

Women around other Prophets

MARYAM BINT IMRAN

Mother of Prophet Isa A.S. (Jesus)

Maryam's birth and her guardianship

The Quran has covered the birth of Maryam in Surah Al Imran's verse number 35 and 36. In Tafsir ibn Kathir, ibn Kathir has elaborated on these two verses (through narrations from others) and provided information about Maryam's parents. According to him, the name of Maryam's father was 'Imran'. He was an imam (prayer leader) in Bayt Al-Maqdis (Al-Aqsa) Bayt Al-Maqdis at that time was under the care of the descendants of Prophet Harun (Aron), the brother of Prophet Moosa (Moses). Imran was a very pious man and well respected by those who took care of religious affairs in Bayt Al-Maqdis. The name of Imran's wife was Hannah bint Faqudh. (Tafsir Ibn Kathir, p 771).

According to Ibn Kathir, Hannah didn't have any children before Maryam. One day, she saw a bird feeding its chick. Seeing that, her longing for a child grew intense and thus she made a sincere prayer to Allah to grant her an offspring. In that prayer she made a promise to Allah that if He gave her an offspring, she would dedicate her child to His worship and in taking care of the holy places in Bayt Al-Maqdis. Hannah's prayers were accepted, and soon she became pregnant. The Quran narrates her response in the following verse: *O my Lord! I have vowed to you what (the child that) is in my womb to be dedicated for your services (free from all worldly work; to serve Your Place of worship), so accept this from me. Verily, you are the All-Hearer, the All-Knowing* (Surah Aal-e-Imran, Verse 35)

And after giving birth Hannah said (as narrated in the Quran): *Then when she gave birth to her [child Maryam (Mary)], she said: "O my Lord! I have given birth to a female child," – and Allah knew better what she brought forth, – "And the male is not like the female, and I have named her Maryam (Mary), and I seek refuge with you (Allah) for her and for her offspring from Shaitan (Satan), the outcast".* Surah Aal-e-Imran, Verse 36

After the birth of Maryam, Hannah decided that she would fulfill her promise and give the newly born child to the service of Bayt-Al Maqdis. Hannah left with Maryam, carrying her in her infant cloth, and took her to the rabbis from the offspring of Aaron, the brother of Prophet Moses. They were responsible for taking care of *Bayt Al-Maqdis* at that time, just as there were those who took care of the Kaabah. Maryam's mother said to them, "Take this child whom I vowed – to serve the Masjid, I have set her free, since she is my daughter, for no menstruating woman should enter the Masjid, and I shall not take her back home." They said, "She is the daughter of our Imam, as Imran used to lead them in prayer, "who took care of our sacrificial rituals." Zakariyya said, "Give her to me, for her maternal aunt is my wife." They said, "Our hearts cannot bear that you take her, for she is the daughter of our Imam." So they conducted a lottery with the pens with which they wrote the Tawrah, and Zakariyya won the lottery and took Maryam into his care.

Life of Maryam

Maryam's guardian Zakariyya (who was the husband of Maryam's maternal aunt) was a very pious man and took good care of Maryam and raised her well. As Maryam became older, she devoted herself to the worship of Allah. Maryam fulfilled the promise of her mother and dedicated her life to the worship of Allah. She was modest, honorable, innocent, and dedicated to her task of worship.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *The best woman (in her time) was Maryam, daughter of Imran, and the best woman (of the Prophet's time) is Khadijah (his wife), daughter of Khuwaylid*

Maryam's piety did not remain unobserved by Zakariyya. According to the Quran, whenever Zakariyya went to visit Maryam, he found her with food and supplies and he wondered about its source and asked her about it to which she used to respond that the food came from Allah. The Quran confirms this through the following verse: *"So her Lord (Allah) accepted her with goodly acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner and put her under the care of Zakariyya. Every time he entered Al-Mihrab to (visit) her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Maryam (Mary)! From where have you got this?" She said, "This is from Allah." Verily, Allah provides sustenance to whom He wills, without limit"* Surah Aal-e-Imran, Verse 37.

Birth of Prophet Isa A.S. (Jesus)

As Maryam grew, she found out about her status of the chosen one. It was revealed in the Quran in Surah Aal-e-Imran Verses 42-43:

- 42. *And (remember) when the angels said: "O Maryam (Mary)! Verily, Allah has chosen you, purified you (from polytheism and disbelief), and chosen you above the women of the 'Alamin (mankind and jinn) (of her lifetime).*
- 43. *O Mary! Submit yourself with obedience to your Lord (Allah, by worshipping none but Him Alone) and prostrate yourself, and Irkai (bow down) along with Ar-Rakiun (those who bow down).*

Maryam could not fully comprehend or interpret the meaning of this news. But soon she found out that she was pregnant. This astonished her because she had never been touched by a man. This obviously upset Maryam greatly and to avoid any embarrassment she withdrew from her family and the public's eye and went to a place east of Jerusalem. It was here that Allah sent angel Jibril (Gabriel) in the form of a man. This made Maryam afraid but then he gave her the news that she was about to give birth to a child named 'Eesa' (Jesus) and that the child would be among those who are loved and blessed by Allah. Maryam was also foretold by Allah that this child would speak from his cradle.

As is obvious, Maryam was upset to know that she was pregnant. And when the angel told her about this child she asked: *She said: "How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?"* Surah Maryam, Verses 20.

Allah stated the answer of the Angel in Surah Maryam: *He said: "So (it will be), your Lord said: 'That is easy for Me (Allah): And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah)'"* Surah Maryam, Verses 21

Although this could have caused Maryam some agony, Allah kept her safe and filled with provisions and food. Furthermore, Allah told her not to talk to anyone about the matter and to keep quiet.

Then Allah revealed to her – *“Oh Maryam strike the base of the palm tree and fresh ripe dates will fall down for you. Eat of them and sooth your eyes with them.”* She ate them and it gave her strength to cope with what was to come. She placed them over her eyes and they did indeed cool her swollen tearful eyes.

Maryam comes back to Jerusalem

After giving birth to Prophet Isa A.S., Maryam came back to Jerusalem with her child. Since she was widely considered to be a pure and pious woman, the people of Jerusalem were amazed to see a child with Maryam. They asked her about his father but she said nothing and pointed to the child. This further confused the people because there was no point in asking an infant about his birth.

In his book “Stories of Prophets”, Ibn Kathir describes how Maryam came back and the Jews started asking her questions: *It was said that Joseph the Carpenter was greatly surprised when he knew the story, so he asked Mary: “Can a tree come to grow without a seed?” She said: “Yes, the one which Allah created for the first time.” He asked her again: “Is it possible to bear a child without a male partner?” She said: “Yes, Allah created Adam without male or female!”*

Jesus speaks from the cradle

While the people were taunting Maryam asking her about the child’s father, a miracle happened. The infant which was still in cradle started speaking to the Jews. The Quran mentions the words of the infant in Surah Maryam, Verses 30-33:

- 30. *He [Isa (Jesus)] said: “Verily I am a slave of Allah, He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet;*
- 31. *and He has made me blessed wheresoever’s I be, and has enjoined on me Salat (prayer), and Zakat, as long as I live.*
- 32. *“And dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant, unblest.*
- 33. *And Salam (peace) be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!”*

So Allah (S.W.T.) protected her, aided her, fed her, clothed her and gave her honour when the people vilified her and gave her no food or water.

Maryam, may Allah exalt her mention, is a role model for all Muslim women because she maintained her impeccable character throughout her life. Allah raised her status and chose her from among the women of the entire world. Indeed, many verses and many Ahadeeth clarified her great status.

ASIYAH – The Wife of Firaun

There is not a lot of information about the righteous woman Aasiyah bint Mazaahim, the wife of Pharaoh (Firaun). All the details that have been narrated about her are from the Israa'eeliyyaat and are not proven in any saheeh text as far as we know. The Quran has presented Aasiyah bint Mazaahim as one of the best role models for women.

But it seems – and Allaah knows best – that she was one of those who concealed their faith from Pharaoh, then her secret was found out. There follow some of the things that have been narrated about her, with some commentary:

- Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *“And Allaah has set forth an example for those who believe: the wife of Fir’awn (Pharaoh), when she said: ‘My Lord! Build for me a home with You in Paradise, and save me from Fir’awn (Pharaoh) and his work, and save me from the people who are Zaalimoon (polytheists, wrongdoers and disbelievers in Allaah)’”* [al-Tahreem 66:11]
- The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ said: *“The men who attain perfection are many, but there are no woman who have attained perfection apart from Aasiyah the wife of Pharaoh and Maryam bint ‘Imraan, and the superiority of ‘Aa’ishah over all other women is like the superiority of thareed over all other foods.”* (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 3230; Muslim, 2431)
- The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ drew four lines on the ground, then he said, *“Do you know what this is?”* We said, *“Allaah and His Messenger know best.”* He ﷺ said: *“The best of the women of Paradise are Khadeejah bint Khuwaylid, Faatimah bint Muhammad, Aasiyah bint Mazaahim the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam bint ‘Imraan – may Allaah be pleased with them.”* (Narrated by Ahmad, 2663. Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Saheeh al-Jaami’*, 1135)
- The Prophet ﷺ said: *“Sufficient for you among the women of the world are Maryam the daughter of ‘Imraan. Khadeejah bint Khuwaylid, Faatimah bint Muhammad and Aasiyah the wife of Pharaoh.”* (Narrated and classed as saheeh by al-Tirmidhi, 3878)
- al-Haafiz ibn Hajar said: Among the virtues of Aasiyah the wife of Pharaoh is that she chose death over royal privilege and torment in this world over the luxury in which she was living. And her insight concerning Moosa (peace be upon him) was correct when she said *“A comfort of the eye for me”* [al-Qasas 28:9 – interpretation of the meaning].

Aasiyah’s greatness is in the fact that although she was the wife of one of the most Powerful, arrogant and tyrant rulers of Egypt, she was able to see and accept the truth in message of Prophet Moses.

For her, wealth, beauty or status was not the main criterion of human excellence; she realized that without faith in Allah, a human being has nothing.

Allah had chosen her to provide refuge to Moses when he was an infant. When her maids brought the cradle of Moses from the river, she insisted to Pharaoh that she wanted to adopt that infant as a child: Aasiyah said: *“(Here is) joy of the eye, for me and for thee: slay him not. It may be that he will be use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.” And they perceived not (what they were doing)!”* (28:9)

On Pharaoh's order, she was tortured to death. In this lady, we see the example of supreme sacrifice: By marrying Pharaoh, Asiya bint Muzahim became the Queen of Egypt, she gained everything that she wanted in this worldly life from the materialistic point of view: the best of clothes, food, palaces, jewels, servants and maids, etc. **But she sacrificed all that to be closer to Allah.**

And that is why we see her included by the Prophet in the list of the four women who attained the level of perfection.

The story of the hairdresser of the daughter of Pharaoh is narrated as follows:

It was narrated that Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ said:

"On the night on which I was taken on the Night Journey (Isra'), a beautiful fragrance came to me. I said: O Jibreel, what is this beautiful fragrance? He said: This is the fragrance of the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter and her children. I said: What is their story?

He said: Whilst she was combing the hair of Pharaoh's daughter one day, the iron comb fell from her hand and she said, '**Bismillaah** (in the name of Allaah).' The daughter of Pharaoh said: 'My father?' She said: 'No. My Lord and the Lord of your father is Allaah.'

She said: 'I will tell him about that.' She said: 'Yes.'

So she told him and he summoned her and said: 'O So and so, do you have a Lord other than me?' She said: 'Yes, my Lord and your Lord is Allaah.'

He ordered that a *baqarah* (lit. "cow") made of copper be heated up, then he ordered that she and her children be thrown into it.

She said: 'I have a request to make of you.' He said: 'What is your request?' She said: 'I would like my bones and my children's bones to be gathered together in one cloth and buried.' He said: 'This will be done for you.'

He ordered that her children be thrown into it in front of her, one by one, until they came to the last one who was an infant boy who was still being breastfed. It was as if she wavered because of him, but he said: 'O mother, go ahead, for the punishment of this world is easier to bear than the punishment of the hereafter.' So she went ahead."

Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: Four infants spoke: 'Eesa ibn Maryam (peace be upon him), the companion of Jurayj, the witness of Yoosuf and the son of the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter.

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in *al-Musnad* (1/309), al-Tabaraani (12280), Ibn Hibbaan (2903) and al-Haakim (2/496).

HAJAR A.S.

Her amazing story and how it's relevant to us

Imagine something, please.

Imagine a husband telling his wife to get dressed because they're going out. She obeys and follows. They get in the car. He drives far away until they reach the middle of literally nowhere; a completely deserted area with absolutely nothing around. The husband then asks his wife to step out of the car with their baby. She asks him why. He doesn't respond. She gets out. He takes off! She runs after him with the baby asking why he is doing that. He tells her that he is fulfilling a religious duty; God inspired him to do that!

Let's allow this to sink in for a moment...

This is not a hypothetical scenario, a bed time story or a legend. This is- more or less- what happened to Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings upon him) and his wife Hajar (may Allah be pleased with her).

We all know the story to a certain extent. But maybe we do not stop to contemplate on how this is relevant to us today; how it's relevant to dealing with our own problems and our own hardships.

This story actually responds to some major spiritual, emotional, psychological, and even existential quests of many people.

"Why me? Why is this happening to me? What did I do? Why do believers have to suffer while those who're less religious have everything they want? What's the point? Where is the wisdom? Where is the mercy?"

So many questions go through people's minds when they're facing a difficulty.

But Allah doesn't leave our quests unanswered. He sent us messages, He sent us Messengers and He sent us those who go through what we go through (or even worse) so that we learn, grow, remain steadfast and keep moving gracefully towards Him until we meet Him!

"There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Qur'an a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe." (Qur'an 12:111)

Now let's go back to Hajar's story and slowly think about a few points.

Prophet Ibrahim took Hajar and their baby to a valley that was completely deserted. He was inspired to take them there, then leave. As he was leaving, Hajar went after him and kept asking why he is doing that. When he didn't respond, she got the message! She asked him, "Has Allah commanded you to do so?" He said: "Yes."

She said: **"Then He will not neglect us."** [Al Bukhari]

This is such a heavy statement.... "He will not neglect us"!

This woman doesn't have anywhere to go. Her husband -who is supposed to take care of her- left her. She doesn't have enough food or drink. Her child will soon start crying desperately, beyond what any

mother could bear. She doesn't know what will happen to them or how this will be resolved or if they'll remain in that place indefinitely...

This is the message in this ayah: *"...and despair not of relief from Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people."* (Qur'an 12: 87)

Why is giving up linked to disbelief? Because giving up and losing hope essentially mean we don't truly know or believe in Allah's Names and Attributes. We don't believe that He is The Provider, The Protector, The All-Wise, The Source of Peace, The Giver of Peace, Relief and Victory....

That's an essential point to remember as soon as one is hit with a hardship...Remembering to trust Allah, have good expectations of Him, knowing that His relief will definitely come, even if it seems impossible at the moment.

The second lesson to take heed of is in what happened to Hajar next.

You know, it is easy to utter words of belief, but acting upon them is something else. When Hajar was faced with this seemingly inexplicable hardship, she immediately said *"Allah will not neglect us."*

But did the hardship immediately go away when she said that? Not at all.

She "talked the talk", but she literally had to "walk the walk."

The food and drink she had eventually ran out and her baby started crying desperately. She started taking the means, walking to a mountain hoping to find anything or anyone there. But there was nothing. She could have doubted the relief of Allah then. But she didn't. She walked again to the other mountain seeking help, seeking anything to save her and her child. But there was nothing. She went back again, and again, and again between those two mountains.... And she could have given up completely at any moment, she could have fallen in despair and anger and rebellion... But she didn't! She didn't.

Until...

"She saw an angel at the place of Zamzam, digging the earth with his heel (wing), till water flowed out from that place. She started to make something like of a basin around it, using her hands in this way and began to fill her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out until she had scooped some of it.

"Then she drank (water) and suckled her child. The angel said to her: 'Do not be afraid of being neglected, for this is the site on which the House of Allah will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah will never let neglected His people.' [Al Bukhari]

Remember those words: ***"Do not be afraid of being neglected...Allah will never neglect His people!"***

She faced her difficulty saying ***"Allah will not neglect us"***; she experienced physical struggle, emotional struggle, psychological, spiritual and even existential struggle... But she remained steadfast. The relief eventually came with an angel repeating her same words "Allah will never neglect His people". This is a live embodiment of this hadith: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Allah the Exalted says: 'I am as my slave expects me to be'"* [Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

She had good expectations of Allah. Allah didn't only meet her expectations, but He has given her beyond what she would have imagined or prayed for.

The place that was deserted became the honorable location of the House of Allah Himself. The little water she was looking for, turned out to be a well that brought life to the entire area; a purified, blessed source of water that doesn't run out until the end of time. The moments of faith, patience and hard work she experienced became a fundamental part of a faith followed by billions of people. She initiated the ritual of sa'ee (walking) between Safa and Marwa, without which our Hajj and Umrah won't be complete. A pillar of Islam won't be complete without following this woman. This is not merely in the physical sense of walking between Safa and Marwa, but also in the spiritual sense of trusting Allah in the severest of moments, continuing to pursue Him and have hope in Him despite everything that we may be facing...

It is essential to remember the message: We will continue to trust Allah, pursue Him and remain on His path no matter how difficult/sad/dull/gloomy/impossible our situations may seem... we will continue to seek Allah.

And He will always support His believers! *"Indeed, We will support Our messengers and those who believe during the life of this world and on the Day when the witnesses will stand"* (Qur'an 40: 51)

Those who are patient and follow the path of the Prophets that Allah taught us, they will surely learn the wisdom, get rewarded beyond their expectations and create an incomparably deep bond with their Creator that they will take with them for eternity in Jannah when they're near Him—because that's the place of those who are truly, genuinely and wholeheartedly faithful!

What are few lessons Hajar taught us about dealing with hardships?

1. Good perception of Allah. Good perception of Allah. Good perception of Allah!
2. True faith through words AND action.
3. Patience. It might take time. It might take effort. But it will get resolved...
4. Working hard and taking the means are important acts to keep us going. The actual solution might come from where we never expected, and it might be bigger and better than what we imagined or prayed for.

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." (Qur'an 94: 5–6)