

We Believe: Special People of the Church / 2

The Mother of God



The Story of Mary

The story of St. Mary is the story of a person who loved God with all her heart and mind. She was a child whom God loved, and she was chosen to be the mother of God's son, Jesus.

Mary's parents were named Joachim and Anna. They loved God, and took Mary to the Temple School for girls in Jerusalem when Mary was a little girl. She studied there and learned about God, just as we learn about him in Sunday School.

When Mary grew up, she was engaged to Joseph, the carpenter,

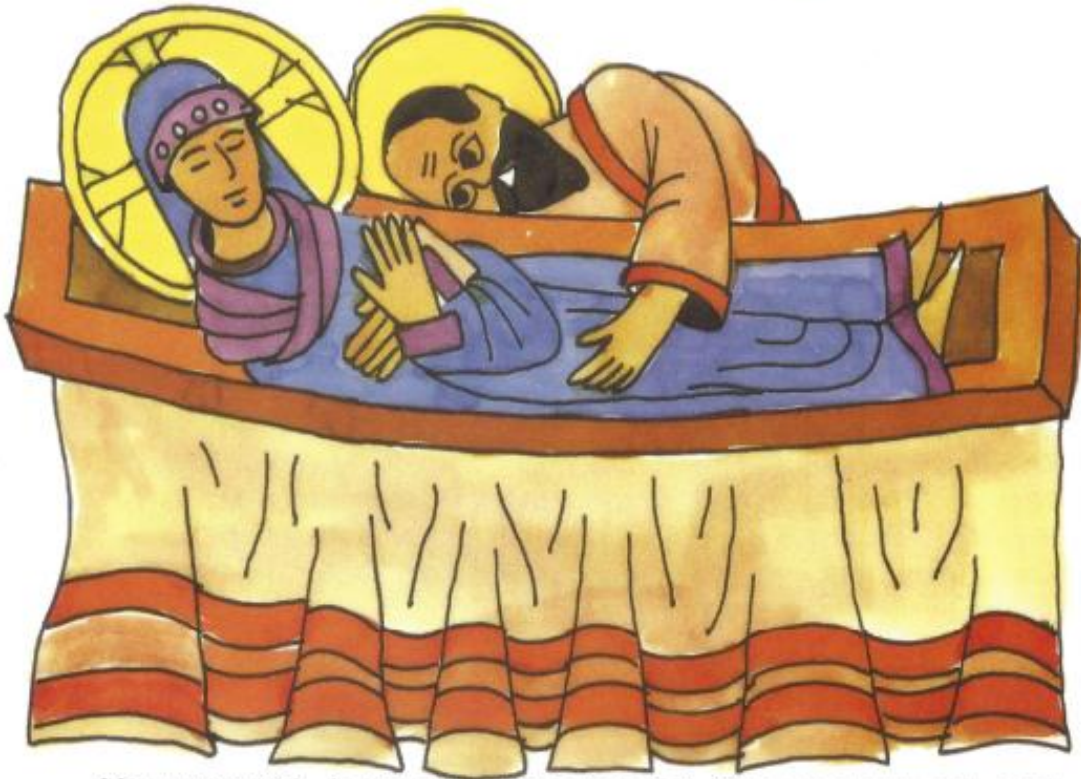
from Nazareth. She loved Joseph very much. One day, as she was praying, God's angel came to tell her that she would be the mother of his son. She was very surprised, because she was not married. The angel told her that she would have this special baby by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel told her that the baby was to be named Jesus, because he would be the Savior. Mary agreed to be Jesus' mother. The angel also came to Joseph and told him the same thing.

Mary's baby was born in Bethlehem. They named him Jesus, just as the angel told them. Later they moved back to Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph made a home for him. Joseph taught Jesus how to be a carpenter. Mary helped him with his homework. She taught him to be loving and respectful of others. She answered his many questions. Like all children, he often must have run to her and whispered, "You are my best friend!"

When Jesus was grown up, Mary stayed with him. Wherever Jesus travelled and taught, his mother was part of the group that went with him. Once, when they went to a wedding together, at Cana, Mary told Jesus to help the bridegroom, because they had run out of wine. Jesus helped by making water turn into wine. This was his first miracle.



Asdvadzadzin
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Mary was with Jesus even when he died. She was very sad, and cried a lot, Jesus told his friend John to take care of his mother. Mary was the happiest when Jesus rose from the dead. She knew that Jesus was God's son. Mary stayed with the disciples after Jesus went to heaven. She helped them, and prayed with them.

About 15 years later, Mary died in Jerusalem. Jesus' friends laid her in a tomb, in a cemetery. Several days later, Bartholomew came back to Jerusalem, he had been away when Mary died. He cried, and asked to be taken to the tomb. When they got to the tomb, they opened it and found that St. Mary's body wasn't there. Then they realized that Jesus had taken his mother to be with him in God's kingdom of heaven.

Mary is the most important of all the saints because she became the mother of God's son, Asdvadzadzin. She obeyed his will, and loved him, even though it was very hard. We ask Mary to pray to her son Jesus for us whenever we need it.

Explain that their lives were especially pleasing to Jesus, and that the people around the saints were able to tell how much they loved Jesus by the way they lived. Explain that the saints' lives let the light of Jesus shine through them. Ask children what other things let light through (i.e., windows, doors, glass, etc.) Inquire if children have ever observed the stained glass windows in your church, and how the light comes through them. (5 min.)

3. Read "Haig's Special Friends" on pages 67-69 of the student text. Ask students some of the tasks performed around church. (10 min.)

4. Then ask children to name some of their special friends in the church. They may name the priest, you the teacher, a parish council member, or individual adults who in one way or another exhibit interest in them, or help them. Explain that our special friends in the church help us in some of the same ways that saints do. Let the children talk about their special friends in the church and the special qualities that each has.

5. Pass out the construction paper, pencils and scissors to children for their "Special Church Friends" activity. Show children how to fold paper in half, short side to short side. Then fold in half again. Show children how to draw a simple stick figure of a person on one panel of the folded paper, top to bottom. Then cut out your drawn figure, so that the paper dolls can be unfolded to stand together. On each different figure, or doll, the name of a "special friend" of each child can be written. Help children draw their figures, and cut them out. As children finish cutting out their dolls, help them write the names of their "special friends" on each doll. Then on reverse side, have children write names of other special friends, the saints, including St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Gregory, and St. John the Baptist. (If children have more than 4 special friends, they may write additional names on back, instead of saints.) (See illustration, p. 31.) (15 min.)

6. Arrange to take children to church to view stained glass windows. (If your church does not have stained glass windows, omit this activity.) Point out to children that light passes through a window and illuminates whatever is on the other side. Ask children what happens when light passes through the stained glass windows. Point out that the figures depicted in the colored panes are illuminated by the sunlight that shines through. Help them see that the figures let the sunlight pass through, just as the real saints let the light of Jesus pass through their lives. Help the children understand that the light of Jesus can pass through all our lives so that we too can reflect his light to others. (10 min.)

7. Return to classroom. Pass out food jars, one to each child. (Have lump of clay placed in bottom of each jar before distributing to children.) Ask children

about light passing through the stained glass windows. Review discussion about how light of Jesus shines through the saints. Try and help each child understand that our lives reflect the light and love of our Lord, if we want them to. Then distribute pieces of colored cellophane, one to each child. Have children wrap the cellophane around the jar, and tape the ends, trimming around bottom and top of jar wherever necessary, so that the whole jar is covered. Then give each child a votive candle to place in bottom of jar. (Make certain candlesticks are firmly set in clay and remain upright in jar.) (15 min.)

8. *At-Home Activity:* Tell children that they are to take their candles home, and tell their families about how the light of Jesus shines through the saints, just as the candlelight will shine through the jar. Children should also find a special place in their homes (perhaps kitchen shelf, or bedroom) where they can place their candle to remind them during the week how the light of Jesus shines through our lives. Children might light their candles at home during the week to remind them of Jesus' light.

9. Clean-up, closing prayer (same as opening prayer).

10. For next week, ask children to bring in pictures of their mothers. (5 min.)

Session 2—The Mother of God

Key Concepts

1. As we have our own mothers, the Church has a mother, St. Mary (Asdvadzadzin).
2. St. Mary loved Jesus as our own parents love us.
3. St. Mary grew up in her second home, the Temple, as we grow in ours, the Armenian Church.

Objectives

Students will

1. Listen to a story about St. Mary and answer questions about it.
2. Make their own storybook of some of the events in St. Mary's life.
3. Frame and decorate a picture of their own mother.

Background for Teacher

First among the saints, St. Mary is honored by the Church with many titles, the most important of which is Asdvadzadzin, or Bearer of God. The Church has carefully defined the position of St. Mary in its life, from earliest times.

All the factual information we have about St. Mary is to be found in the New Testament, and it is from this source that the role of St. Mary in the Church has been developed. She was, like Joseph, of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of King David. She was

related to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Tradition tells us she was the daughter of Joachim and Anna, who offered their only child to God, presenting her to the Temple at a very early age.

She was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she conceived (by the Holy Spirit) the child who would be the Savior of the world. That she gave birth to the Christ-child in the humblest of surroundings is another indication of her own humility and lack of pretension, humility which would serve her well all of her life. She and Joseph raised the child Jesus in Nazareth, teaching him the skills and faith necessary for any child of any time.

Only four times does she appear in the Gospels after the beginning of her Son's ministry. The first of these is at the marriage in Cana, which was the occasion of her Son's first miracle. The next time we see her is at Capernaum, where, with her relatives, she sought an audience with her Son. We find her again at the foot of the Cross, where she agonized with her Son as he died. With almost his last words, Jesus commended his mother to the care of his closest friend and disciple, John. Lastly, in the days following the Ascension, Mary met with the disciples, prayed with them and comforted them as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room.

There is nothing in the Scriptures which tells about Mary's departure from this world. Holy Tradition teaches us that she died about 15 years after our Lord, and after her burial, at which the Apostle Bartholomew was not present, she was laid in a tomb. Bartholomew returned to Jerusalem within a few days, and disconsolate at having been away, asked to be taken to her tomb. When they opened the tomb, St. Mary's body was not there, and the tradition began that her Son had taken her to heaven. By the seventh century the Church began celebrating the birth and death of St. Mary on a regular basis.

St. Mary is pictured on every altar of every Armenian church. We commemorate her in our hymns and prayers, and ask her intercession for us repeatedly, for she is the first of all the saints.

Also, read St. Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-52, John 2:1-12.

Materials Needed

- Old Christmas cards depicting St. Mary and the infant Jesus
- Crayons or markers, glue, pencils, construction paper, or oaktag cut into 9" x 12" pieces
- Picture of each child's mother
- Glitter, paste-on stars, ribbon, sequins, etc., for decoration

Procedure

1. Welcome children enthusiastically. Open with prayer "During the Day" from *Prayers for Armenian Children*, page 25.

2. Review last week's discussion on saints. Try to glean from children one or two characteristics of saints, particularly that they let the light of Jesus shine through their lives. Discuss how we can let the light of Jesus shine through our own lives, by being helpful to others, being obedient, trustful, respectful, etc.

3. Begin lesson by saying, "Today we are going to learn about Jesus' mother, St. Mary or Asdvadzadzin. St. Mary obeyed God's will and became the mother of our Lord. Because she was Jesus' mother, she is also the mother of the Church." Have children open to pages 70-72 in their textbooks and read the story together.

After story is completed, ask:

- What were the names of Mary's parents?
- Where did Mary learn about God?
- What did Joseph do for a living?
- What did the angel tell Mary?
- Who would help Mary have the baby?
- Where was Jesus born?
- Where did Jesus grow up?
- What kinds of things did Mary do for Jesus when he was a boy?
- Who told Jesus to perform his first miracle? What was it?
- When was Mary most sad? When was she most happy?
- What happened when Bartholomew visited the cemetery Mary was in? Where is Mary now?

Try to allow every child to answer a question.

(20 min.)

4. Distribute activity packet pages on Asdvadzadzin, and have children color the events in Mary's life. Show children your completed booklet. After the pictures are colored, give children scissors, and help them cut the page in the middle, along *cut* line (lengthwise). Have children lay out the 2 halves next to each other, and read with them the caption under each picture. After children are familiar with these 5 events, help them to make a book of St. Mary's life. Fold each half along the dotted *fold* lines, dividing each piece into thirds. Then glue ends to each other at *glue* markings, forming a circular piece. Booklet can be strung at two points for hanging as a mobile, or can be folded like a standard booklet. Each child now has his own chronological record of the events in St. Mary's life.

(20 min.)

5. Clean up from previous activity. Discuss with children some of the things their own mothers do for them. Let them offer as many thoughts as they have. Make a list and put it on the blackboard, or display it somewhere in the room. Then say something like, "We all know how special our mothers are to us. We love our mothers because they are so special. St. Mary was special too, both to her son Jesus, and to us in the Church. All of us love our mothers and like

to have pictures of her; in the Church we have a picture of Jesus' mother, St. Mary." Have children take out pictures of their own mothers. Pass out construction paper or oaktag to each child. Let children decorate their mothers' pictures with sequins, or other materials you have brought. Help each child mount his/her picture on the oaktag, leaving room for the child to write underneath at least one special thing his/her mother does. (Have children write, "My mother is special," above the picture and, "she makes cookies for me, she loves me, she takes care of me," etc., below the picture.) Allow children chance to be as artistic as possible. (15 min.)

6. *Homework Assignment:* Have each child bring in an empty egg carton, preferably styrofoam.

7. Clean-up, closing prayer (same as opening prayer), evaluation. (5 min.)

Optional (If time permits): Pass out Christmas card pictures of St. Mary with the infant Jesus. (Have them already separated from the second part of the Christmas card.) Pass out pieces of construction paper to children. Say something like, "We all know that St. Mary is very important to all Christians. We know how important having a picture of our mothers is for each of us, and having a picture of St. Mary is important to the Church. Where do we find a picture of St. Mary in the church?" Children should be able to remember that an icon of Mary decorates the altar. Then have the children paste pictures of St. Mary on the construction paper, and list under the picture some of the things that St. Mary did for her son Jesus. Make list on the board and let children copy from the class list. Compare to the list of things their own mothers do for them, to see that St. Mary loved her Son as their mothers love them. After cards are written, hang them around classroom.

To Extend the Lesson: Read the story of St. Mary, Obedient Servant in *Saints for Children from the Tradition of the Armenian Church*, and discuss questions.

Session 3—The Twelve Apostles

Key Concepts

1. Just as we have special friends, so Jesus had his special friends, the apostles.
2. As our special friends help us do things, Jesus' special friends helped him by establishing churches.

Objectives

Students will

1. Cut paper dolls and write the names of the apostles on them.
2. Decorate plastic dime-store eggs with faces and put an attribute of each apostle on each egg.

3. Read "Marty's Building" and answer questions about it.

Background for Teacher

The twelve apostles were our Lord's closest associates and friends. They were the ones he chose, hand-picked, to carry on his work, and the ones he entrusted to carry his message to the four corners of the earth. Jesus trained them, lived with them, encouraged them, ate with them, laughed with them, cried with them, and ultimately they were the ones who turned the world upside down with his message of salvation for all. The twelve were not educated men; four were simple fishermen, one was a tax-collector, the others were no more important. Yet it was this group of believers who were transformed from a hapless band of "groupies" into a powerful, spirit-filled group of men who healed the sick, raised the dead, and called on all to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are heirs to the apostles. We pride ourselves on being an "apostolic" church, one that can trace its origins to the apostles. Our faith is the common thread which binds us to other ancient churches, and finds its expression in our worship. It is important for children to recognize the significance the apostles have for the Church, and particularly the importance Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew hold for the Armenian Church. The apostles are another testimony to the fact that the most unimportant, seemingly insignificant people can become vehicles for the Holy Spirit, and be used by him for the glory of the Kingdom.

Also read book, *Friends of Jesus for Children* (Regina Press), available at Diocesan Bookstore.

Materials Needed

- Plastic colored pull-apart eggs, available in Woolworth's or K-Mart, 12 for each child
- Waterproof writing/markings pens
- Construction paper, 3 pieces for each child (approximately 9" x 12")
- Scissors
- An egg carton for each student
- One set of apostles' characteristics for each child (student activity packet)

Procedure

1. Welcome children enthusiastically. Open with "During the Day" prayer, *Prayers for Armenian Children*, page 25. Be sure to say an encouraging word to each child as he/she arrives; e.g., "What a pretty dress you have, Mary" or "You look so nice in blue, John." Follow up on those children who are absent from week to week. Encourage them (or their parents) with a phone call, card, perhaps even send their lesson material through the mail. Make each