

Mary Worship Is Idolatry

'You will have no other gods before Me. You will not make for yourselves an idol or any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or buried in the earth below or in the sea. You will not bow yourself down to them nor serve them' (Exodus 20:3 to 5). 'You will make no cast idols for yourselves' (Exodus 34:17). 'Do not turn to idols nor make molten gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 19:4). 'You will have no other gods before Me. You will not make an engraved image for yourself or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or buried in the earth or in the sea. You will not bow down yourself to them nor serve them' (Deuteronomy 5:7 to 9).

"Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together you who have escaped from the nations, those who have no knowledge (of God), who carry the wood of their idol and pray to a god that cannot save (for eternal life). Declare and bring the idol forth. Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has shown salvation from ancient times? Who has declared it from times of old? Have not I, the Lord? There is no God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour. There is no one besides Me. Look to Me and be saved (for eternity) all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no one else. By My own Self I have sworn, the Word is gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not return. To Me, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. Only in God it is said of Me, is righteousness and strength. To Him will mankind come and all those who were incensed against God will be disappointed" (Isaiah 45:20 to 24). 'All nations You have made will come and worship before You, Lord. They will glorify Your name for You are great and do wondrous things. You are God alone' (Psalm 86:9 & 10). These verses make it very clear, we must worship the Lord God only and we must never worship an image of Mary who is 'buried in the earth' following her natural death about 2,000 years ago.

Mariology is the worship of Mary, Jesus' mother but to worship Mary or pray to her is not of God. The icons, pictures, images and idols depicting the so-called Mary and Jesus are an abomination to God. The idols cannot do anything for humanity – they are just worthless idols that are to be burned by fire, not given away. 'Their idols are silver and gold (or wood, or in modern times, plastic), the work of men's hands. They have mouths but cannot speak. They have eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear. They have noses but cannot smell. They have hands but cannot feel. They have feet but cannot walk. Those who make them will become like them. Yes, everyone who trusts in their idols will become like them' (Psalm 115:4 to 8). 'The idol makers will be disappointed, yes, confounded, all of them. Those who are makers of idols will go into confusion together' (Isaiah 45:16). 'What value does the engraved image have, that its maker would engrave it? Why would the maker of idols, the teacher of lies fashion its form to make the molten image, to cause people to trust in it, to love mute idols? Woe to them who say to the wood, 'Awake!' or to the mute stone, 'Arise!' Can the idol teach? It is overlaid with gold and silver and there is no breath in it at all' (Habakkuk 2:18 & 19). 'You must burn the engraved images of their gods with fire. You will not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourself lest you be snared in it for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. You will not bring an abomination into your house and become an evil devoted thing like it. You will utterly detest it and you will utterly abhor it for it is an evil devoted thing' (Deuteronomy 7:25 & 26).

People who feel uncomfortable using the name of Jesus, sometimes feel more comfortable believing they are speaking to Mary. Back in the early church, people were much the same and did not like hearing about Jesus. The apostles were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus but not to be deterred, the apostles said they had to obey God rather than man and continued preaching the Gospel about Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:28, 29 & 40), but they never preached about Mary as being divine. Most certainly Mary was chosen by God to bring forth our Messiah, but she died like all mortal humans and was buried. Why did people start worshipping a deceased woman? The image of mother and child had been an object of worship from the time of Babylon, centuries before the birth of our Lord Jesus. This actually dates back to the days of the Babylonian cult, instigated in the Tower of Babel and is still practiced today but under the guise of religion. After Damascus became the area of the head of the Babylonian cult, the people continued to worship the 'queen of heaven' and her son Sol, Baal or Tammuz (Jeremiah 7:18). The so-called 'queen of heaven' or goddess of fertility, was Venus or Ishtar from where we get the word Easter. 'Behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz' (Ezekiel 8:14). That god Tammuz was a Babylonian god that was supposed to die every year and be raised again during the time of the year that is now called Easter, along with his mother Ishtar. Ishtar and Tammuz are pagan gods now depicted as Madonna and child or Mary and Jesus. This abomination was adopted from the Babylonian cult and accepted by the church and a few other religions. Under Constantine's rule, the church thought it would be politically expedient to give the congregation a parallel figure to bring into their new officially imposed worship. That was when Mary was elevated to divine status. The worship of Mary was set up in 381 AD and was decreed by the council of Ephesus in 431 AD. That is recorded in history, it is fact. There is no mention of worshipping Mary until then and there is no worship of Mary in the Bible. In 1854 Pope Pius 9th proclaimed the 'immaculate conception' of Mary. In 1931 Pope Pius 11th reaffirmed that erroneous doctrine. Mary was not 'immaculately conceived'. She was not born sinless. She was a normal

woman born in the normal way who needed to repent of her sin and accept her Son Jesus as her Saviour like every other person. Some people believe Mary was the only human born by so-called 'immaculate conception', so they say Jesus was born without original sin. That implies Mary did not need a Saviour and that she was divine, but after studying the scriptures we can see that is wrong and is contrary to scripture. Mary herself realised she had need of a Saviour (Luke 1:46 & 47). If Mary did not need a Saviour, she would not have glorified God as her Saviour. It was Jesus Who was born by the Holy Spirit, not Mary.

Here are two shocking facts about Mariology. The halo we often see drawn around the heads of the 'Madonna and Child' was taken from the ancient practice of sun worshipping. The symbol of the sun god Sol, Baal or Tammuz is depicted as a 'T' then on top of the 'T' a loop symbolising the goddess of the moon or fertility Ishtar, became the Egyptian ankh. An ancient statue of Venus holding her son Sol was adopted by the church as Mary and Jesus and by other religions as their goddess of fertility with her male child. What is even worse than that, is the so-called 'sacred heart' that is surrounded by a shining 'sun'. During the time of human sacrifices, usually the sacrifice of young children, the first part of the flesh removed from the victim was the beating heart which was then offered to the pagan sun god referred to in the Bible as Molech (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2 to 5). That ancient abomination is what has been adopted as the so-called 'sacred heart'. Instead of destroying the pagan gods as the Lord commanded in His Word, they were simply adopted into Christianity and masked as Christian themes. These false doctrines have nothing whatsoever to do with the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel told Mary, Jesus would be conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26 to 38) and He was born without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Mary had never had sex with a man (Luke 1:27 & 34) and did not have sex with Joseph until after Jesus was about a month old (Matthew 1:24 & 25). The Holy Child born to Mary was born of the living God (Matthew 1:20 & 21; Luke 1:35). In the early church, prayers were never directed to Mary. We are not to pray to Mary but we are to do what the Bible says; we are to pray to the Father in Jesus' name (John 16:23). If Mary, who was a righteous woman, knew she was being linked to the evil 'queen of heaven' she would no doubt be appalled. This whole doctrine of Mary worship is evil in the sight of God.

People who believe they are worshipping Mary are in fact practicing idolatry. Those who devotedly worship 'Mary' worship their false goddess far more than they worship our true and living God, our Creator. Worshipping anything or anyone is idolatry – something God really hates. Worshipping Mary puts her above Jesus and that is blasphemy. Mary worship is a counterfeit 'saviour'. Mary worshippers need to search the Bible to see what is written about idolatry and to see the truth about the woman they think they are worshipping. Their idol worship has no truth or relevance to the real Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. The Lord alone is to be worshipped, glorified, sought in prayer and God and only God is able to forgive our sins and answer prayers. He is our only source of salvation, truth and peace. He alone is to be feared. He alone is to receive our praise and worship. The Lord never forgets about us. He has engraved mankind onto His great hands. 'I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands' (Isaiah 49:15 & 16). 'Lord, what is mankind that You think of them? What is the son of man that You care for him?' (Psalm 8:4; 144:3). Mankind does not need any other mediator. Mary cannot replace the Lord in any possible way and those people who cry out to Mary are not seeking the Lord, they are seeking their idol. Mary cannot intercede for us nor can any deceased person or any dead so-called saint. Intercession on a high spiritual level is the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. 'Who is there to condemn us? Will Jesus the Messiah Who died and was raised from the dead, Who is at the right hand of God interceding for us?' (Romans 8:34). 'He Who searches the hearts of mankind knows what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit Who intercedes on behalf of the believers in harmony with God's will' (Romans 8:27).

Mary was a holy woman, that is certain but we are not to worship her. She was a human woman, saved by the grace of God like all people who accept Him. The Lord is to be the sole object of our worship. He is the object of our appreciation, our thanksgiving, our gratitude, our veneration and is to be the focus of our attention. God is able to hear and answer our prayers. We do not need anyone else. If we are in correct relationship with God the Father and pray according to His will, we can be bold and approach Him. 'This is the boldness (or confidence) we have in Him; if we ask anything according to His will He listens to us. If we know He listens to us, whatever we ask we know we have the petitions we have asked of Him' (1 John 5:14 & 15). As we are prompted by the Holy Spirit, we go directly to God the Father and ask in Jesus' name. Mary does not come into the equation. It is God Who shows grace and mercy. Mary does not because she is deceased and cannot. Mary plays no part in our redemption. Jesus is our Redeemer Who will live forever. In the Book of Job it is stated by Job himself in prophecy, our Redeemer lives as our Intercessor, He would stand on the earth and after his own death, Job would see God in his new, resurrected body. "As for me, I know my Redeemer lives. In the end He will stand on the earth. After my skin is destroyed then in my body I will see God Whom I, even I, will see on my side (meaning as an Intercessor). My eyes will see Him and not as a stranger. My Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25 to 27).

Yes, Mary was a blessed virgin – until after Jesus was born then she lived like any other normal married woman and had four sons and two or three daughters, most of whom are named in the Bible. Mary is the Gentile version of the Hebrew name Miriam and as a Jewish woman, her name would have been Miriam. To put aside any thought of worshipping Mary, we will have a close look at her life – the life of a normal Jewish woman of her time in history, chosen by God to bring our Messiah and Saviour into the world with the knowledge of her husband and family. Starting with Luke 1:26 to 38: ‘The angel Gabriel was sent from God to Galilee in Nazareth, to a girl never having been married; a virgin named Miriam betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, a descendant of the house of David. Gabriel came to her and said, “Hail, O favoured one! The Lord is with you! Blessed are you before all other women!” When Miriam saw Gabriel she was greatly troubled at what he said and wondered what such a greeting might mean. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid Miriam, for you have found grace with God. Listen! You will become pregnant and will give birth to a Son. You will name Him Jesus (in Hebrew, Yeshua). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His forefather David. He will reign over the house of Jacob throughout the ages and of His (eternal) reign there will be no end.”

Miriam asked the angel, “How can this be since I have no husband?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and so the holy Child which will be born will be called the Son of God ... with God nothing is impossible.”

Then Miriam said, “Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to what you have said,” and the angel left her’.

Luke 2:4 to 39: ‘Joseph went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house of David to be enrolled with Miriam his wife who was about to become a mother. While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her Son, her Firstborn and she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn ... The shepherds hurried and found Miriam, Joseph and the Baby lying in a manger. When they saw Him they made known what had been told to them concerning this Child, and all who heard it were astounded at what the shepherds told them but Miriam kept all these things in her heart’ ... When the time came for Miriam’s purification and the Baby’s dedication, they came according to the Law of Moses and brought the Baby up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male that opens the womb will be dedicated holy to the Lord.” Joseph and Miriam came to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons ... The Baby’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about Him. Simeon blessed them and said to Miriam His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed and destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also so the secret thoughts and purposes of many hearts may be disclosed ... When Joseph and Miriam had done everything according to the Law of the Lord, they went back into Galilee to their own town, Nazareth’. Twelve years later Miriam still guarded all these things in her heart.

Jesus never worshipped Mary. He respected her and honoured her but He never once placed her as anyone to be venerated. Jesus knew He was the Son of God and focused on His ministry, occasionally placing Mary and the rest of His family equal to strangers, showing no family favouritism. When Jesus was twelve years old, He and his family were returning from a trip to Jerusalem when it seemed as though Jesus became lost in the crowd. When he was found after three days sitting in the temple, asking and answering questions, Mary, who had obviously been very worried about Him, rebuked Him saying, “Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I were anxiously looking for you.” Jesus said to them, “Why were you looking for Me? Did you not understand I must be in My Father’s house?” Mary and Joseph did not understand (or comprehend) what He had said to them. He went down to Nazareth with them. He was subject to them and His mother kept all these sayings in her heart’ (Luke 2:41 to 51). Perhaps a more mature young man would have told his parents he wanted to stay back in Jerusalem but Jesus was only twelve and would have behaved like a twelve-year-old, but when Mary showed her disapproval, Jesus immediately obeyed His parents and was ‘subject’ to them. When the family were attending a wedding in Cana, Mary asked Jesus to attend to the lack of wine. Jesus said, “Woman, what does that have to do with you and Me?” (John 2:1 to 11). Jesus was effectively saying, “This is none of our business,” but to honour His mother and prevent her from looking foolish, He performed His first miracle. Another time, when Mary and her now adult children wanted to speak to Jesus, He said concerning the people who had crowded around Him, “Whoever does the will of My Father Who is in heaven is My brother, sister and mother” (Matthew 12:46 to 50). On another occasion a woman from the crowd yelled out, “Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts that nursed You!” But Jesus said, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:27 & 28). If Mary was to be worshipped, that would have been the perfect time to begin but Jesus refuted what the woman had yelled out and put the glory straight back onto God and the Scriptures. These events show us, Jesus never considered His mother Mary worthy of worship.

Apart from the first four Gospel books and one verse in the Book of Acts, the role Mary played in bringing Jesus into the world is mentioned in two verses written by the apostles but her name is not mentioned. 'Concerning His Son Who was born a descendent of David according to the flesh' (Romans 1:3) 'When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born to a woman, born under the law' (Galatians 4:4). The truth is, nobody exalted Mary. That false doctrine was added about three hundred years after Mary died of natural causes, as a normal human. Apart from revealing her youth at the time of her marriage, the Bible does not tell us anything about Mary's appearance, height or hair colour. We can read about her humility, obedience and devotion, which are all far more important to God than physical appearance. Mary would have been approximately sixteen when Gabriel visited her to inform her she was the most blessed woman on earth. Mary was an obedient and humble young woman who immediately accepted what Gabriel told her and she allowed God to overshadow her so she could become pregnant to give Jesus the form of a human. When this happened, Mary considered herself to be a humble servant of God, not a goddess. Mary did ask how it would be possible to have a Child without ever having been intimate with her future husband, but Gabriel explained that to her. Mary and Joseph were not intimate until weeks after Jesus was born. 'The birth of Jesus occurred like this ... When His mother Miriam had been promised in marriage to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit ... But Joseph had no union with Miriam as her husband until she had borne her Firstborn Son and Joseph named Him Jesus (Yeshua)' (Matthew 1:18 & 25).

Mary and Joseph lived in the town of Nazareth before Jesus was born. That was where Gabriel visited Mary. Like most young couples starting out, Mary and Joseph were not wealthy. All they could afford to sacrifice at Jesus' dedication were two birds. That certainly does not mean they remained poor, as we will see later. When the verse says there was no room in the inn, that does not mean they could not afford to pay for a room, it means the inn was fully booked. A manger was dry feeding trough. Jesus was born in a large lower storey stable where animals were kept warm, dry and safe during the winter nights. The animals slept on hay and had dry feeding troughs (mangers), plus separate troughs for water. A shepherd and his family lived in the upstairs rooms so warmth from the animals would naturally rise and warm the family's living area during the cold winter months, so the houses were very large – large enough to accommodate an entire flock of sheep. In the warmer months, the stables could be used for guests. It was a normal way of life in those days. The Bible says the weather was warm enough for the shepherds to have their flocks outside at night, and the shepherds themselves were sleeping outside under the night sky. 'In that district there were shepherds living out under the sky in the field, watching over their flock by night' (Luke 2:8), so Jesus was born in the summer. The manger would have been scrubbed clean, ready for the next winter season. The place where Jesus was born would not have been a dirty, animal infested barn. It was possible the owner of the house cleaned his stable out ready for the influx of people coming to Bethlehem to register their names. Mary and Joseph were not alone. When the shepherds arrived, they were still staying in the place where Jesus was born – and there were other people there too, who marvelled at what the shepherds told them (Luke 2:18). If these things had been said to strangers, news would have travelled quickly, but if what the shepherds said, was said to Joseph's family, they would have taken little notice and what Jesus said later in His ministry bears that out. "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country, amongst his own family and in his own household," and, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown" (Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24). So although the people marvelled at what was being said about Jesus, as relatives, they did not honour it. We know Mary had no baby clothes with her, because the angel made a point of saying Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths (Luke 2:12). If swaddling cloths had been the norm, they would not have needed to point that fact out to the shepherds, however, swaddling cloths were nothing spectacular. They were merely long strips of cloth used as the modern equivalent of bandages. We know Mary, Joseph and Jesus moved to a house at some point within the following two years, because when the wise men from the east visited, they went to the house (Matthew 2:11). Perhaps they moved from the stable into the house upstairs after the crowds had left Jerusalem.

There were many amazing things said about Jesus when He was a baby. Mary did not seem to react or say anything, but guarded everything deep in her heart as though she could never share what was being said. She kept the promises and prophecies about Jesus a secret that was not revealed until after Jesus had died, had risen and the Gospels were being written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. That could have been because although Jesus' bodily conception was supernatural, from then onwards everything was normal. Mary could also have kept those things to herself because she was fearful of what the consequences would be if she talked about them. Herod had already tried to have Jesus slain before He was two years old when he decreed every male child had to be killed (Matthew 2:13 to 16). Mary seemed to never have spoken about the things said about Jesus, before or after he was born. Even her younger sons had no idea Mary had been told Jesus was the Son of God or that He would one day be King. We read their angry reaction to Jesus performing miracles during His ministry. 'The Feast of Tabernacles was drawing near so Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so Your disciples may see the works You do for no one does anything in secret when he wishes to be conspicuous. If You must do these things show Yourself

openly and make Yourself known to the world!" For even His brothers did not believe in Him' (John 7:2 to 5). Mary kept so quiet about the events surrounding Jesus' birth, even Jesus' cousin John the Baptist was never told. He said he did not know Him as the Messiah until Jesus Himself revealed Who He was (John 1:31). John's mother Elizabeth knew, but John did not know. When Simeon prophesied, a sword would pierce Mary's soul (Luke 2:35), he did not mean she would die by the sword. He meant watching the terrible torture and death of her Son would be so heartbreaking, it would be like having a sword pierce her soul. Mary could not have understood what Simeon meant. She just kept it all to herself. As a mother, it must have torn her heart to pieces to watch what the Romans did to her beloved Son. She was forced to watch as Jesus was humiliated, spat on, tortured then crucified and there was nothing she could do to help Him.

Jesus was Mary and Joseph's Firstborn Child (Luke 2:7). They had at seven or eight other children after Jesus was born. The eldest was Joseph Junior nicknamed James, Yaaqov (James), Judah (Jude) and Simon, and there were 'all of His sisters' indicating more than two sisters (Matthew 13:55 & 56; Mark 6:3). When Mary went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, Salome was with her (Mark 16:1) and another woman named Joanna (Luke 24:10). Joanna along with Susanna ministered to Jesus during His ministry (Luke 8:3). Joanna and Susanna could possibly have been two of Jesus' sisters because these women were active in Jesus' life. In those days, single women did not follow single men around the countryside to minister to him unless they were related. Salome bought the spices for His anointing, so it seems these women were closely related to Jesus. Only the closest family members were the ones who tended to a dead body (Leviticus 21:1 to 3). There were three women named Mary at Jesus' cross; Mary, Jesus' mother, known as the mother of James (Luke 24:10) and the mother of James (Mark 15:40 & 47); Mary wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. There was another woman identified as the sister of Jesus' mother Mary. Since we know that Salome was there, we can see that Salome and Mary were sisters. That would make James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the first cousins of Jesus. It would then make sense for Salome to ask Jesus to put his cousins on either side of His throne in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 20:21). It also makes sense that just before Jesus died, He committed the care of Mary into the hands of His cousin John (John 19:26 & 27), and John being Jesus' youngest cousin, would explain why Jesus loved John so much and why they were so close (John 13:23; 21:7). Why Mary's four sons were not given the care of Mary instead of their cousin John, is not explained in the scriptures. Mary had four sons and John had his mother Salome, so why Jesus did that is unclear, but probably because at that point of time, none of Jesus' younger brothers were believers. Far from being an only child, Jesus was part of a large, close family. After Jesus rose from the dead, Mary and Jesus' brothers all became believers. 'All of these with their minds in full agreement devoted themselves steadfastly to prayer, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers' (Acts 1:14). Notice here, they were praying with Mary, not to Mary. Jesus' brother James went on to write the epistle of James; Judah wrote the epistle of Jude. Simon became extremely zealous and was named Simon the Zealot. Eldest brother James was never mentioned again.

Judaism recognises the importance of a cohesive family. From their ancient culture through to today, the home has been the centre of religious life, the building block of the family for the children and thus for society. Jewish teaching has always been God's ideal, and that is a home filled with love and peace where children can grow up and learn to love Him. This strong cultural foundation enabled the dispersed Jewish people to continue worshipping God after their temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Study of the Old Testament and prayer was part of normal home life. God instructed parents to teach their children about Him just like Abraham did (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9 & 10; 6:7). The synagogue was an integral part of Jewish life centuries before Mary became a wife and mother. Mary and Joseph did a remarkably good job of teaching Jesus when He was a child. Jesus' knowledge of the scriptures was especially surprising to the Jews, because Jesus never attended school. There were schools in those days, but apparently Jesus never went. 'The Jews were astonished and said, "How is it that this Man is so learned in the Sacred Scriptures when He was never educated?"' (John 7:15). The job of teaching Jesus from a young child about the things of God fell to Mary and Joseph, so most of what He learned, He would have learned from His parents and since we read that he did not attend school, He was 'home schooled'. Jesus knew how to read and write so they would have taught Him that too. In view of the fact that Jesus knew so much at such a young age, Mary and Joseph must have been excellent teachers of God's Word. This is consistent with the scriptures when Jesus was shown to be extremely knowledgeable in the Hebrew scriptures at just 12 years old. 'After three days they (Mary and Joseph) found Him (Jesus) in the temple sitting amongst the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and His replies' (Luke 2:46 & 47). As a Jewish boy, Jesus was very well versed in the scriptures. That prepared Him for His earthly ministry.

Ancient Jewish women were no different to women today. They loved their cosmetics, perfume, jewellery and stylish clothes. Marriage was considered the most important way of life. It cemented families and that filtered out into society. The Jewish marriage took place in two stages. The first stage was the betrothal, akin to an engagement today except after being betrothed, if the couple changed their minds they had to divorce. Family and friends would witness the initial betrothal, like we would an engagement party and it was sealed

when the young couple shared a cup of grape juice. However, the big difference between an engagement and betrothal, is an engagement is not legally binding, but a betrothal was absolute. Before Joseph realised Mary had become pregnant by the Holy Spirit, he considered divorcing her even though they had not yet married but were betrothed (Matthew 1:18 to 25). The fathers of the bride and groom would agree to the marriage. A young couple were not forced into marriage but their families had to agree. That would stop any young person making a rash decision they could regret later. It was impossible to elope. After their betrothal, they were considered husband and wife and seeing another person was out of the question – it was considered adultery. Even at this point, the couple were never to be alone and always had to have a chaperone. Physical purity was paramount.

After the betrothal, the bride prepared herself and her bridesmaids for the wedding feast. Wedding gifts were chosen and set aside. The groom would prepare a location for the wedding and a home for his future wife and family. The preparation traditionally took up to a year. The second stage of the marriage would often last for a week of celebrating, feasting, music and dancing. During the wedding feast, the couple would go into the husband's house where the marriage was consummated. Until that time, the couple were not permitted to be alone together. The first meeting alone was the consummation of the marriage, even if sexual relations did not take place. Once the couple had been alone together they were considered to be legally married. Once they were married, the husband did not work for one full year so he could concentrate on his new bride, home and marriage. 'When a man is newly married, he will not go out with the army or be given any business. He will be free at home one year and shall enjoy his wife whom he has taken' (Deuteronomy 24:5). That is how important marriage was to the Jewish people.

We can only imagine the reaction of Mary's parents when she told them she had been visited by the messenger angel Gabriel and their supernaturally conceived Grandchild would be the Son of God. No teenage girl would have been able to keep that striking event to herself, and she most certainly would not have kept it a secret from her own parents. Filled with excitement, Mary was quick to rise up and run to her Aunty/cousin Elizabeth's place, so logically she would have been very keen to share the news with her mother first. As we can see by Elizabeth's reaction to Mary's greeting, Elizabeth already knew Mary's Baby was the Son of God, so it is logical other family members would have been told too, or the whole family would have been shamed by Mary's pregnancy. Although the Bible does not mention how, Mary's parents would have been told, possibly in a dream or some other way. Jewish fathers had all authority over their children and the Lord placed that responsibility onto the fathers, so in turn, the Lord would not have overridden His own command. Therefore, He would have spoken to Mary's father about all this beforehand. Mary's pregnancy would not have been a shock to her parents, just as it was not a shock to Elizabeth. The Bible does not say who initially told Joseph about Mary's pregnancy, but that job probably fell to her father. It was clear Joseph did not believe Mary's story about being pregnant by the Holy Spirit. We can only imagine how heartbroken Joseph was. Joseph was a just and upright man and would not expose her publicly so he decided to divorce her secretly. The Laws of Moses said in the case of infidelity the guilty one could be shamed and sometimes stoned. Joseph being the kind of man he was, chose not to publicly disgrace Mary but divorce her privately, so the Lord had to send an angel to tell him to take Mary as his wife because she really was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. The angel even explained how Mary's pregnancy was the fulfilment of prophecy (Matthew 1:20 to 23). That period of time must have been very difficult for both Mary and Joseph.

Once they were betrothed there would have been the usual excitement preceding a marriage. Some translations of the Bible say Joseph and Mary were betrothed when they went to Bethlehem together (Luke 2:5), but that would not have been permitted according to the law of the day. The Bible says Joseph took Mary to his side as his wife (Matthew 1:24), so they were married before they left for Bethlehem. Mary would not have accompanied Joseph if they were not legally married. The Bible does not tell us about their wedding, but it would have been a normal traditional one. We do not know if anybody other than her immediate family knew about Mary being pregnant, but if they did not know then, they would have been able to work it out when Jesus was born six months into the marriage. The shame Mary must have felt would have been very difficult to cope with in those days. It was customary for the women attending the wedding to comment on the bride's dress. The community supplied a girl with her wedding garments, so some women would have noticed Mary's pregnancy. A wedding was not a quiet, private occasion. It was expected the whole village would attend. After taking a year to prepare his life for his new bride, a groom's father would assess what his son had done and if everything was right, would send the groom and his supporters off to collect his bride from her parent's house for the wedding. There would be a cacophony of noise as the groom approached the bride's house. The bride and her bridesmaids would be able to hear the procession from a distance away. The bride would have made herself ready with the correct garments and without electric lighting, the oil lamps would have to be kept full and the wicks trimmed, just in case the groom arrived at night. The bride would be covered in a white veil and escorted into the street to meet her betrothed. The bride, her family and all her maids, plus groom's supporters would proceed to the groom's parent's house to join in with the guests who were already at the wedding feast. The bride would have some idea when the

groom would arrive. She could not be taken unaware. If she was out or unprepared when the groom came for her, it was possible the groom would shut her out of his life. Jesus explained that scenario when He painted a verbal picture of ten brides waiting for their Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1 to 13).

Joseph was a righteous man who had prophetic dreams that he always obeyed. The first recorded dream was the one telling him to take young pregnant Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20 to 23). Then Joseph had a dream urging him to flee into Egypt to escape Herod (Matthew 2:13). After a couple of years Joseph dreamed again. This time he was told to return to Israel (Matthew 2:19 to 21). A short time after that dream, Joseph dreamed again and he was warned to go to Galilee (Matthew 2:22). Joseph was committed to obeying the Laws of Moses as we can see several times. Luke 2:21 to 27 corresponding with Leviticus 12:2 to 8; Joseph had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day; Mary had her purification ceremony and the naming of Jesus in the Temple. Mary, Joseph and his family travelled to Jerusalem every year for Passover (Leviticus 23:5; Luke 2:41). Joseph not only obeyed the Lord, he led his family into that level of obedience too. When God spoke to Joseph he always reacted with trust, obedience, faith and submission to the will of God, no matter how hard it was. He was encouraged to marry Mary and he would have suffered shame and humiliation as a result of his obedience because he would have been blamed for Mary's pregnancy. Joseph was told to go to Egypt. We do not know what life was like there or how hard it might have been for them. It may have been hard physically but emotionally it would have been very stressful. Mary and Joseph were a great distance away from all family support for the first time in their lives, on the run, in a strange country, speaking a different language and with a new baby. Imagine how hard that would have been for them. How did they survive financially? How did they cope? We will never know, but the Lord would certainly have provided for them. We can see how Joseph went to great lengths to protect his new little family. Then they had to undertake the long journey back to Israel when Jesus was about two or three years old. Joseph's obedience to whatever the Lord told him would have had an influence on Jesus too Whom we know was completely obedient to God the Father.

Much of what has been written about Mary and Joseph in modern books has removed them from their cultural, historical and Biblical setting, and has created an image of Mary as an iconic deified woman. That has undermined her humanity and robbed us of seeing both Mary and Joseph as two normal people, especially chosen by God to carry out His divine will for the preparation of the salvation of mankind. The family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus have been stripped of their Jewishness, resulting in a church without stable roots. That in turn has created an atmosphere whereby the church has cruelly mistreated the Jewish people for two thousand years. We need to place Mary and Joseph as pivots in God's overall plan for mankind. Without their humble obedience, Jesus could not have come at that exact time. God could not have formed Jesus within Mary's womb if both Mary and Joseph were not obedient, faithful people. It would have been unthinkable for a young woman to raise her Son alone in those days. When we ponder on those facts and accept their role in God's plan, we will begin to grasp the Jewish foundation of our faith. Mary and Joseph lived in Israel within the Jewish culture, obeyed the Laws of Moses, spoke Hebrew and raised their children in that Biblical context. Mary and Joseph courageously faced their situation with unshakeable faith so our Messiah could come into the world as a Baby. The angel told them, their miraculously conceived Son would be the Saviour of mankind. Their lives were pure, holy and righteous before God. Their role in our lives is vital to our salvation because they were the parents of Jesus our Saviour.

Mary was from the priestly tribe of Levi, a descendant of Aaron. The verses regarding Mary's 'kinswoman', her aunt or cousin Elizabeth, reveals that. Joseph was from the royal tribe of Judah – a descendant of King David (Matthew 1:6 to 16). Some may think Joseph was 'only the stepfather' but that attitude is wrong. God has honoured Joseph for his role in helping provide us with our Saviour by including his bloodline in Jesus' genealogy as equally as Mary's bloodline. Joseph's father was named Jacob (Matthew 1:16), while Mary's father was Heli (Luke 3:23). Jesus was considered to be from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). Both Mary and Joseph were descended from the tribe of Judah but at some point, Mary's family married into the tribe of Levi. They were filled with faith and courage. Not only did they endure shame, they travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Mary was away from all family support while heavily pregnant with her first baby and she was very young. That in itself would have been incredibly difficult but worse still, the trip to Bethlehem for a heavily pregnant woman in those days would have been gruelling. She gave birth without her mother there to assist her. Mary would have had assistance from the women in Joseph's family but they were not Mary's family. The male writers of the Gospels would not have thought it necessary to add a detail like who assisted Mary during childbirth. Not long after the birth of their Baby they became refugees in Egypt because they had to escape from Herod then they travelled all the way back to Nazareth. The scriptures say Joseph was a just and a righteous man – a man of high moral standing (Matthew 1:19). Mary was an innocent and pure young teenaged woman, chosen and blessed (Luke 1:27 & 28). This couple were especially chosen by God to bring forth and raise the Son of God, teach Him the scriptures and to prepare Him for His ministry. God was with Joseph and Mary, of that there is no doubt, but they faced enormous obstacles and very difficult challenges. Through all of that, they remained totally obedient to God without a word of complaint. They

really were role models for us to follow. When Mary told the people in John 2:5, "Whatever He tells you to do, do it," she knew what it was to be obedient and do whatever God told her, so Mary had the authority to say that. Whatever God told Joseph and Mary to do, they did it. The fact that Joseph and Mary taught Jesus so well, is an indication that God the Father was careful to choose the perfect couple to raise and teach Jesus, the Son of God. Mary and Joseph went through all that for us – for you and I and the millions who have come to believe in Jesus and be saved from their sins. We have a lot to be grateful for. Thanks to them, we have our Saviour. How many people have ever thought about Mary and Joseph in that way? We should have the highest respect for Joseph and Mary and we can freely appreciate their enormous effort to pave the way for the salvation of millions of people but that does not mean we are permitted to worship Mary.

Many Christians assume Joseph was dead by the time Jesus began His ministry, but that assumption may not be correct. 'Is this not Jesus, the Son of Joseph, Whose father and mother we know?' (John 6:42). We know Mary was not dead and she was included in the same sentence. The people of Capernaum said 'know' (present tense) not knew (past tense), so this one word implies the people knew Joseph at that time. There is another verse that indicates Joseph was still alive. 'All spoke well of Him and marvelled at the words of grace that came forth from His mouth and they said, "Is this not Joseph's Son?"' (Luke 4:22). It is likely Joseph was a Master Tradesman or a Master Builder with a high social status. Jesus would have followed in his father's footsteps as was the custom of the day, so Jesus would also have been a tradesman, taught by Joseph. By the time Jesus began his public ministry at thirty, He was already well known, honoured and respected around the whole of Israel and that indicates a high social status. 'Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men ... Jesus Himself taught in their synagogues, being recognised and honoured by all' (Luke 2:52; 4:15). Not everybody had the privilege of standing up in the synagogue to speak but because Jesus was well versed in the scriptures, financially well off, enjoyed a high social status and was the eldest Son, opened doors and gave Him the chance to have incredible influence over the population. Whatever Jesus and Joseph's trade was, it paid well because Jesus owned a very expensive seamless tunic, like a warm singlet (John 19:23). Jesus would have enjoyed social privileges unavailable for less wealthy Jews.

Here is one frightening fact about worshipping Mary – it has terrible eternal consequences. It is idolatry and blasphemy and the Bible says idolaters cannot enter into eternal life. They cannot go to heaven. They will end up being sent to the eternal Lake of Fire – a place so terrible, people cannot imagine it. God calls them children of disobedience. 'Know this for sure ... no unclean person or a covetous person who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Jesus and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words. Because of these things the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience, therefore do not be partakers with them' (Ephesians 5:5 to 7). 'For the evil ... idolaters and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death' (Revelation 21:8). There is only one hope for people who worship Mary. Their only hope is to stop praying to Mary, stop idolising her, stop venerating her above God. Repent of the sin of idolatry and blasphemy. Pray to God in Jesus' name and give to God all the glory, love, honour, praise and worship for He alone is worthy of worship. In the following verses honouring God there is no mention of Mary. 'Worthy are You our Lord and God the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honour and the power for You created all things and because of Your desire they exist and were created' (Revelation 4:11). 'You are worthy to take the Book of Life and to open its seals for You were slain and bought us for God with Your blood, out of every tribe, language, people and nation' ... 'Worthy is the Lamb Who has been slain to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing!' I heard every created thing in heaven, on the earth, buried in the earth, in the sea and everything in them saying, "To God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honour, the glory and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 5:9, 12 & 13).

Amen and God bless you.

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