

and to a male child who would rule all the nations (Rev 12:5). The early Church Fathers, including St Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), in his *“Dialogue with Trypho”* written at Ephesus, where the Virgin Mary actually resided with St John, according to tradition, refer to Mary as the New Eve.

The theme of the *“Woman”* is taken up by Jesus at Cana (Jn 7:4) where, at her *“Intercession”*, Jesus’ public ministry is *“hastened”*. Again, at the foot of the Cross, when it is *“consummated”* (finished) (Jn 19:30), Jesus commends his mother (*“Woman”*) to John who represents all the *“beloved Disciples”* down the ages.

The Mother of God

In 429 AD the Nestorian heretics refused to acknowledge Mary as the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, become man (incarnate) for us. They were prepared to call Mary the *“Mother of the human nature”* of Christ. But since Mary gave birth to a Person, in whom the two natures – of God and of man - are inseparable, not just a *“nature”*, Mary may rightly be called *“THEOTOKOS”*. She is the God-bearer, or *“Mother of God”*, although that is not to say she is the Mother of the Godhead.

The title *“THEOTOKOS”* in fact protects believers from falling into the heresy of Nestorianism. In Lk 1:43, Elizabeth prophetically addresses Mary by this title: *“Why is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”*

The Assumption

The belief in the bodily Assumption of Mary has been *“of faith”* since the earliest centuries. As she received redemption as the first fruits of Christ’s work, so she also received bodily resurrection and heavenly glory (Rev 12:1). Documentary evidence of belief in Mary’s Assumption goes back to the 4th century. By the 6th century the doctrine and the feast day were already universally established in

the Church of the West and the East. The teaching was never disputed during the period of the Fathers, nor did any church or any city claim to have Mary’s relics. That is remarkable, for in the early Church, cities and churches vied with one another for the bones of apostles and martyrs.

Psalm 132:8 states: *“Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness”*. Mary forever is our Queen Mother: *“The Queen stands at your right-hand arrayed in gold”* (Ps 45:9). Just as surely does the ultimate Davidic King, Jesus Christ, reign with his Queen Mother at his right hand – just as Solomon reigned beside Bathsheba. So it was fitting, said St John of Damascus, after calling Christ the New Solomon, that the mother should take up her abode in the Royal City of her Son. What honors God has conferred on Mary, he who commands us to honor our parents and did this most perfectly in Jesus.

Just as the Word of God in stone was preserved in an ark of gold and carved cherubim, so to one of Mary’s titles is Ark of the (New) Covenant, and she was appropriately adorned with grace to bear the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ.

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The Blessed Virgin Mary

The Catholic understanding of the Communion of Saints (Rom 12:5) is that all believers, living and dead, are united with Christ by a bond of love and of intercessory prayer. Since Mary, the mother of Jesus is the first of the redeemed; Catholics venerate her in a special way and call on her powerful intercession in prayer. *Our God is a God of the living, not of the dead (Mk 12:26-27) and we are surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses (Heb 12:1) of which Mary is the foremost.*

In Lk 1:48, Mary, the mother of Jesus, after being greeted by her cousin, Elizabeth, as *“the mother of my lord”* (Lk 1:43) prophesies in her song of praise (the Magnificat): *“from now on all generations will call me blessed”*. Catholics, as well as Eastern Orthodox Christians, have fulfilled that prophecy to the letter throughout the Christian centuries.

Always a Virgin

Non-Catholic Christians do not believe, as Catholics do, that Mary was a perpetual virgin, quoting Mt 1:25, stating that *“Joseph did not ‘know’ Mary until she had borne a son (Jesus)”*. However, the Greek and Semitic usage of the word *“until”* does not imply anything about what happened after the time indicated. Matthew is simply emphasizing that Mary was indeed a virgin at the time Jesus was born. Consider this: *“Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no children until the day of her death”* (2 Sam 6:23). Are we to assume that she had children after her death? Of the raven that Noah released from the ark, we are told that the bird *“went forth and did not return till the waters were dried up upon the earth”* (Gen 8:7). In fact we know that the raven never returned at all. Examples could be multiplied.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she asked: *“How can this be, since I know not man?”* (Lk 1:34). This has always been taken to mean that

Mary had taken a vow of lifelong virginity, even in marriage, which Joseph respected. Mary's question did not indicate that she did not know how children were conceived. If she intended having children and did not intend to maintain a vow of virginity, her question makes no sense at all. Recent discoveries, such as at Qumran in 1947 show that vows of virginity and celibacy were a known practice. Jesus and Paul were both celibates, as was John the Baptist.

The fact that Jesus is described as Mary's "firstborn" in Luke 2:7 does not imply that she had other children afterwards. Firstborn was a technical term as in "firstborn" lamb which does not imply a second-born. The firstborn child was the child that "opened the womb" (Ex 13:2), Nb 3:12). The first male child of a marriage was termed a "firstborn". A funerary inscription discovered in Egypt refers to a woman who died during the birth of her "firstborn". Are we to assume she had other children after her death?

Regarding the "brethren" of the Lord, the term had a wider meaning in the Bible and included cousins and even kinsmen. Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ, had a specific word meaning "cousin". The same is true of some African languages which also lack a word to mean "cousin". Lot is described as Abraham's brother in Gen 14:14, but Lot was the son of Aran, Abraham's deceased brother (Gen 11:26-28). Thus Lot was really Abraham's nephew. Jacob is called the brother of his uncle, Laban (Gen 29:15). Examples are numerous. The words could even refer to people apparently unrelated such as a friend (2 Sam 1:26, 1 Kings 9:13) or just an ally (Amos 1:9)

The "Brethren" of Jesus

So just who were the "brethren" of the Lord? Of the four brethren named in the gospels, consider James. Similar reasoning can be used for the other three. We know that James' mother was "Mary".

Of the women standing beneath the cross "among them were Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Mt 27:56). "*Among them were Mary Magdalen, and Mary, the mother of James the less and of Joseph, and Salome*" (Mk 15:40). Then look at Jn 19:25: "*And meanwhile his (Jesus') mother, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen had taken their stand beside the cross of Jesus*". We see that the mother of James and Joseph must be the wife of Cleophas. Elsewhere though, James (Mt 10:3) is described as the son of Alphaeus, which would imply that Mary, whoever she was, was the wife of Cleophas ("*Clopas*" in Greek) and Alphaeus. The solution may be that the two men are one and the same person.

James then, must be the son of that other Mary and Cleophas. Hegessipus, a 2nd century historian relates that Cleophas was the brother of Joseph, Jesus' foster father. James then is Joseph's nephew and a cousin of Jesus. The identification of these "*brethren of the Lord*", as demonstrated from the Bible, shows that they were NOT the Virgin Mary's children.

In the incident in the Temple, with Jesus aged twelve, he is mentioned as evidently the ONLY son of Mary (Lk 2:41-51); there is no hint of other children in the family. The people of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, refer to Jesus as THE son of Mary, not "a" son of Mary (Mk 6:3). The Greek expression implies he is her only son. In fact, others in the Bible are never referred to as Mary's sons, not even when they are called Jesus' brethren. If they were sons, this would be strange usage. We also find Jesus' brethren saying that Galilee was no place for him. (Jn 7:3-4); another time the brethren said "*he must be mad*". (Mk 3:21). This kind of behavior would make sense for ancient Jews only if they were older than Jesus, but that alone eliminates them as "*blood brothers*", since Jesus was the firstborn.

Consider the scene at the foot of the Cross. Jesus entrusted his mother to the apostle, John (Jn 19:26:27). If James, Joseph, Simon and Jude were indeed Jesus' blood brothers, it is hard to imagine why Jesus would have disregarded family ties and Jewish law to make this provision for his mother.

Hail Full of Grace

In Luke 1:28 the angel Gabriel greets Mary as "*Hail, you who are full of grace*" The original Greek word with which Mary is addressed, and which is used nowhere else in all Scripture is "*KECHARITOMENE*". In Greek the expression used for Christ in Jn 1:14 as "*full of grace*" is "*pleres charitos*" The same is true of Stephen in Acts 6:8 – not Kecharitomene. The full meaning of this greeting to Mary, in English is "*Hail, you who are full of God's gracious gift of his life in all time, undiminished*".

Mary's song: "*He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is his name*", acknowledging in humility, this greeting, alludes clearly to what Catholics call the Immaculate Conception (Lk 1:49). The eastern orthodox Christians call the same gift: "*Panaghia*" – "*the All-Holy one*".

This is Mary's gift of being exempt from all stain of original sin from conception, through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ and by a singular grace of Almighty God, in order for Mary to be a fit dwelling-place (Ark of the New Covenant) for the Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ.

The New Eve

In the "*protoevangelium*" (Gen 3:15), God promises to "put enmity between Satan and the woman, and between Satan's *seed* and Mary's *seed* (Jesus and all believers). Nowhere else in the Bible is reference made to a woman's seed, always a man's The images of Revelation also point to a "*new Eve*" (together with the new "*Adam*"-Christ),