

Lee Mount Baptist Church Bible Study

What was the name of Jesus' mother?

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Matthew calls Jesus' mother 'Mary,' or *Μαρια* in Greek, but Luke calls her *Μαριαμ*, or Maryam in English, the Aramaic form of the much older Hebrew name Miriam, which is also the name he uses for Martha's sister. Luke calls Mary of Magdala, the other Mary who went to the tomb and the mother of Mark *Μαρια*.

John never mentions Jesus' mother by name, simply saying 'his mother.' He refers on one occasion to 'Mary (*Μαρια*) and Martha' but in the very next sentence and elsewhere throughout his gospel he calls Martha's sister *Μαριαμ*. He calls Mary of Magdala and Mary, the wife of Clopas, *Μαρια*.

So it seems most likely that Jesus' mother and Martha's sister were both commonly known as *Μαριαμ* whereas the other Marys were known as *Μαρια* because

1. Luke is a Greek speaker who does not use any of the Aramaic expressions which the other gospel writers do;
2. he says to Theophilus that he has researched his account carefully and so the fact that he uses the Aramaic *Μαριαμ* suggests that this is what the people he interviewed used as the name for Jesus' mother and Martha's sister.

It is even possible that he interviewed Jesus' mother during the two years in Palestine when he was waiting for Paul to be sent to Rome; she would have been in her eighties at the time but she had borne at least seven children to adulthood — a quite astonishing feat for a woman in her day; so she must have been reasonably healthy. He would in any case have interviewed her second son, James, who was 'head' of the church in Jerusalem.

He probably interviewed at least one of the sisters because he records an incident about which only the two sisters could have known and which none of the other gospel writers record.

Though completely unrelated to the Aramaic, *Maria* is the feminine form of the Roman name, *Marius*, which would have been familiar to anyone living in the Roman Empire and would be written *Μαρια* in Greek. So it looks as if this form had been adopted as an alternative to the Aramaic *Μαριαμ* or the Hebrew *Miriam* by a lot of people living in Palestine. There is only one other record of a person in the bible being called *Miriam*, namely, Aaron's sister.

The fact that John suggests that the name most commonly used for Martha's sister is *Μαριαμ* suggests that Luke was being accurate in his use of names and the fact that John on one occasion uses *Μαρια* as an alternative to *Μαριαμ* suggests that Matthew was simply using the common alternative to *Μαριαμ* as Mary's name even if it may not have been the version of the name by which most people knew her.