

The Story of Jesus from the *Sura* of Mary

(from the Qur'an: Sura 19:16-40)

16. Relate in the book the story of Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the east.¹
17. She placed a screen to shield herself from them, then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects.
18. She said, "I seek refuge from thee to God the Most Gracious. Do not come near if you fear God."
19. He said, "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, to announce to thee the gift of a holy son."
20. She said, "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?"
21. He said, "So it will be: Thy Lord said, 'That is easy for me,' and we wish to appoint him as a sign unto men and a Mercy from Us. It is a matter so decreed."
22. So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place.²
23. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. She cried in her anguish, "Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!"
24. But a voice cried to her from beneath the palm tree. "Grieve not! For thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee.
25. "And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm tree: It will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee.
26. "So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, "I have vowed a fast to God the most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being."³
27. At length she brought the babe to her people, carrying him in her arms. They said, "Oh, Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought!
28. "Oh sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!"⁴
29. But she pointed to the babe. They said, "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?"⁵
30. He [the child] said, "I am indeed a servant of God; He hath given me Revelation and made me a prophet
31. "And he hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live.
32. "He hath made me kind to my mother and no overbearing or miserable;

33. “So peace is upon me they day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life again!”
34. Such was Jesus the son of Mary: it is a statement of truth, about which they vainly dispute.
35. It is not befitting to the majesty of God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it “Be,” and it is.
36. Verily God is my Lord and your Lord, Him therefore serve ye, this is a way that is straight.
37. But the sects differ among themselves: and woe to the Unbelievers because of the coming Judgement of a momentous day!
38. How plainly they will see and hear, the Day that they appear before Us! But the unjust today are in error manifest!
39. But warn them of the Day of Distress when the matter will be determined, for behold, they are negligent and they do not believe!
40. It is We who will inherit the earth, and all beings thereon, to Us will they all be returned.

¹ Islamic tradition maintains that the revelation came to Mary while she was in a state of ritual purity, in solitary prayer and devotion.

² Tradition has it that the annunciation and conception took place in Nazareth, while the birth took place in Bethlehem, some 71 miles distant. Islamic tradition has it that the birth itself took place beneath a palm tree, after which the infant was lain in a manger in a nearby stable.

³ Again, Mary is in a state of ritual purity, withdrawing from conversation with other people on the strength of a vow to God. This is not a literal fast, as the tree will provide food for her.

⁴ The townspeople are making fun of Mary here, reminding her of her lineage (coming from a priestly family, she would be referred to as a “sister of Aaron”) and suggesting that she has disgraced her family by having a child when she is not married. Islamic tradition maintains that she was not married, for if she had been, she would not have been a virgin.

⁵ Mary is rescued by her own child, who miraculously begins to speak and corrects the mistaken assumptions of the crowd.