

# The Virginity of the Theotokos

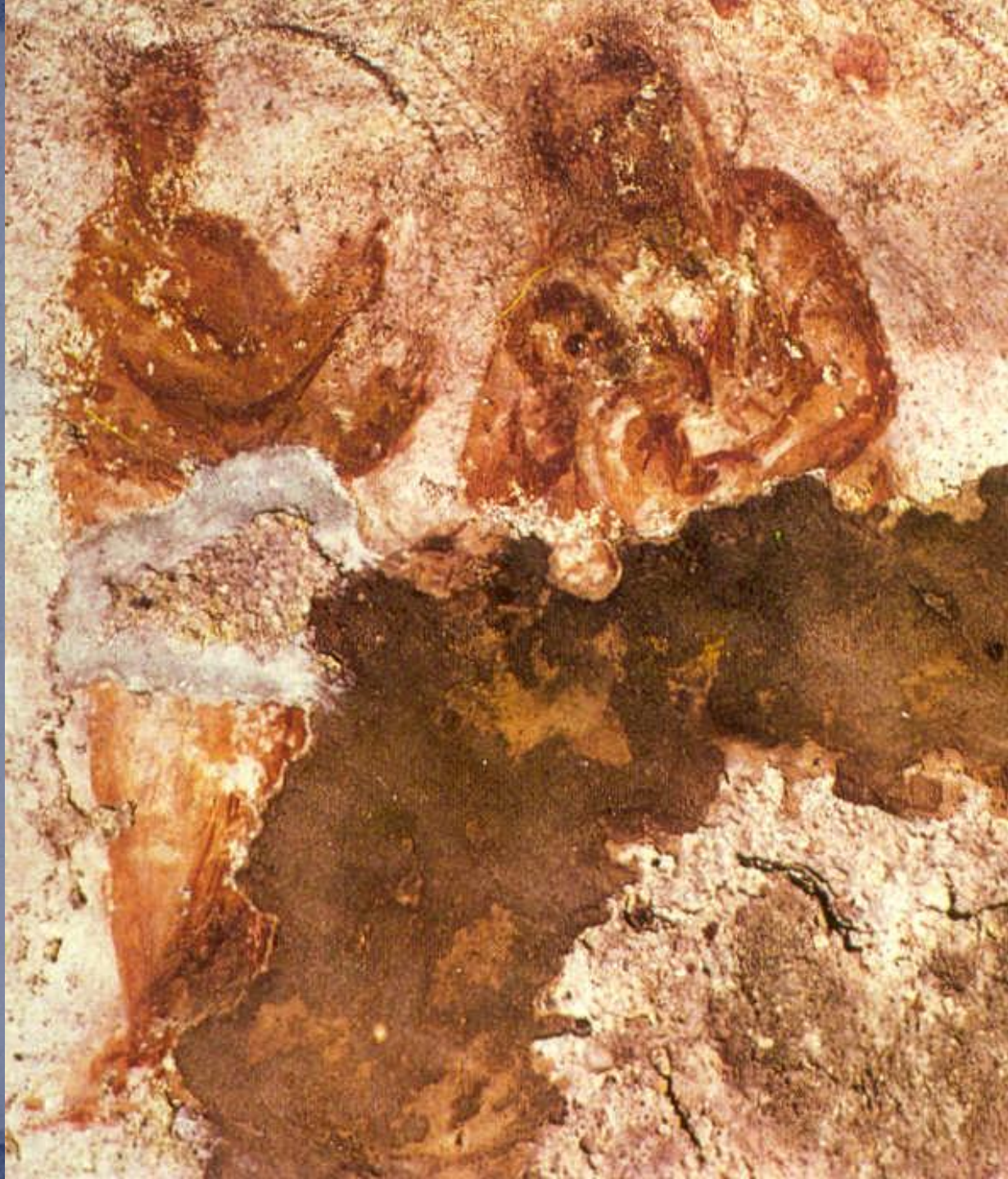
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## And her Perpetual Virginity

Under your mercy we take refuge, O Mother of God. Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger, [O you] alone pure and alone blessed.

--Sub Tuum Praesidium (~250AD)







Teta, the Theologian, defender of “al  
3azra2”



**6 Different Things Your Egyptian  
Grandmother will Do Around Your  
Home (If they live with you)**

# We believe in One Lord Jesus Christ

- ...who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became man.
- This is the earliest title of St. Mary. She was called “the Virgin”, not just “a” Virgin
- The “Apostolic Tradition” written circa 215AD writes concerning the baptismal creed: “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, the one coming to judge the living and the dead?” (15:21)
- St. Ignatius of Antioch (50AD to 110AD) wrote: “And from the prince of this world were hidden. (1) Mary's virginity and (2) her child-bearing, in like manner too (3) the death of the Lord. Three mysteries are these for open proclamation, wrought in God's silence.” (Ephesians 19)
- Gospel of Matthew alludes to Isaiah's prophecy



# Isaiah 7:14

- Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel.
- Objections:
  - Not “the virgin”, but “the almah”, i.e. the “young maiden”
  - This resembles pagan fables of being born of a virgin, like Perseus

# “Almah”

- St. Justin the Martyr (born 100AD, died 165AD)
- Around 150, believed to have written his dialogue with Trypho, discussing the Old Testament prophecies of Christ
- Gives ancient objections of Jews against the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7; the same objections today!

# “Almah”

- St. Justin’s defense:
  - “Your seventy elders” translated the term “almah” into “parthenos”. Therefore, why is it that Jews changed their opinion on the meaning of the word “almah” only after Christ?
    - Furthermore, after Christ, your Jewish fathers removed some verses from the Scriptures, from Esdras, from Jeremiah, from Psalm 95(96)
  - The devil tried to take the ancient prophecies and reproduce them in Greek pagan fables, such as Perseus
    - One can say St. Justin took an extreme exaggeration because the story of Perseus seem to introduce an unorthodox sexual relationship between Zeus and Perseus’ mother, and because of its strange description, people have called that “virgin birth”; but there is no “sexual” description of the birth of Christ



# “Almah”

- St. Justin’s defense (explaining Isaiah 7, from LXXVII to LXXXIV)
  - The Jews believed it referred to Hezekiah, and according to St. Justin, used other verses
  - Isaiah 8:4, Micah 2:6, Jeremiah 31:5, Psalm 110, Psalm 24 do not refer to Hezekiah accurately, but to Jesus
  - “The Lord Himself will give you a sign”
    - Ahijah, like all other normal mothers gave birth through conjugal relations. How is that “a sign”?



# Genesis 3:15

- “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.”
- St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130AD to 202AD) one of the first documented to explain this verse as the seed of Mary, Christ destroying the seed of the devil, sin. (A.H. III.23.7)
- St. Cyprian of Carthage (210AD to 258AD) was the first to connect Isaiah 7:14 with Genesis 3:15, to prove the unnatural event of a women with seedN

# The Perpetual Virginity (a late teaching?)

- The first time we find a CLEAR explicit reference to her PERPETUAL virginity was St. Clement of Alexandria (150AD to 215AD) and the great teacher Origen of Alexandria (185AD to 254AD)
- Afterwards, pretty much all the Church fathers have taught it, St. Athanasius, St. Ephrem the Syrian, St. Epiphanius of Salamis, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the Cappadocian fathers, St. John Chrysostom, St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Jerome, St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Severus of Antioch, etc. etc. etc.
- So why then was it not so clear before them?



# St. Clement of Alexandria

- It appears that even today many hold that Mary, after the birth of her Son, was found to be in the state of a woman who has given birth, while in fact she was not so. For some say that, after giving birth, she was examined by a midwife, who found her to be a virgin. These things are attested to by the Scriptures of the Lord, which also give birth to the truth and remain virginal, in the hiddenness of the mysteries of truth. “She gave birth and did not give birth”, Scripture [Pseudo-Ezekiel] says, since she conceived by herself, not as a result of union with a man. (Stromata 7:16)

# Origen of Alexandria

- Thus we should be bold and say that while the Gospels are the firstfruits of Scripture as a whole, the firstfruits of the Gospels is the Gospel of John, whose profound meaning cannot be perceived except by him who rested his head on Jesus' breast and who received Mary to be his mother also.
- He who wishes to be another John must become so in order to be pointed out by Jesus as another John, that is to say, another Jesus. While Mary has no son other than Jesus, as it appears to those who think correctly about her, nevertheless Jesus said to his Mother, "Behold your son" (Jn 19:26), and not, "Behold, this man is also is your son." In other words, he said to her, "This man is Jesus, whom you bore."
- Indeed, when someone is perfect, it is no longer he that lives, but Christ lives in Him (Gal. 2:20); therefore when he speaks of him to Mary, he says, "Behold your son, that is, Jesus Christ."  
(Commentary on John 1:6; PG 14, 32)



# The Perpetual Virginity (a late teaching?)

- The earlier Church fathers dealt with certain heresies against the Gnostics and Jews
- Some gnostics believed that Jesus did not have a real body, called docetism
  - So the presence of St. Mary was proof of Jesus' real flesh
- Some gnostics believed that Jesus was not really “born from a virgin”, but went through her like water flowing in a tube
  - But Christ took flesh from Mary, not merely go through her
- And of course, most other people, especially Jews and Ebionites, did not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus

# The Perpetual Virginity (a late teaching?)

- Since writings were written only when heresies arose, the first time the heresy arose concerning the perpetual virginity of St. Mary was Tertullian, who lived around the same time as St. Clement and Origen
- St. Clement and Origen taught this based on
  - Tradition!!! (please see lecture on Tradition)
    - One written proof of the Perpetual Virginity was in an Apocryphal work, the Protoevangelium of James, written around 150AD
  - The New Eve Theology of Recapitulation (St. Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus)
    - Eve disobeyed through the deception of an angel while being Virgin betrothed to Adam became the cause of death for all humanity
    - Mary obeyed through the blessing of an angel while being Virgin betrothed to Joseph became the cause of eternal life for all humanity
    - Mary is the patroness/advocate of Eve
  - Jesus is First-Born of God and First-Born of Mary (St. Hippolytus of Rome 170AD to 236AD)
  - The Church Icon Theology (St. Clement's Paedagogus 1:6)



# Church Icon Theology of St. Clement

- The Lord Jesus, fruit of the Virgin, did not proclaim women's breasts to be blessed, nor did he choose them for give nourishment. But when the Father, full of goodness and love for men, rained down His Word upon the earth, this same Word became the spiritual nourishment for virtuous men. O mysterious marvel!
- There is one Father of all, there is one Word of all, and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere. There is also one Virgin Mother, whom I love to call the Church. Alone, this mother had no milk, because she alone did not become a woman. She is virgin and mother simultaneously; a virgin undefiled and a mother full of love.
- She draws her children to herself and nurses them with holy milk, that is, the Word for infants. She had no milk because the milk of this child, beautiful and familiar: the body of Christ.

# St. Jerome (341-420)





# Helvidius' objections

- The Lord Jesus is Mary's "firstborn son" (Mt 1:25; Lk 2:7)
- St. Joseph "did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn." (Mt 1:25)
- "Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." (Mt 1:18)
- "the brothers" of the Lord (Mt 12:46; 13:54-56; Mk 6:1-3; Jn 2:12; Acts 1:14; Gal 1:18,19)
- Jerome wrote against Helvidius in 383AD

# First-Born

- Firstborn is the title of priesthood. The firstborn of all the Old Testament fathers before the Mosaic law was priest of the family.
  - Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine. (Ex. 13:2)
- So Christ is the great high priest (Heb. 4:14), the firstborn of the Virgin, and was consecrated to the temple as the firstborn.
  - “Every only child is a firstborn child but not every firstborn is an only child” (St. Jerome)
- After the Mosaic law, the Levites replaced the consecrated firstborns in terms of priesthood, but not consecration:
  - Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. The Levites shall be a ransom from them; therefore, they shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to cattle. They shall be Min; I am the Lord. (Num. 3:12-13)



# First-born

- Remember the theological discussion from St. Hippolytus?
  - The Son is the firstborn of all: firstborn of God, so that it would be clear that He is the Son of God and the second after the Father; firstborn before the angels, so that it would be clear that He is Lord of the angels; firstborn of the Virgin, so that it would be evident that He re-creates in Himself the first-formed Adam; firstborn from the dead, being Himself the firstfruits of our resurrection. (comm. on Daniel 4,11)
  - If Jesus is the First-born of God, there is no “second born”
  - We as Christians baptized and chrismated into Christ are made “firstborns” in Christ; there is no second, third born, etc. in the Church
  - 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to **the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven**, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Heb 12)

# Until

- “The Lord said to my Lord. Sit at my right hand **until** I make Your enemies Your footstool.” (Ps 110:1)
- “Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro **until** the waters had dried up ...” (Gen 8:7)
- “Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to **until** the day of her death.” (2 Sam 6:23)
- “I am with you always, even **until (unto)** the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)
- Moral: until does not necessarily mean something opposite will happen “after the until”



# Before they came together (Jerome)

- Regarding the words of the Gospel: “Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:18), [Helvidius] observes: “No one, when speaking about someone who is not going to eat lunch, says, ‘Before he ate lunch.’ ”
- I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. Should I accuse him of lack of experience or just carelessness? Suppose someone should say, “before eating lunch at the harbor, I set sail for Africa.” Would this mean that his statement could be not valid unless he had to eat lunch at the harbor some day? Or if we wished to say, “The apostle Paul, before departing for Spain, was put in chains in Rome.” Or to say—which is quite likely—“Helvidius, before repenting, was struck down by death.”
- Now does Paul have to go to Spain immediately upon his release? Must Helvidius repent after his death, even though Scripture says, “In the underworld who will give you praise?” (Ps. 6:5)? Although the preposition “before” often indicates a consequences, sometimes it merely shows what was being planned beforehand.

# Before they came together

- Therefore, it is not necessary that the things one was planning to do should really happen, should something else intervene to prevent them from happening. Thus, when the evangelist says, “Before they came together”, he means that the time of the wedding is near and that things have reached the point that she who had been considered engaged was about to become a wife.
- St. Jerome, *adversus Helvidius*, 4; PL 23, 195-196



# Brothers of the Lord

- Four ways the Scriptures use the word “brother”: blood brother, close relatives, common nationality, friendship/faith
- It was believed by the Church fathers that the “brothers of the Lord” were His close cousins or relatives
- Examples from the Scriptures:
  - For example Lot was called Abraham’s brother (Gen. 14:14) even though he was his nephew (Gen 11:31).
  - Boaz spoke of his “close relative” Elimelech as his “brother” (Ruth 4:3).
  - Joab called Amasa, his first cousin (2 Sam 17:25), “brother” (2 Sam 20:9).
- Christ entrusted the care of His mother to an unrelated disciple (Jn. 19:26), not to any of His “brothers” as one would expect if He had blood brothers.

# Brothers of the Lord

- Sons of Joseph the widow from previous marriage
  - Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hegesippus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Hilary of Potiers, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose, and Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus
- Sons of the Theotokos' sister?
  - Jerome
- The important thing is: The Theotokos did not have any other children and continued a vow of virginity after Christ's birth



St. Jerome debating the perpetual virginity of Mary with the heretic Helvidius



# A Vow of Virginity?

- The Protoevangelium of James (~150AD)
  - Mary was firstborn of barren parents Joachim and Anna
  - Consecrated to the Holy of holies at age 3
  - Fed by angels
  - Left the temple at age 12 and was betrothed to Joseph, an old widow, by a miracle of a dove coming out of his rod
  - Her pregnancy caused a scandal in the Jewish community, accusing Joseph of not keeping her a virgin as was vowed
  - When she gave birth, the midwife Salome confirmed that she remained a virgin



# A Vow of Virginity

(St. Gregory of Nyssa 335AD-394AD)

- But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. (Lk 1:29)
  - She was not troubled by the sight of an angel, since according to tradition, she was fed by an angel. She was troubled “at his saying”.
- “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Lk 1:34)
  - If she did not vow to be a virgin, she would probably ask, “with Joseph?” or maybe not ask at all

# A Protestant Objection: Wife!!!

- But but but...she is Joseph's wife!!!
- But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary **your wife**, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ... Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him **his wife**. (Mt. 1:20,24)



# A Protestant Objection: Wife!!!

- Mary was “betrothed”, (Mt. 1:18) which means she was a virgin dedicated to Joseph, and there is no word for “fiancee”. The betrothed is “husband” and “wife”
- And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.’ (Dt. 20:7)
- “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you. (Dt. 22:23-24)

# A Protestant Objection: Wife!!!

- If St. Matthew was adamant about the marriage, it would be normal to speak of Mary as Joseph's wife consistently. But he doesn't:
- 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take **the young Child and His mother**, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."  
14 When he arose, he took **the young Child and His mother** by night and departed for Egypt ...
- 19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take **the young Child and His mother**, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took **the young Child and His mother**, and came into the land of Israel. (Mt 2)
- Now that the birth happened, the focus is no longer on Joseph, but on "the young Child and His mother", as if separate from Joseph, and we never hear of Joseph again except as an identity of Jesus



# A Protestant Objection: Woman!!!

- Protestants say that Christ's use of "woman" for a married woman
- 2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." 4 Jesus said to her, "**Woman**, what does your concern have to do with Me? My **hour** has not yet come." (Jn 2)
- 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "**Woman**, believe Me, the **hour** is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. (Jn 4)

# A Protestant Objection: Woman!!!

- 2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. ...
- 7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” ...
- 9 And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “**Woman**, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” ...
- 12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” 13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.” ...
- 19 Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” 20 These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His **hour** had not yet come. (Jn 8)



# A Protestant Objection: Woman!!!

- A **woman**, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her **hour** has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. (Jn 16:21)
- 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "**Woman**, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that **hour** that disciple took her to his own home. (Jn 19)

# A Protestant Objection: Woman!!!

- 11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, “**Woman**, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” 14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “**Woman**, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).



# A Protestant Objection: Woman!!!

- Notice how all these passages come from John
- Symbolizes the woman of Genesis, and the hour coming soon; it symbolizes salvation for the female
- Eve was called woman when she was still a virgin
- The last instance, the woman is in a “garden”, Jesus calls her name now that the hour has come in Eden
- “Woman” was never to be derogatory; in some instances it is a Semitic form of respect, like “lady”

# Why the Virgin Birth?

- St. Augustine believed that Original Sin was promulgated through conjugal relations. Virgin birth protected Christ from “Original Sin”
- Most Church fathers, including St. Cyril of Alexandria did not talk about conjugal relations as the cause of our “Original Sin”, but rather we are born in exile from the grace of God
  - The virgin birth is a new birth promised to all of us; Christ who is eternally begotten of the Father by the Holy Spirit, is begotten also by the Holy Spirit through the incarnation
  - We too born of the virgin womb of the Church, are promised birth from on high by the Holy Spirit



# St. Severus of Antioch against Julian

- When Adam sinned, his human nature did not change, but his state of grace changed
- All creation is corruptible, mortal, and passible by nature, including man
- If Christ had a “pre-fall” human nature, then Christ is not consubstantial with our human nature; Christ’s humanity is by nature corruptible, mortal, passible
- If conjugal relations brings about “sinful nature”, then marriage is sin!!! Virgin birth has nothing to do with “sinless nature”. It has to do with “new birth”
- If Christ had a different human nature than us, then His birth, growth, hunger, suffering, death, and resurrection is all fake and acting
- “aphtharto-docetism”=“incorruptible illusion”

# Abouna Tadros Malaty's Contemplation

- Virgin birth is impossible, teaching us that we as human are poor and unable to work out our own salvation. Our own efforts will not suffice, but the grace of God.
- “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord. Let it be according to His word.” St. Mary took an active role with her free will. The Virgin birth/salvation must be by the free will of faith.
- Virginity is the life of the angels, of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Virgin birth represents the New Church.



# Why the Perpetual Virginity?

- Why not? Virginity was the practice of those who were dedicated 100% to the service of God like Elijah
- Jewish tradition according to Philo has it that Moses “separated himself” from his wife Zipporah after the burning bush encounter
- Another rabbinical tradition, one man exclaimed concerning the elders chosen in Numbers 7 for God working among them, “Woe to the wives of these men!”
- Numbers 30 speaks of “vows” believed to be abstinences from conjugal relations
- Alexandrian Jewish community, the “Therapeutae” and some Essenes
- Greek philosophers were known to take virginal vows
- In the New Testament, virginity takes a very strong character with St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul, and Christian tradition in general

# Why the Perpetual Virginity?

- 1 Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut.  
2 And the Lord said to me, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. 3 As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way.” Ezekiel 44:1-3



# Why the Perpetual Virginity?

- If something is known to be set aside for holiness, touching unworthily brings upon wrath, as it did with Uzza when he touched the Ark (2 Samuel 6:7 and 1 Chronicles 13:10)
- St. Joseph, a “just man” (Matthew 1:19), meaning a man who followed the laws and the Scripture word-for-word, would have perceived the virgin birth with such awe so as to treat Mary like the Ark of the Covenant!

# Why the Perpetual Virginity?

- Go back to why the Virgin Birth in recapitulation
  - Eve became the mother of all those living in the flesh according to the law of death, whereas Mary became the mother of all those living in the Spirit, according to the law of True Life in Christ
  - If therefore Eve represents fleshly living, Eve fulfills this by carnal relations; if Mary represents spiritual living, Mary fulfills this by her continued virginity
  - Virginity represents membership of the Body of Christ (including those who are married); think of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins. (Mt 25) They're all virgins



# Summary

- Virginitv is practical (and liberating) for those who are completely dedicated for a purpose in serving God
- Ezekiel prophesied it
- As the New Ark, it is not lawful to touch unworthily
- As representative of great angelic life, morality, and dedication, representing the Church, which is both mother and ever-virgin, being an example for all baptized into Christ
- To reject the perpetual virginitv is to dishonor St. Mary, dishonor Christ, dishonor the salvific and moral work of His salvation, and to dishonor the Church



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Thank you!

