

## **Elizabeth and Mary**

**Memory Verse:** *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble* (1 Pet. 5:5b NIV).

### **Background Helps:**

We come at last to female characters in the *New Testament*, beginning with the two women who participated so prominently at the beginning of this new era: Elizabeth, mother of the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, and Mary, mother of the Messiah himself. Mary, as the mother of our Lord, has become the most revered woman in the history of the human race. She figured significantly in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (see Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Matt. 1:22-23, and Galatians 4:4), miraculously conceived the Lord Jesus apart from a human father (Matt. 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38), and became the human mother of the Son of God.

There are a number of unbiblical teachings about Mary that have gained currency in some circles: (1) The Immaculate Conception, that is, Mary was conceived without any original sin or guilt. But the Bible teaches that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), except Jesus (Heb. 4:15), and Mary herself acknowledged her need of God as her Savior (Luke 1:47). (2) The Assumption of Mary, that is, Mary was raised from the dead and “assumed” body and soul into heaven in a manner similar to Christ’s ascension. This event is nowhere mentioned in Scripture. (3) The perpetual virginity of Mary, that is, Mary remained a virgin after the birth of our Lord. This teaching is based on the belief that celibacy is a more holy state than marriage. But see Matthew 1:25; 13:55-56; and Luke 2:7. (4) Mary as Coredemptrice and Mediatrix, that is, Mary, as the mother of the Savior, has a share in the redemption of the world, and she now intercedes with her Son on our behalf. But the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). These unbiblical teachings have tended to blunt the impact of Mary’s very real example of godly womanhood to all the members of the female race.

### **Lesson Helps:**

Although you may want to consider doing a lesson on Elizabeth (especially in a class with older women) or even a lesson combining a study of the two women, Elizabeth and Mary, most teachers will probably want to devote their class to a study of Mary, the most “blessed among women” (Luke 1:42).

A possible lesson aim: My aim is to teach my students about the humility of Mary, so that they will choose to lead a life of humility. This lesson follows the “key characteristic” plan explained on the handout, “Handling a Character Study Lesson.”

Study incidents in the life of Mary that reveal her humility:

- The Annunciation (Lk. 1:26-38). Notice her humble submission to the will of God in verse 38.
- The “Magnificat” (Lk. 1:46-56). Notice how Mary magnifies the Lord for exalting a humble servant like herself with the privilege of bearing the Messiah.

- The birth of Christ (Lk. 2:1-20). Notice Mary's humble reflection on these extraordinary events (v. 19). She does not brag about her Son or about her special privilege as his mother.
- The boy Jesus in the temple (Lk. 2:41-51). Again, Mary's humble reflection on the extraordinary nature of her Son is noted (v. 51).
- Mary's humility is seen in her acceptance of her unique role as the human mother of God's Son, even though this role caused her personal hardship: Luke 2:34-35; 8:19-21; 11:27-28; John 2:1-12; 19:25-27.
- Our last look at Mary is in Acts 1:12-14, where she simply takes her place among the other disciples of Jesus with no apparent position of importance. She is humble to the end.

How can we demonstrate this same trait of humility in our own lives? Like Mary we can submit to God's will, magnify the Lord in prayer, quietly reflect on our God-given privileges rather than boast about them, accept our God-given trials without resistance, and fill our role in the body of Christ without seeking a place of prominence.

Mary's life and character are an excellent example of the memory verse, 1 Peter 5:5b. God's grace was lavished on Mary in response to her humility. God exalts the humble (as Luke 1:46-55 makes plain), and Mary is an outstanding exhibit of this truth. She was privileged to be the human mother of God's own Son, the Savior of the world.

**Assignment:**

-  Read about women in the ministry of Christ (Prominent Women of the Bible).
-  Memorize Psalm 116:1