



# A Portrait of Mary, Part 1: Miriam of Nazareth A WebSearch

## The Questions to Explore:

*How do we understand the historical Mary?*

*How does this understanding impact our faith?*

**Overview:** This WebSearch guides you to explore Mary as a Jewish village woman of faith. It takes you to several Internet resources that will provide the basis for your reflection, using a map, an article, and Scripture. With this process, this WebSearch will also offer a few tips on how to examine an Internet resource and tell if it is reliable. It will conclude with suggestions for next steps in a further exploration of the theme.

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**Time Commitment:** This learning experience will not require more than 1 hour.

**Task:** In this learning experience, you will

- Recall and reflect on your own experience of Mary
- Locate a biblical map on the Internet
- Read one brief article in which the author discusses Mary
- Locate Scripture references on the Internet
- Use the article and map to answer key reflection questions
- Decide on the next steps to explore this theme further

## Process:

1. *When learning about a historical person, it is helpful to explore their world, i.e. the place and time in which they lived. Go to [the map of the Land of Israel](#) in 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE*
  - a. **Check the reliability** of this site. (*Tip: scroll to the bottom and click on the author's name to learn about him. Also note at the bottom that this site is an American Theological Library Association Selected Religion Website with a catalog number, providing evidence of its endorsement.*)
  - b. **Click on Nazareth**; read the descriptions and view the pictures. Click on other live links (in red) to view pictures and descriptions of the surrounding areas.
2. **Reflect on Your Experience**
  - a. When you think about Mary as a first century woman, what is prominent in your mind? Please describe it.

- 1) What setting do you picture her in? What is that location like? What does she look like? What is she doing?
- 2) What might she be doing that has to do with practicing her faith?

b. Read Mary's Magnificat in your Bible or in the online Bible in [Luke 1: 46-55](#). *(Tip: There are various translations of the Bible, and different translations are appropriate for different purposes. A version that is translated from the original languages is most reliable for study. The Roman Catholic Church uses the New American translation with Revised New Testament.*

- 1) What stands out for you?
- 2) What phrase(s) especially draws you?
- 3) What does this suggest about Mary?

3. *Read and reflect on the article, "[In Search of the Real Mary](#)" by Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ*

- a. First, check on the reliability of this article.
  - 1) Before you read it, scroll the entire article. Who is the author? What do you know about her? *(Tip: Knowing about the author helps you to know if you can rely on the article.)*
  - 2) You can learn more about the author by looking her up on the web site of [Fordham University](#): *(Tip: A university web site will give reliable, accurate, and current information. Looking at information like educational background and publications helps you to know if the author is a scholar.)*
  - 3) Check to see if the article is current by noting the publication on the article. *(Tip: The web master is giving us a hint on the date. Look at the web address:  
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0501.asp>. This indicates that the article was published in May, 2001 and is reasonably current. Being current is not always a test of accuracy; it must be evaluated in light of the topic being explored. For example, something 4 years old on stem cell research could not be relied on for accuracy because it is such a rapidly changing field of study. For topics on Catholicism, a good rule of thumb to follow is to insure that the item is dated after the Second Vatican Council which ended in 1964. This being said, there are still countless spiritual and theological classics, i.e. John of the Cross, Teresa of*

*Avila, Augustine's Confessions, etc., that are valuable to us and should be viewed in their historical context.)*

**4. Read and reflect on Johnson's article and the map.**

- a. Johnson describes "the Real Mary" as a Jewish Peasant Woman of Faith. From these categories, and from the setting illustrated and described on the map:
  - 1) What is important for you in thinking about Mary's ordinary life? Who is the "the Real Mary" for you?
  
  - 2) What new insight or awareness is emerging for you? How is this important in your life of faith?
  
- b. In describing the Magnificat, Johnson says "This is a great prayer; it is a revolutionary song of salvation." (You may wish to read the Magnificat again: [Luke 1: 46-55.](#))
  - 1) Do you agree with this description? In what way(s) is it revolutionary or not?
  
  - 2) In what way(s) does this prayer invite you to imagine a different future? What might that future look like?
  
  - 3) Does Mary's prayer inspire a prayer from you? Write it here.
  
- c. If you completed the WebSearch Part 1 of "A Portrait of Mary," you read "Mary: A Model for All Ages" by Gloria Hutchinson.
  - 1) How is Hutchinson's view of Mary similar to that of Johnson?
  
  - 2) How is it different?

## ***Review the Tips for Evaluating a Web Resource***

### ***What have you learned about judging an Internet source as reliable?***

- 1. Find out more about the author's background and credentials. If you look beyond what is offered on an article byline or a book jacket, depend upon site where the author is employed.***
- 2. Determine if there are other organizations that endorse the site.***
- 3. Verify the publication date, and assess the currency for the particular topic.***

## **Next Steps**

- ***Complete the C21 Online WebSearch, A Portrait of Mary, Part 2: Model of Faith*** available at [www.bc.edu/c21online](http://www.bc.edu/c21online)
- ***Study Scripture with C21 Online.*** Sign up for a two-week online workshop (with guided discussion) on The Gospel of Luke or The Gospel of Matthew, or learn about the Synoptic Gospels in the 6-week online course Encountering Mark, Matthew and Luke: The Synoptic Gospels. For more information and special group rates, go to [www.bc.edu/c21online](http://www.bc.edu/c21online).
- ***Read more about life in first century Palestine.***
  - Return to [the map site](#) you viewed in question 1: Above the map you will see several links inside a bordered area. These will lead you to excerpts from the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian and member of Jerusalem's priestly aristocracy. This will provide background on the political situation at the time Mary lived. In particular, click on: *Antipater & Sons*, *Herod's Reign*, and *Galilee under Antipas*. Use it to imagine the political environment in which Mary lived her life.
  - Read "[The History of Palestine in New Testament Times.](#)" (Remember: Check on the reliability of this site.)
- ***Read a church document that served as a source for Johnson.*** Johnson refers to *Marialis Cultus* or [Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary](#), an apostolic exhortation from Pope Paul VI in 1975.
  - See especially the Conclusion, paragraph 56, for the reference to Mary as "our sister in faith."
  - See Section Two, *Four Guidelines for Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, paragraphs 29-39, for further details behind Johnson's "Five Features of Good Marian Theology."
- ***Read more from Elizabeth A. Johnson.*** Her book *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum) 2003, expands on the themes of her article.
- ***Read more about Mary's Magnificat.*** See [the article by Daniel Casey](#) in *Scripture from Scratch* from St. Anthony's Messenger Press.
- ***Learn more about at The Mary Page from the [University of Dayton](#).***