:** *« Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?»*

**Mark 3:31-35:** *"About the true kinship of Jesus"*.

Often these words of Jesus are said to be hard. The scene takes place in Capernaum, where Jesus went to live. The family of Jesus came from Nazareth to take him away because: *"He has lost his mind"*. For Jesus, his true family is formed by those who welcome the Word of God and put it into practice.

### Mary

Nor is there an allusion to the infancy of Jesus or the presence of Mary on the cross. But, let us note that Mary is not alone and does not make any personal gesture. But the scene lifts the veil of a deep inner drama that Mary must have experienced: **Incredulity** or **Faith**. In Mary's time, when the woman had to follow her family... she had to choose between following her family or following Jesus, renouncing then all material safety and social ties. Following Jesus for Mary was to do as Abraham did, to go out to a new and unknown country... without all the religious references.

The message of Mark is like that of Paul; he puts himself in other perspective: the human roots of Jesus.

## 4- Gospel of Matthew (written around 70 A.D.)

Matthew is the first of the evangelists to tell episodes from the childhood of Jesus. But his gospel has a theological purpose. He paints a portrait of Christ.

**Mt 1:16** Mary is named in the genealogy.

**Mt 1:18-25:** He speaks of the virginal conception.

**Mt 2:** *"With Mary, his mother"*

**Mt 12, 46-50:** *"It is about Jesus and his true family..."*

The first two chapters are devoted to stories from childhood. Mary is named in them, but she does not say anything, everything is said from Joseph's point of view. Matthew highlights Mary's role in two ways: Mary is present as the child's mother and she is a virgin. For Matthew, Mary is the Gracious One and Joseph is the Righteous One. These are the disciples of Jesus: forgiven and called to live according to the justice that God wants. (Mt 5:20)

Born through Mary, Jesus is the one who is at the center of everything, even for Mary.

Matthew does not mention Mary's presence at the cross. For Matthew, Joseph and Mary prefigure the community of disciples that Jesus will create around him. Unlike Mark, Matthew shows the disciples saying: *"Behold my mother"*. (Mt 12, 49-50)

## 5- Gospel of Luke and the Acts (written at mid-seventy A.D.)

As in Matthew, Luke's Gospel opens with two chapters devoted to the childhood of Jesus. In this New Testament, Luke is the one that offers the most abundant testimony about Mary. Luke will be interested in the female personality of this story.

### **The two first chapters:**

Lk 1:26-38: The Annunciation.

1, 39-56: Visitation and Magnificat

2. 1-52: The birth, the infancy and adolescence of Christ.

8. 19-21: *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice"*.

11, 27-28: *"Blessed is the womb that bore you"*.

But Jesus answered, *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it"*.

Mary has a leading role. We have the story of her vocation (1:26-28), her response, her journey in faith and her prayer. It is she who reflects on the meaning of the words and deeds surrounding the birth of Jesus (2:19). Simeon addresses Mary (2:34-35). She is the one who rebukes Jesus during his teenage escape (2:48).

Mary is seen here as the believer, the first in the faith. Mary is elevated by Jesus to the rank of a free being who no longer obeys the rules of men but the Word of God.

With this gospel we enter a time in which Mary will occupy a great space in the theology and spirituality of Christians.

Jesus takes advantage of the circumstances to situate his Mother.

**This discovery of Mary is always made in relation to Jesus and the Church.**

## 6- Apocalypse written around 80-90

Chapter 12.

In this text (little known to you perhaps because it is too difficult) we have 3 interesting passages:

"A woman dressed in the sun."

"a child..."

"A dragon..."

### **Mary**

Most exegetes see in this Woman who gives birth and flees to the desert: **the Church, the messianic community**. But tradition has also seen in second place: **Mary, the Mother of Jesus**.

Mary is not present in this text as the mother of Jesus. She is considered a member of the new community that gives birth to the Messiah and Mary is a great participant in this birth. She is a woman who believes and bears witness, like every Christian, to the One who overcomes the powers of death.

## 7- Gospel of Saint John (written at the end of the first century: 90-100)

Two texts introduce Mary almost at the end of John's story.

A first time at the wedding in Canaan.

John 2:1-12: "They have no more wine"...

"What he says to you, do."

"Woman, what's between you and me?"

Jn 19:25-27: Jesus said to his mother, "Behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"

John is the only one who emphasizes Mary's presence at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Canaan and at the end of it at the Cross.

On the other hand, there is nothing about childhood, nor about the public ministry of Jesus.

In reading this Gospel, we must not lose sight of the symbolic dimension of language. These marvelous acts designate the one who performs them, they indicate his identity. John also shows us this very strong bond between Jesus Christ and Mary. What there is between them is more than just a mother-son relationship, which is marked by the rather dry interpretation of Jesus. There is a much more important relationship between them that is found in the order of faith and revelation.

*"Do what he tells you..."*

This attitude of Mary represents the openness to faith of a people, that of Israel. She is the woman, the daughter of Israel. Through her faith, Jesus fulfils the first sign.

Mary's place remains always united to Jesus, her son, and always in function and in favor of the faith of early Christian communities.

#### IV- Conclusions

#### The central objective of faith is Jesus Christ

As we have seen through the proposed texts, Mary does not appear in them until around the year 70. With St. Paul we can say:

*"I have come to proclaim the mystery of God because I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified"...1 Cor 2,2*

So do our ways of speaking, living, praying, welcoming and accompanying in Lourdes bear witness to this primacy of Christ?

Whenever we speak about Mary in the New Testament, we should first seek what is said about Christ and then about the Church. Mary will then appear in her true perspective.

#### As an example let us consider some texts together

##### 1) - Luke 1:26-28: The Annunciation

###### What it says about the Mystery of Jesus.

Jesus will be the real Messiah, of the lineage of David V. 32-33  
He will be great and holy as God V; 32 and 35

He will be called Son of the Most High and Son of God V. 32 y 35

In him the promise made to Abraham by God "of the impossible" is fulfilled V; 37; Gen 18:14

###### What it says about the Mystery of the Church

"Rejoice" (v. 28) resounds like the call addressed to the Daughter of Zion in the past (So 3:14; Zech 9:9): an entire people is invited to rejoice at the coming of their Savior.

He who comes will "reign over the family of Jacob". V33: the future of God's people is at stake.

###### What it says about the Mystery of Mary...

Mary belongs to a long generation of those who are called: God is with her and grants her favor V.28 and 30. She receives a new name: her destination will be changed V; 28

She is invested with the Spirit and Power of God V.35:

She believes in the Word and makes herself available for the service of the Lord. V.38

(Part of the above is taken from Jean-Pierre Prévost's book "**La Mère de Jésus**". Cerf Novalis)

Now, or rather at home, I invite you to reread two texts: John 2, 1-12 ► Canaan

John 19, 25-27 ► The Cross

Then you make the same boards:

#### What this text tells me:

About the Mystery of Jesus  
Mary...

About the Mystery of the Church

About the Mystery of

Good work.

Sr. Chantal Rabier  
Daughter of Wisdom

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