



Mary, the Mother of God

The role of Mary, the Mother of God holds a central place in the Catholic Church as well as her being a key figure for broader Christians, as well as Muslims. The early Church bestowed upon Mary the Greek title *Theotokos*, literally God-bearer, which gave form to the more familiar title Mother of God.

Over the years, great prominence has been given to Mary, supported by a long tradition of prayerful piety. At times, this has incorrectly assigned divine status to Mary equalling that of Jesus. Mary should never replace Christ as the centre of Christian faith. In more recent times there has been a reclamation of the importance of Mary as an exemplary disciple and situating her within the communion of saints (SEE: Communion of Saints)

What is known about the historical Mary is scant and largely drawn from the gospels. Other 'legends' about Mary find their origins in writings outside of the four gospels, known as apocryphal writings. One such legend concerns Mary's parents, Sts. Joachim and Anne contained within a piece of writing known as the *Protoevangelium of James*. The historical and cultural contexts of first century Palestine however do give a lens into aspects of Mary's life.

When it was announced to her that she would bear a son, Mary would have been a young girl living in a country rife with political unrest. Galilee at that time would have been a dangerous place to live. On top of this, as an unmarried girl expecting a baby she would face social rejection and alienation at the very time she would need support. Well aware of all this, Mary says "Yes" and provides the model for authentic discipleship.

After Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, she proclaims a song of praise for the goodness of God. In that prayer, the Magnificat, she praises the God who has "lifted up the lowly". The economic and social structures of the time would have forced people of Mary's status- the lowly- into various forms of servitude. In accepting God's invitation to bear his Son, Mary *chooses* to serve. This is not a passive or weak decision but one that stands against the forces of alienation and oppression.

Mary is a powerful role model that exemplifies the often surprising ways God works in people's lives. God does not work through those in positions of power and prestige but chooses to be incarnated into the world through the invisible one. As with Mary, it is often through one's perceived inadequacies and limitations that God can most effectively act. For it is through the lowly, the small and the unexpected that the reign of God irrupts into the world.