

GRAMMATA ON THE THEOTOKOS

What The Bible Says About Mary

Mary, called the Θεοτοκος (Theotókos = God-bearer) in the Eastern Church, was deeply steeped in Holy Scriptures (Bible) and the Jewish Tradition. So well was she versed in the Scriptures that the New Testament presents her as quoting and applying them in her everyday life, e.g. when she visited her cousin Elizabeth, and at the wedding at Canaa. But this humble woman who pondered the Scriptures is quite often misunderstood. We shall try to answer questions about Mary using the Bible as meditated upon by the Church tradition.

Why is Mary called "Mother of God"?

The first one to call her this was her cousin Elizabeth, when she asked, "Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (Luke 1:43)

The Greek word for "Lord" (κυριος) used in the New Testament was common to mean God. When the Orthodox say that Mary is the Mother of God they do not, of course, say that she existed before God, but that she is the mother of the divine Jesus who is part of the Holy Trinity. The Apostle John teaches us that the Word who is God was made flesh (John 1). This is Jesus born of Mary. If Jesus is God made flesh and Mary is truly His Mother, then she deserves the title *Mother of God*. This title actually dates back to the third century. It was also used as a defense of Christ's divinity at the Council of Ephesus in 451.

The Theotókos contemplated the word of God to such an extent that it became flesh within her. Jesus, likewise, invites us to be like his mother. He said, "My *mother* and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice." (Luke 8:21) This is far from a put-down of Mary, as is sometimes contended. In fact, St. Luke in his Gospel holds up the Virgin Mary as that one who perfectly hears the word of God and fully responds to it. Not only does she readily embrace it but she makes haste to share it with her cousin. Mary directs us also to meditate upon and live out the word of God in our lives.

Why is she called "Ever-Virgin"?

Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55). The Aramaic language spoken at Jesus' time used the word "brother", meaning the same as "cousin". Because of early Christian writings and church tradition we know that James, Joseph, Simon and Jude were actually what we call *cousins* of Jesus. Mary was consecrated to God in a very special way, and so she offered her perpetual virginity to God as a gift. After bearing Christ in her womb she would not allow herself to be known by another. Her virginity is actually spiritual purity manifested in an everlasting physical way.

St. Paul writes to his disciples, “I arranged for you to marry Christ so that I might give you away as a chaste virgin to this one husband” (2 Corinthians 11 :2). Mary’s first husband is the Lord God. In Revelations 14:4, we read that the followers of Jesus “... have kept their virginity “ by following Christ most purely. Thus we are to be spiritual virgins for Christ. Jesus even invites some people to perpetual sexual virginity for the sake of the Kingdom. (Matthew 19: 12). The Tradition of the Church has stated that Mary is both physically and spiritually pure and immaculate.

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