

What happened to Mary?

Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, is one of the most famous women who have ever lived. Although her name is easily recognized, little is actually known about the woman herself, her upbringing, or her life after her Son, Jesus, returned to His heavenly Father (John 16:28; Acts 1:9-11). So what did happen to Mary after the gospel accounts?

What we know for sure is that Mary was an unmarried virgin girl when God sent the angel Gabriel to give her a message (Luke 1:26-27). She was engaged to a man named Joseph, but they had not had sexual relations (Luke 1:34; Matthew 1:18, 25). She became pregnant as a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that the Child she carried had no earthly father (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). An angel also visited Joseph and told him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife, so they married and Joseph became known as the father of Jesus, even though he was not (Matthew 1:21-24; 13:55). The rest of the Christmas story found in Luke 2 gives us glimpses of Mary as she gives birth to the Savior (verse 6), is visited by the shepherds (verse 16), and is eventually found by the wise men from the East (Matthew 2:7-12).

After Jesus' birth, as they were commanded to do under Jewish law (Exodus 13:2; Leviticus 12:6-8), Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord and offer the proper sacrifice. They met two prophets there who immediately recognized the Promised One of Israel. An aged woman, Anna, blessed the Child, and elderly Simon prophesied over Him, giving Mary a glimpse of the sorrow that would one day pierce her heart when her Son would suffer for the sins of the world (Luke 2:34-35).

The next time we see Mary is in Luke 2:41-52, when Jesus was twelve years old and attending Passover at the temple for the first time, as was Jewish custom. Jesus,

becoming aware of His true identity, spent His time in the temple with the priests and teachers, amazing them with His wisdom. Mary and Joseph started home without Him, thinking He was with others in their caravan. They went a day's journey before they realized He was not with them. They returned to Jerusalem and spent another three days searching for Him. Mary expressed a normal mother's frustration when they found Him and scolded Him a bit for scaring them that way (verse 48).

Mary is not mentioned again until the beginning of Jesus' three-year ministry. He had been invited to a wedding in the Galilean town of Cana (John 2:1-10). When the host ran out of wine, it was Mary who came to Jesus and told Him about it. Jesus then quietly performed His first miracle, turning about 150 gallons of water into fine wine (verses 6-10). After the wedding Jesus went with "his mother and his brothers and his disciples to Capernaum to stay for a few days" (verse 12). The fact that only Mary is mentioned, not Joseph, seems to indicate that her husband had died at some point during Jesus' growing-up years.

Despite the miraculous events surrounding His birth, Mary still did not fully grasp her firstborn Son's true purpose. Matthew 12:46-48, the next mention of Mary after the wedding in Cana, recounts an incident when she and Jesus' brothers summoned Him as He was preaching. His response to their interruption indicates that He understood that even those closest to Him did not yet understand or believe in Him as Israel's Messiah. In John 7:2-5, Jesus' brothers tried again to dissuade Him from what God had sent Him to do. This may also indicate that Mary continued to be confused about His role in coming to earth.

We see Mary again at the crucifixion in John 19:25-27. She watched her holy Son be

tortured and crucified. From the cross Jesus turned to His disciple John and asked him to take care of His mother from then on. So we know that John took Mary into his own home. Jesus' choice of John to care for Mary may have been due to the fact that Jesus knew His own brothers were not yet believers and He wanted His mother to be with someone who believed in Him.

Acts 1:14 finds Mary among the disciples in the upper room after Jesus' ascension into heaven. She was among the one hundred twenty (Acts 1:15) who were baptized in the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It may have been only after her Son's resurrection that Mary truly believed, as did some of her other children (Galatians 1:19). Her presence at Pentecost is the Bible's last reference to Mary.

Since Scripture is silent about what happened to Mary after Pentecost, we have only tradition and legend to tell us what became of her. Many scholars speculate that Mary lived out her years in John's home, either in Jerusalem or in Ephesus. Some have suggested that, since it is believed that John oversaw many of the churches in Asia Minor, Mary moved to Ephesus with him and was part of the Ephesian church where young Timothy pastored (1 Timothy 1:3), but we cannot know for certain. What we do know is that, although Mary was chosen by God for a unique assignment, she had to receive salvation by faith in her Son just as we all do (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 4:12). Mary is now in heaven with all the believers who have died in Christ, not because she gave birth to Jesus but because she trusted in His shed blood as payment for her sin (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:11).