

## Why is Mary Considered Ever-Virgin?

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Two dogmas concerning the Mother of God are bound up, in closest fashion, with the dogma of God the Word becoming man. They are: a) Her Ever-virginity, and b) Her name of Theotokos. They proceed immediately from the dogma of the unity of the Hypostasis of the Lord from the moment of His Incarnation—the Divine Hypostasis.

The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ from a Virgin is testified to directly and deliberately by two Evangelists, Matthew and Luke. This dogma was entered into the Symbol of Faith of the First Ecumenical Council, where we read: Who for the sake of us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. The Ever-virginity of the Mother of God is testified by Her own words, handed down in the Gospel, where she expressed awareness of the immeasurable majesty and height of Her chosenness: My soul doth magnify the Lord... For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed... For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His Name (Luke 1:46-49).

The Most Holy Virgin preserved in her memory and in her heart both the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel and the inspired words of righteous Elizabeth when she was visited by Mary: And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to Me? (Luke 1:43); both the prophecy of the righteous Symeon on meeting the Infant Jesus in the Temple, and the prophecy of the righteous Anna on the same day (Luke 2:25-38). In connection with the account of the shepherds of Bethlehem concerning the words of the angels to them, and of the singing of the angels, the Evangelist adds: But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19). The same Evangelist, having told of the conversation of the Divine Mother with the twelve-year-old Jesus after their visit to Jerusalem on the Feast of Pascha, ends his account with the words: But His mother kept all these sayings in her heart (Luke 2:51). The Evangelists speak also of the understanding of the majesty of her service in the world by the righteous Joseph, her espoused husband, whose actions were many times guided by an angel. When the heretics and simple blasphemers refuse to acknowledge the Ever-virginity of the Mother of God on the grounds that the Evangelists mention the "brothers and sisters of Jesus," they are refuted by the following facts from the Gospel:

- a) *In the Gospels there are named four "brothers" (James, Joses, Simon and Jude), and there are also mentioned the "sisters" of Jesus—no fewer than three, as is evident in the words: and His sisters, are they not ALL with us? (Matt. 13:56).*

On the other hand,

- b) *in the account of the journey to Jerusalem of the twelve-year-old boy Jesus, where there is mention of the "kinsfolk and acquaintances" (Luke 2:44) in the midst of whom they were seeking Jesus, and where it is likewise mentioned that Mary and Joseph every year journeyed from faraway Galilee to Jerusalem, no reason is given to think that there were present other younger children with Mary: it was thus that the first twelve years of the Lord's earthly life proceeded.*

*c) When, about twenty years after the above-mentioned journey, Mary stood at the cross of the Lord, she was alone, and she was entrusted by her Divine Son to His disciple John; and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home (John 19:27). Evidently, as the ancient Christians also understood it, the Evangelists speak either of "half" brothers and sisters or of cousins.*

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The seedless birth of Christ can and could be denied only by those who deny the Gospel, whereas the Church of Christ from of old confesses Christ incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary." But the birth of God from the Ever-Virgin was a stumbling stone for those who wished to call themselves Christians but did not wish to humble themselves in mind and be zealous for purity of life. The pure life of Mary was a reproach for those who were impure also in their thoughts. So as to show themselves Christians, they did not dare to deny that Christ was born of a Virgin, but they began to affirm that Mary remained a virgin only until she brought forth her first-born son, Jesus (Matt. 1:25).

"After the birth of Jesus," said the false teacher Helvidius in the 4th century, and likewise many others before and after him, "Mary entered into conjugal life with Joseph and had from him children, who are called in the Gospels the brothers and sisters of Christ." But the word "until" does not signify that Mary remained a virgin only until a certain time. The word "until" and words similar to it often signify eternity. In the Sacred Scripture it is said of Christ: In His days shall shine forth righteousness and an abundance of peace, until the moon be taken away (Ps. 71:7), but this does not mean that when there shall no longer be a moon at the end of the world, God's righteousness shall no longer be; precisely then, rather, will it triumph. And what does it mean when it says: For He must reign, until He hath put all enemies under His feet? (I Cor. 15:25). Is the Lord then to reign only for the time until His enemies shall be under His feet?! And David, in the fourth Psalm of the Ascents says: As the eyes of the handmaid look unto the hands of her mistress, so do our eyes look unto the Lord our God, until He take pity on us (Ps. 122:2). Thus, the Prophet will have his eyes toward the Lord until he obtains mercy, but having obtained it he will direct them to the earth? (Blessed Jerome, "On the Ever-Virginity of Blessed Mary.") The Saviour in the Gospel says to the Apostles (Matt. 28:20): Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Thus, after the end of the world the Lord will step away from His disciples, and then, when they shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel upon twelve thrones, they will not have the promised communion with the Lord? (Blessed Jerome, *op. cit.*)

It is likewise incorrect to think that the brothers and sisters of Christ were the children of His Most Holy Mother. The names of "brother" and "sister" have several distinct meanings. Signifying a certain kinship between people or their spiritual closeness, these words are used sometimes in a broader, and sometimes in a narrower sense. In any case, people are called brothers or sisters if they have a common father and mother, or only a common father or mother; or even if they have different fathers and mothers, if their parents later (having become widowed) have entered into marriage (stepbrothers); or if their parents are bound by close degrees of kinship.

In the Gospel it can nowhere be seen that those who are called there the brothers of Jesus were or were considered the children of His Mother. On the contrary, it was known that James and others were the sons of Joseph, the Betrothed of Mary, who was a widower with children from his first wife. (St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, Panarion, 78.) Likewise, the sister of His Mother, Mary the wife of Cleopas, who stood with Her at the Cross of the Lord (John 19:25), also had children, who in view of such close kinship with full right could also be called brothers of the Lord. That the so-called brothers and sisters of the Lord were not the children of His Mother is clearly evident from the fact that the Lord entrusted His Mother before His death to His beloved disciple John. Why should He do this if She had other children besides Him? They themselves would have taken care of Her. The sons of Joseph, the supposed father of Jesus, did not consider themselves obliged to take care of one they regarded as their stepmother, or at least did not have for Her such love as blood children have for parents, and such as the adopted John had for Her.

Thus, a careful study of Sacred Scripture reveals with complete clarity the insubstantiality of the objections against the Ever-Virginity of Mary and puts to shame those who teach differently.

*\*From St. John (Maxomovitch), The Orthodox Veneration of Mary, The Birthgiver of God (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), pp. 31-33.*