

## THE VIRGIN MARY IS AN EVER-VIRGIN

On March 17, 2015, Ben Witherington III, professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, during an interview with CNN made the following statement: "The New Testament says nothing about Mary being a perpetual virgin, it says she virginally conceived Jesus, and it certainly implies that she went on to have more children after that, and his brothers and sisters are in fact his brothers and sisters."

We are saddened to witness that this professor and New Testament "theologian" had nothing more edifying to speak of, such as the divinity of Christ, or the Resurrection of Christ, or the brilliance of the Christian Faith, in order to strengthen the faith of his listeners. Rather, he chose to mar, belittle, and speak evil of the most-holy and pure Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, subsequently, to cast doubt into the faith of them who are weak in the faith. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that such "discoveries" are publicized and disseminated by the media almost always during the period of Great Lent, just as most of the Christian world is preparing to celebrate Pascha.

The aforementioned Protestant belief expressed by professor Witherington is a misconception that appeared much earlier than the inception of Protestantism in 16th century. Certain groups of Christians as early as the Apostolic era held this same erroneous understanding, which was categorically refuted by the Orthodox Church.

Professor Witherington, just as his predecessors, errs **"not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29)**. And to use the words of the Apostle Paul, **"they have a form of godliness but deny its power" (2 Tim. 3:5)**.

Thus, with God's help, we will demonstrate that they who deny the Ever-Virginity of the Virgin Mary are indeed unaware of what they are saying and ignorant—either unknowingly or willfully—of both the Holy Scriptures and Christian sacred tradition. We will do so by first examining the arguments used to claim that the Virgin Mary gave birth to other children and demonstrating why they are unfounded, unsupported, and invalid, and in following, we will set forth the evidence that establishes the Virgin Mary as a perpetual virgin, even after the incarnation of the Word and Son of God.

## THE SO-CALLED “BROTHERS OF CHRIST”

The heretical Eunomians and the Antidikomarianites,<sup>1</sup> who denied the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos, and in turn their modern-day successors, use the following passages from the Gospels which refer to the “brothers of Christ”:

“While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him” (Mt. 12:46). “Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Jude, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” (Mk. 6:3). “After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples” (Jn. 2:12). “His brothers therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea’” (Jn. 7:3). From these verses, however, in no way can it be concluded that these brothers were children of the Most-Holy Virgin Mary.

In the Holy Scriptures, oftentimes relatives are also referred to as brothers. For example, Abraham and Lot are called brothers, even though Lot was Abraham’s nephew. “So Abram took Sarai his wife **and Lot his brother’s son** and all their possessions” (Gen. 12:5). “So Abraham said to Lot, ‘Let there be no strife between you and me ... **for we are brethren**’” (Gen. 13:8). “Now when Abraham heard **his brother Lot** was taken captive ... and also brought back **his brother Lot** and his goods” (Gen. 14:14-16). Similarly, Jacob and Laban are also termed brothers, even though Jacob was Laban’s nephew. “So Isaac sent Jacob ... to Laban ... **the brother of Rebecca**, the mother of Jacob and Esau” (Gen. 28:5). “Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the wells’ mouth, and watered the flock of Laban, **his mother’s brother**” (Gen. 29:10). “Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘**Because you are my brother**, should you therefore serve me for nothing?’” (Gen. 29:15).

They who are referred to as the brothers of Jesus should be understood with the above meaning: they were His close relatives, and not siblings of the same mother. The so-called “brothers of the Lord” were children of Joseph from his first wife. Joseph had a wife, from the tribe of Judah, who gave birth to six children for him: four boys and two girls, just as the Gospels of St. Mark and St. John describe. His first son was James. After him he had another son named Joses. Next was Simon, and then Jude. In following he also had two daughters named Mary and Salomi. His first son James, who was also known as “the righteous one,” became the first bishop of Jerusalem, and he was also referred to as “the brother of the Lord,” just as

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<sup>1</sup> These were heresies that surfaced during the fourth century A.D.

the Apostle Paul attests: "I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19). However, he is called the brother of the Lord not because they were biological brothers but because they lived together under the same roof and were thus brothers by grace. Mary, having been betrothed to Joseph, was viewed by everyone as his wife, even though she had no physical contact with him. Due to these circumstances and on account of their close familial association with each other, the sons of Joseph and the Savior acquired the status of brothers.

It is something similar to the case of Joseph. Even though Joseph was not directly involved with the birth and the incarnation of the Savior, he nevertheless received the status of His father by way of accommodation. St. Luke the Evangelist states the following concerning the Savior: "**Being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph**" (Lk. 3:23). The Virgin Mary herself also said to Him, "**Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously**" (Lk. 2:48). Nonetheless, who can call Joseph the biological father of the Lord, since he was not at all responsible for His birth, and especially since we know that the incarnation took place without the seed of a man? Just as the Gospels state that Joseph is Jesus' "father" without actually being his biological father but his stepfather, in the same manner even though the Scriptures make reference to Jesus' brothers, they were not actually His biological brothers but His stepbrothers.

St. Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus (†403 A.D.) makes the following wonderful observation: "Whenever I would hear James being called the brother of the Lord, I would marvel and wonder why this was necessary? Now, I understand why the Holy Scriptures spoke like this ahead of time. It spoke thus so that when we hear, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you" (Lk. 8:20), we may realize that it is referring to James and the other sons of Joseph, not to some other sons of Mary who did not exist."<sup>2</sup>

Christ's words to His mother and to St. John the Theologian also attest that the Virgin Mary did not give birth to other children. For, as it is written in the Gospel according to St. John, while the Savior was hanging on the Cross, "When He saw the disciple whom He loved," He said to him concerning Mary, "Behold your mother." Similarly, He said to His mother, "Behold your son!" (Jn. 19:26-27). If the Virgin Mary had other children, and if she had a husband, then what was the reason for Christ to entrust Mary to John and

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<sup>2</sup> *Patrologia Migne*, Vol. 42, p. 712

simultaneously hand over John to Mary? Why did He not rather entrust her to the Apostle Peter? Why did He not choose to entrust her to Andrew, Matthew, or Bartholomew? It is obvious that He picked John on account of his virginity. He entrusted the Ever-Virgin into the hands of a virgin. **“Behold your mother!”** She was not John’s biological mother. But He spoke thus in order to establish her as the Mother and Leader of virginity. The Gospel states that **“from that hour, that disciple took her to his own home” (Jn. 19: 27)**. If she had a spouse, if she had a household, if she had children, then she would have returned to her own family and not proceeded to live with a stranger.

The truth of the aforementioned is further supported by the very writings of Jude and James. Even though Jude is referred to by the Evangelists as the brother of Jesus, in his Epistle he addresses himself not as the brother of Jesus, but as the brother of James, and as a servant of Jesus Christ: **“Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James” (Jude 1:1)**. Similarly, James the brother of God in his General Epistle calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ: **“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jam. 1:1)**.

Finally, according to the testimony of St. Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus, it is not possible for James to have been the son of Mary because James was older than Christ. For, he documents that James passed away approximately twenty-five years after the Ascension of the Lord, when he was ninety-six years old.

### THE WORD “FIRSTBORN”

The King James Version of the New Testament states: “And he knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son” (Mt. 1:25). When reading the above verse, Protestants incorrectly presume that since the Virgin Mary had a firstborn son, then she must have also had other children in following.

Careful examination of the Greek original text, however, reveals that this verse is recorded in a slightly different manner. The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (by George Ricker Berry), which preserves the original Greek word order in its entirety, reads as follows: “And [he] knew not her until she brought forth her son, the firstborn.”

Using the original Greek text, St. Epiphanius comments on this verse with the following very insightful observation: “The Evangelist does not say that the Virgin Mary gave birth to **her firstborn**, but rather Joseph ‘did not know her until she brought forth her son, **the firstborn.**’ St. Matthew did not say ‘**her**’ firstborn, but rather ‘**the**’ firstborn. Thus, he uses the phrase ‘**her son,**’ in order to signify that Christ was born from her according to the flesh. However, when he employs the adjective ‘firstborn,’ he has it standing alone—‘**the firstborn,**’—independent of the possessive pronoun ‘her.’ This is Whom the Apostle Paul refers to as “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15), not because He is united with creation but because He was begotten before the creation.”

But even in the instance where the word “firstborn” is taken to mean the Virgin Mary’s firstborn son, even then in no way can it be concluded that the Mother of God subsequently gave birth to other children. For, as St. Basil the Great (†330 AD) notes: “The ‘firstborn’ is not always thus called in comparison with others born afterwards, but ‘firstborn’ is called He who first opens the womb.” And the Blessed Theophylact (†1108 AD) agrees: “The Evangelist rightly calls the Lord the Firstborn Son of the Virgin, even though she never gave birth to a second. ‘Firstborn’ means the first to be born, even if there is no second child.”

In Holy Scriptures, the word “first” is also used to indicate “only.” The prophet Isaiah states: “Thus says God, the King of Israel ... the God of hosts: ‘**I am the first** and I am hereafter; beside Me there is no God’” (Is. 44:6). It is obvious that in this verse, the word “first” is used in place of “only.”

We know from the Holy Scriptures that the Word and Son of God is the only begotten Son of God: “For God so loved the world that He gave His **only begotten** Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). “The **only begotten** Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father” (Jn. 1:18).

Nonetheless, in the New Testament Jesus Christ is also called **God’s firstborn Son**: “‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee;’ and once more: ‘I will be to Him for a Father, and He shall be to Me for a Son.’ And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’” (Heb. 1:6).

Just as Jesus is the only begotten Son of God the Father even though He is also called the firstborn Son of God, similarly He is the only begotten Son of His Ever-Virgin Mother Mary even though He is referred to as the firstborn Son of the Virgin.

Additionally, the Apostle Paul calls Jesus Christ:

i) **Firstborn among many brethren:** “To be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). “Firstborn among many brethren” is used not because He is the firstborn amongst Mary’s supposed other children, but amongst them who became worthy of receiving adoption of sonship through Him when He became her son according to the flesh.

ii) **Firstborn from the dead:** “And He is the head of the body, the Church, Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead” (Rev. 1:5). “Firstborn amongst the dead” is used because He is the cause of the resurrection of the dead.

iii) **Firstborn over all creation:** “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth” (Col. 1:15). “Firstborn over all creation” is used because He brought creation from non-being into being.

From all the above, it becomes evident that the word “firstborn” in Scripture, whenever it is employed in reference to our Savior Jesus Christ, expresses the meaning of and is synonymous with “Only-Begotten.”

### THE WORD “UNTIL”

Certain people proceed to hypothesize that the Virgin Mary gave birth to other children after the Divine birth-giving, drawing their conclusion from the following passage of the Gospel: “And he took to him his wife, and **was not knowing her until** she brought forth her Son, the firstborn” (Mt. 1:24-25). It seems, however, that they who draw this conclusion are unaware that the word “until” in Scripture denote meanings very different than their common usage. Whenever the phrase **ἕως οὗ** (which is translated as “until”) is used in Scripture, it conveys a continuous and perpetual state. It is customary for Scripture to often use “until” instead of “forever” or “eternally.” Here are a few examples that illustrate the truth of these words:

“The raven returned not **until** the earth was dried up” (Gen. 8:7). Obviously, the raven did not return to the ark even after the flood had ended.

“Sit on My right [says God the Father to His Son] **until** I should place Thine enemies as a footstool of Thy feet’ (Mt. 23:44; Ps. 109:1). Does this mean that there will come a time when the Son will no longer be at the right hand of God the Father?

“I Am **until** you shall grow old” (Isa. 46:4). Does this mean that God will cease to exist when people grow old? Certainly not.

“In His days shall righteousness spring up, and abundance of peace **until** the moon be removed” (Ps. 71:7). Does this mean that God’s righteousness and peace will no longer be present when the moon is removed?

“And behold, I am with you [the Savior says to His disciples] all the days **until** the completion of the age” (Mt. 28:20). Does this mean that Christ will only be with the faithful in this present age, and that after the Second Coming He will no longer be with them?

“And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child **until** the day of her death” (2 Kings 6:23). With Protestant reasoning, we would have to believe that Michal gave birth to a child after she died. However, she had no child before or after her death.

In the parable of the ten thousand talents, Christ states “His master became angry and delivered him to the torturers **until** he should pay all that he owed” (Mt. 18:26). Here the expression “until he pays off his debt” is understood as forever, since the master is condemning the servant to eternal damnation.

The above verse has another meaning as well. According to St. Epiphanius, when the Evangelist writes “and he **did not know her**” (Mt. 1:25), he is actually referring to the glory that the Virgin Mary had received. That is, St. Matthew does not intend to say that Joseph did not know her physically, but that he did not know and was unaware of the eminence and honor that God had given her.

Behold the words of the holy father: “And he did not know her.’ Truly, how was he to know that a woman would receive such grace? Or how could he have known that a young girl would be honored with such glory? He knew she was a woman in physical form and a female by nature. He knew that her mother was Anna and her father was Joachim. Furthermore, he knew that she was related to Elisabeth, and that she was from the house and lineage of David. However, he did not know that anyone upon the earth—especially a woman—would ever be honored with such glory. And so, he did not know her (i.e. who she truly was) until he saw the miracle. He did not come to know the miracle until he saw whom she gave birth to. When she gave birth [to Christ], then he came to know the honor God had given her, and he realized that it was she who had heard, “Rejoice, thou who are full of grace. The Lord is with thee; blessed are you among women” (Lk. 1:28). ... And so, Joseph came to know Mary, not through any physical contact. On the contrary, he came to

know her by honoring her whom God had honored. He did not know that she had received such glory until he saw the Lord born from a woman."

St. Isidoros Pilousiotis similarly states, "the verse 'he did not know her' may be understood as follows: 'He did not know how she conceived until she gave birth,' and he witnessed the miracles that took place."

## **PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE VIRGIN MARY**

The Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos had been announced centuries beforehand by the prophets. The Prophet Isaiah, who prophesied the Virgin-Birth of the Savior, says the following concerning the Virgin Mary: "**Behold, the Virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Emmanuel**" (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:22). He does not say "behold, a virgin," or "behold, a certain virgin," but "behold **the** virgin."<sup>3</sup> That is, **the one-and-only** virgin, who would conceive while she was a virgin, and subsequently remain a virgin during and after childbearing.

According to St. Nektarios, the above prophecy demonstrates that this Virgin was pre-ordained from ages past and chosen from amongst all the generations to become the Mother of God, Whom she would carry, nurse, and nourish during the years of His infancy and childhood. And since the Virgin was chosen to serve as the Mother of Emmanuel, she would remain His Virgin Mother not only during the time she carried Him, but forever.

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus makes the following accurate observation: "Does not the very name [i.e. virgin] convince you? Who, throughout all the generations, ever mentioned the name 'Mary,' and when asked 'which Mary?' did not immediately reply 'the Virgin'? Adjectives used to describe people clearly testify and serve as the evidence of their virtue. Indeed, all the righteous men received a title that was appropriately suited for each one of them. Abraham was named 'the friend of God' (Jam. 2:23), and he will never cease being known as such. Jacob was given the name "Israel" (Gen. 32:28), and it has never been modified after that. The Apostles were called "sons of

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament (translated from the original Hebrew by the seventy-two scholars) contains the definite article ἡ and says, "behold **the** virgin." The Greek original text of the Gospel according to St. Matthew also records the verse as "behold **the** virgin." Unfortunately, many English versions (including the King James Version) have the verse translated with an indefinite article: "behold **a** virgin." The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (by George Ricker Berry), which provides a literal translation of the original Greek words and phrases, reads "behold **the** virgin."



thunder" (Mk. 3:17), and this title has not been abolished. To Saint Mary, the name 'Virgin' was assigned, and it has and will remain unchanged. For this holy [lady] remained immaculate ... ." Thus, Holy Scriptures ascribed the title "Virgin" to the Mother of God because she would remain a virgin throughout her entire life.

The Prophet Ezekiel mystically foretells both the future incarnation and birth of Emmanuel from the Virgin, as well as the Ever-Virginity of the Mother of the Lord. The external gate of the Holies facing East (which God showed him during a vision) that was to remain closed, represented the Virgin. Behold the words of the prophet: **"Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary that looks eastward; and it was shut. And the Lord said to me, 'This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it; for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it, and it shall remain shut. For the prince, He shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord'" (Ezk. 44:1-3).**

According to all the Holy Fathers of the first centuries, who upheld apostolic tradition, this vision informs us that the Lord God of Israel would enter into this world as a "Son of Man." Furthermore, it advises us that only He would eat bread (i.e., He would incarnate) in this gate (i.e., the Virgin), that only He would arrive through it, and thereafter it would remain closed: **"for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it, and it will remain shut."**

St. Ambrose (†397 AD), for instance, interprets this vision of the prophet Ezekiel with the following words: "What is this gate, if not Mary? Does it not remain closed because she continues to be a Virgin? Therefore, Mary is the gate through which Christ entered into this world, when He came forth through a Virgin birth without loosening the locks of her virginity."

Behold how the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos was pre-ordained by the Divine Will, just as the Virgin was fore-chosen from amongst every generation by Divine providence, in order for her to become and remain the Mother of Emmanuel.

## TYPOLOGIES OF THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Just as many wondrous events in the Old Testament, such as the bronze serpent (Jn. 3:14), Jonah and the whale (Mt. 12:39), prefigured the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, similarly many wondrous events in the Old Testament foreshadowed the Holy Virgin, who by Divine Will carried, gave birth, and remained as she was before giving birth.

St. Nektarios, drawing from the writings of the holy Fathers and the hymnology of the Church, enumerates the following typologies of the Virgin Mary:

1. **The burning bush** that was not consumed, but remained unharmed after the divine fire had descended, was a fore-type of the Virgin (Ex. 3:1-4). Just as the bush was on fire but was not consumed by the flames, similarly the Virgin gave birth and remained a virgin thereafter.

2. **The sea** that remained untrodden after Israel had crossed it, foretold the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos. Just as the sea parted and allowed the people of Israel to cross through it, and thereafter the waters covered the bottom of the sea and no one ever walked through it again, similarly Christ was born through the Virgin, without anyone else ever coming forth from the Virgin again.

3. **The rock** that gushed forth living water was an image of the Virgin, from whom Christ the eternal water emerged.

4. **The fiery column** that lit the way for Israel and **the bright cloud** through which the Lord God was made manifest foretold of the Virgin.

5. **The Tabernacle of the Testimony** showed forth the Virgin (Hb. 9:1-5).

6. **The Ark of the Covenant** signified the Virgin (Hb. 9:1-5).

7. **The Tablets containing the Ten Commandments** represented the Virgin. Just as the word of God was etched upon the tablets, the Word of God the Father entered the Virgin.

8. **The budding staff** of Aaron foreshadowed the Virgin (Num. 17:1-10). Just as the dry rod of Aaron blossomed without the presence of any moisture, similarly the Virgin brought forth Christ without the seed of a man.

9. **The urn** holding the heavenly manna foretold of the Virgin (Ex. 16:33), who as a rational and living vessel contained within her womb the heavenly and living manna, Christ.

10. **The ladder of Jacob**, by which God descended, foreshadowed the Virgin (Gen. 28:12-13), through whom God descended and came into the world.

11. **The dewy fleece** was a typology of the Virgin (Jdg. 6:38). For Christ descended to the earth quietly and rested upon the Virgin like a raindrop falling on a wool fleece (Ps. 71:6).

12. **The light cloud** upon which the Lord sat (Isa. 19:1). For Christ sat within the arms of the Virgin Mary during their flight to Egypt, when the idols of Egypt collapsed.

13. **The very Temple in Jerusalem** foreshadowed the Logical Temple of the King-of-all.

14. **The mystical tongs** seen by Isaiah, which took the fiery coal from the altar of sacrifices, proved to be the Virgin, who conceived in her womb the Divine fiery coal, Christ (Isa. 6:6).

15. **The Uncut Mountain** whence the cornerstone Christ was hewn without human hands was a fore type of the Virgin (Dan. 2:45). Just as this rock was cut from the mountain without any human hand touching the mountain, similarly, Christ came forth from the Virgin without any human hand touching the Virgin.

St. Nektarios further comments thus: Could the Virgin—who had already been pre-ordained to become the Mother of God, who had been chosen from amongst all generations, who had been foreshadowed by such mystical and symbolic images, and who had been dedicated to God from a young age—have become the spouse of Joseph? No! Never! The Virgin was a virgin before giving birth, a virgin while giving birth, and she remained a virgin after giving birth. That which is holy can never be defiled or become common. That which has been consecrated to God belongs to God alone. This is why they who steal sacred objects are deemed sacrilegious, impious, and worthy of condemnation; for they unlawfully take what has been dedicated to God.

St. Epiphanius also makes a similar observation: Joseph was a righteous man. Would it be possible for him in his old age to have disrespected and acted irreverently toward the Mother of the Lord? Not at all! The Gospel says that "he was a righteous man," and that because He feared God "he wanted to send her away secretly" (Mt. 1:19). Joseph's son James is notable as well. He became the first bishop of Jerusalem, and he was called "the righteous one" by all the people. On account of his constant kneeling in prayer before the Lord the skin on his knees had become similar to that of a camel; furthermore, he lived with virginity throughout his entire life. Do you see how Joseph's entire household was exceptionally virtuous? If the sons of Joseph had chosen to live with chastity, how much more so would the elderly and honorable Joseph choose to preserve the Virgin pure, and to honor the

vessel wherein the salvation of man (i.e., Christ) came to reside? Joseph witnessed extraordinary and wondrous things. Angels appeared during the birth of the Son of God, praising and hymning from Heaven above, "Glory to God in the Highest, and peace upon the earth and goodwill to men" (Lk. 1:35). The shepherds come to the cave where Christ was born and announced these things to Joseph. How would it be possible for him who was informed of such remarkable signs and miracles to disrespect the holy and sacred body in which God Himself dwelled? How could he possibly dare to couple with the Virgin Mary, who possessed such great and unparalleled holiness?

### **LOGICAL REASONING IN SUPPORT OF THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE VIRGIN MARY**

St. Luke the Evangelist relates the following concerning the Ever-Virginity of the Most Holy Mother of the Lord: "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent forth by God to a city of Galilee, the name of which was Nazareth, to a virgin who was espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the name of the virgin was Mariam. And the angel entered and said to her, 'Rejoice, thou who hast been shown grace, the Lord is with thee; **blessed art thou among women.**' And having seen him, she was greatly troubled at his word, and was considering what type of salutation this may be. And the angel said to her, 'Cease being afraid, Mariam; for **thou didst find grace with God.** And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. This One shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His father, David. And He shall reign over the house of Jacob to the ages, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.' But Mariam said to the angel, '**How shall this be, since I do not know a man?**' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; wherefore also the One who is born of thee shall be called Son of God...' And Mariam said, 'Behold, the slave of the Lord; may it be to me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her." (Luke 1:26-38).

St. Nektarios states that from the above narrative the following is evident:

i) Mary, who had been betrothed to Joseph, remained a virgin while living in his house.

ii) She wonders how the words of the angel will be fulfilled because she neither knew **nor intended to know** a man. If at some point in the future she were to enter into marital union with Joseph, it would have been quite natural (since she was engaged at the time) to suppose that the angel was speaking to her concerning the child who would be conceived through marriage. However, she made no such assumption because she had been dedicated to God.

iii) The angel's proclamation, that she found grace before God, signifies that she had been chosen to become and remain the Mother of God—this is why she is blessed among women.

How is it now possible for one to suppose that God's consecrated Virgin—who found grace before God in order to become the Mother of the Logos, who was “blessed among women,” and who became the Logical Temple of the Savior—would abandon her godly glory and her Divine Son in order to become the mother of sons of men, and subsequently divide the love and care owed to her Divine Child with other children? They who postulate such things are ignorant of what it means to have a heart consumed by the love of God—especially a heart belonging to the maiden Mother of God!

Since the Holy Virgin was pre-ordained to become the Mother of Emmanuel, it was necessary for her to remain the Mother of Emmanuel forever. It was necessary for her to dedicate her entire soul and heart to her high calling. It was necessary for this to be her only uninterrupted focus and concern; her only care and ceaseless preoccupation. Truly! Every other care and worry, every additional concern, meditation, and preoccupation distracting her from her lofty destiny and her holy mission would have rendered her void of the most-important and foremost virtue of conscientious devotion to her preeminent obligation, and incapable of perfectly fulfilling it with self denial.

The Holy Virgin, as Mother of Emmanuel, could not take on the responsibility of becoming the mother of other children for the following reasons:

i) Her maternal affection toward the Divine Child, her piety toward Him, her devotion and worship to Him, and the Divine fire that engulfed and enflamed her heart, which filled it with perfect virtue and which left no room for any other earthly comforts and desires, in no way permitted her to take on any further obligations toward other children.

ii) Her elevated mind, which only contemplated the Divine Child, only delighted in Him, and only concerned itself with Him, made it impossible for it to turn to other cares and duties.

iii) The Godhead is jealous, and He demands absolute love: love with all of one's soul, all of one's strength, all of one's heart, and all of one's mind (Mt. 22:37). If Jesus demanded such love from His followers, He demanded it much more from His mother. Since everything the Savior demands of us is a gift given by Him (requiring only the disposition of them who have received [the gift]), it follows that the Mother of the Lord, who was made worthy of such grace and gifts, loved her Son with all of her mind, was immovably affixed to her Son with all her soul, and no power was capable of distracting her from the love of her Divine Child.

iv) The conception by the Holy Spirit and the one-and-only birth of the Son of God rendered the Virgin Mary not only the Most-Holy Mother of God but also the Holy Temple and dwelling place of God. And once things have been dedicated to God and sanctified by Him, they cannot become defiled or common, but forever remain sacred and holy to the Lord, only belonging to Him. Therefore, it was not possible for the Theotokos to bear other children.

Indeed! If virgins who were wounded with the love of the Bridegroom Christ declined marriage with kings—in order to dedicate themselves to God—, what can we say about our Most-Holy Lady, the Theotokos? St. Thekla abandoned her bridegroom to live in virginity. St. Catherine, St. Irene Chrysovalantou, St. Paraskevi, and many other women, in following, did the same. St. John the Baptist, the greatest amongst the prophets, lived a life of virginity. St. John the Evangelist remained a virgin throughout his entire life; moreover, many of the Apostles left their wives and families to follow Christ, and thereafter they lived a life of virginity.

The Apostle Philip had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy. St. Epiphanius notes that they become worthy of prophesying because they lived in virginity (Acts 11:9). According to the scriptures, which speak of the Archangel Gabriel's appearance to the Virgin Mary, and his announcement to her that she would give birth to the Son of God and Savior of the world, the Virgin Mary is also a prophetess: **“So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son, and the Lord said to me, ‘Call his name Quickly Despoil, Swiftly Plunder.’ For before the child shall know how to call for his father and mother, he shall take the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria” (Isa. 8:3-4 Orthodox Study Bible)**. Thus, she also lived a life of virginity.

Is it possible for the Mother of God, who had dedicated herself to serving the Lord from a young age, to have abandoned her calling and proceeded to get married and have other children? Certainly not! In such an

instance, she would not be the most blessed amongst women, but she would have been inferior to many other women who devoted their entire life to Christ with virginity. However, this is not the case.

The Holy Scriptures inform us that the Mother of God preserved her godly glory until the end. In the Psalms the Virgin Mary is referred to as a queen who stands to the right of the Lord: **“At Thy right hand stood the queen, arrayed in a vesture of inwoven gold, adorned in varied colors” (Ps. 44:10)**. The scriptures state that she will be loved by the King, and they prophetically confirm the glory she would receive: **“And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty, for He Himself is thy Lord ... All the glory of the daughter of the King is within, with gold-fringed garments is she arrayed, adorned in varied colors” (Ps. 44:10-12)**. Furthermore, they reveal that virgins will follow after her: **“The virgins that follow after her shall be brought unto the King, those near her shall be brought unto Thee” (Ps. 44:13)**. Indeed, virgins have followed behind her, because she is the chief and leader of the virgins. And in the book of Revelation, she is referred to in the following marvelous manner: **“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars ... And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (Rev. 12:1-5)**.

**HISTORICAL TESTIMONY SUPPORTING**  
**THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE VIRGIN MARY**  
**—by St. Nektarios, Bishop of Pentapolis—**

They who deny the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos truly refute the Holy Spirit, because they refute the truth itself, which the Church (both through God-bearing Fathers of various times and regions, as well as the Ecumenical Synods) proclaimed and validated as holy and Apostolic tradition—observed always, everywhere, and by all pious Orthodox Christians.

The dogma regarding the Ever-Virginity of the Most-Holy Theotokos is founded upon an unshakable base of Christian antiquity, and is confessed by the most ancient fathers of the Church.

Origen (†245 AD), an ancient writer of the Church, says: “This virgin gave birth to God and became a mother, but she did not lose her virginity.”

St. Ignatius the God-bearer (†108 AD), an Apostolic Father, who was a disciple of St. John the Theologian and the founder of the Church of Antioch, in his Epistle to the Ephesians calls the Theotokos Mary “Virgin.” And he adds the following: “The Prince of this World, that is, the Devil, was unaware of three things: the virginity of Mary, her birth-giving, and the death of the Lord...” Therefore the Theotokos gave birth in a supernatural manner, and she remained a Virgin after giving birth, just as before. Our God-bearing Father calls this birthgiving a mystery, “which took place in stillness.”

At the beginning of the second century, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, responding to them who waged war against the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos, such as Theodotion, Aquila, and others, proclaims absolutely that the Theotokos Mary is a Virgin: “As the human race fell into bondage and death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by means of obedience.” And again: “that which the virgin Eve bound by means of disbelief, this the Virgin Mary loosed by means of faith.” He furthermore adds: “For just as the former [Eve] was by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His Word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain God, being obedient to His word... if the former did disobey God, so the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become patroness of the virgin Eve.”

During the middle of the fourth century, the Blessed Augustine taught the following: “Mary proved to be a typology of the Holy Church. Just as she remained a virgin after giving birth to the Son, similarly, throughout time she gives birth to her members, yet her virginity is not compromised.” And in his homily “Concerning Virginity,” he declares the following: “The virginity of Mary is much more valuable and graceful, since it was consecrated to God by the Virgin before her conception of Christ. This is evident from her response to the Angel who announced to her the good news of her conception: ‘How shall this be, since I know not a man?’ Certainly the Virgin would not have spoken in this manner if she had not perpetually vowed to God to remain a virgin. But, as this was contrary to the Judaic customs, she was betrothed to a righteous man, who was obligated not only to respect her, but, furthermore, to make others respect the fact that she had been dedicated to God.”

The holy hieromartyr Peter Archbishop of Alexandria (†311 AD) confesses: “Our Lord and God Jesus Christ toward the end of the ages was



born according to the flesh from our holy and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin.” (PG 18, 517B).

Similarly, speaking of the Virgin Panagia, St. Athanasios the Great (†373 AD) says that Christ “received a true human body from the Ever-Virgin Mary” (PG 26, 296B). And when commenting on the 11<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 84, “they met mercy and truth; they kissed righteousness and peace,” he declares, “it is clearly proclaiming the truth that came forth from the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin; for He is the Truth, even though He was born from a woman” (PG 27, 373A).

Didymos (†398 AD) the ecclesiastical writer of Alexandria states, “He Who shone forth before the beginning of time from the ineffable Light in later times was born from the Ever-Virgin out of compassion in an inexpressible manner” (PG 38, 404C).

St. Basil the Great (†379 AD), the Revealer of Heaven, does not only proclaim the Theotokos to be a Virgin, but an Ever-Virgin. In his homily *On the Birth of Christ*, he states, “The Theotokos **never ceased being a virgin.**” Furthermore, he loudly proclaims that it is not even possible for Christ-loving people to tolerate hearing otherwise: “I believe that by not accepting even to hear that the Theotokos did not remain a virgin, lovers of Christ present a sufficient testimony [of her Ever-Virginity].”

Additionally, the golden-mouthed St. John Chrysostom (†407 AD), in his homily *On the Annunciation*, addresses the Virgin thus: “You found a bridegroom who guarded your virginity.” Elsewhere, he calls the Theotokos “Holy Lady and Ever-Virgin.” And again, he names her: “Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.”

St. Epiphanius (†403 AD) also heralds the following: “Who has ever said ‘Mary’ without adding ‘the Virgin,’ when asked [which Mary]?” He also declares that she is “the holy Ever-Virgin” who “was not physically united with anyone, neither prior nor after the birthgiving of the Savior” (PG 42, 736B & 737B).

So also, St. Jerome (†420 AD), during the peak of his ministry around the middle of the fourth century, wrote the following against the heretical Pelagius: “Only Christ opened the gates of the Virgin Womb, which afterwards remained closed.”

St. Cyril of Alexandria (†444 AD) calls the Virgin: “Heifer who never experienced the yoke.”

St. John of Damascus (†749 AD), the advocate and champion of Orthodox dogma, states, “Just as the Lord was conceived and preserved her who had conceived Him a virgin, similarly having been born He preserved her virginity unharmed; for He was the only one to pass through her and thereafter preserved her shut” (PG 94, 1161 AB).

Furthermore, Gregentios (†552 AD) (in his discussion with a Jew) names Mary “**Eternal Servant** and Theotokos.” Also, Caesarios (†542 AD), in *The Dialogue* answers the twentieth question in this manner: “The God-manhood of the Word originates from the **eternal servant** Mary.” Thus, the Virgin Mary remained eternally dedicated with virginity to the Lord.

Finally, through Her most ancient hymns, the Church praises the Most-Holy Virgin Mary with the following words: Theotokos, Birth-Giver of God, Ever-Virgin, Mother of God, Virgin Mother, Unwed Mother, Unwed Bride, Mother and Virgin, Bearer of Light, Logical Temple, a Bride without Espousal, Treasure of Purity, Land Untrodden, and Heavenly Tabernacle. There are hundreds of adjectives of honor for the Theotokos, expressive of our Holy Church’s viewpoint and understanding concerning her Ever-Virginity. Many of these are also found in the writings of ancient Church Fathers. The hymnography of our Holy Church expresses the steadfast conscience of the entire Church, which reigned within Her from the first centuries, and which has been preserved up until our days. And when the Universal Church speaks, every mortal tongue must remain silent. Because when the Church speaks, the Holy Spirit of God is speaking. Therefore, he who disagrees with and challenges the Church opposes the Holy Spirit.

The very first Ecumenical Synod, convening in Nicaea in 325 AD, clearly proclaims the Ever-Virginity of the Most-Holy Theotokos in the Symbol of Faith itself, stating that the incarnation of Christ and His Divine manifestation as a human occurred “by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” This formal proclamation of the virginity of the Theotokos by an Ecumenical Synod expresses the spirit of the whole Church since Apostolic times. This dogma was validated by subsequent ecumenical, provincial and local synods as an inviolable doctrine of the Faith. The Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681 AD) especially speaks at length concerning the virginity and Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos (in Act 21), and professes the Theotokos as Virgin before giving birth, while giving birth, and after giving birth. In its first canon, this

same Synod similarly declares the Theotokos an Ever-Virgin—confessing one Christ, the Son of God incarnate, and that the Ever-Virgin, who gave birth to Him without seed, is primarily and truly Theotokos. The Council in Trullo (692 AD) calls the Virgin “Immaculate Virgin Mother.”

During every service in the Orthodox Church, at the end of each series of petitions, the deacon or priest voices the following: “Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and **ever virgin Mary**, with all the saints, let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.” And during every Divine Liturgy, we sing: “Only begotten Son and Word of God, although immortal You humbled Yourself for our salvation, taking flesh from the holy Theotokos and **ever virgin Mary**.”

All of these testimonies of the Holy Fathers and the Ecumenical Synods, who preserved unchanged the holy apostolic tradition, are sufficient to convince and inform all them who believe with a pure heart in the truth of the Church.

This truth and authority of the Ecumenical Synods is even accepted by both the Latin church and the Anglican church. Distinguished men of the Anglican church accept the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos based on the authority [of these Ecumenical Synods].

Thus, the religious writer Robert Nelson declares, “The exquisite and incomparable privilege of this mother [the Virgin Mary], the exceptional honor and worship she always gave to her Son, the reverence for the Holy Spirit that overshadowed her, the filial goodness and piety of Joseph, to whom she was given as a bride, [all these things] informed the Church of God throughout the ages to believe that **she [the Theotokos] still remains thereafter in the same virginity**. Therefore, we also are obligated to confess her as the Virgin Mary.”<sup>4</sup>

And John Pearson states, “When [every Christian] saith, ‘I believe in Jesus Christ Who was born of the Virgin Mary...he is conceived to intend thus much: ‘I assent unto this as a most certain and infallible truth, that there was a certain woman, known by the name of Mary, espoused unto Joseph of Nazareth, who before and after her espousals was a pure and unspotted Virgin, and being and continuing in the same virginity, did, by the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost, conceive within her womb the only begotten Son

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson’s Festival, London, 1732, pg. 172

of God; and, after the natural time of other women, brought him forth as her first-born Son, **continuing still a most pure and immaculate Virgin.**"<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, according to the Holy Synods, the holy and God-bearing Fathers, the Apostolic Ecclesiastical Tradition in general, and even the authentic testimonies of authoritative men from other denominations, the dogma of our Holy Orthodox Church regarding the Ever-Virginity of the Most Pure and Immaculate Mother of our Lord remains firm and unshakeable.

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<sup>5</sup> John Pearson, *Exposition of the Creed*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1864, p. 324.