

Chapter 5: Blessed Mary or the Queen of Heaven?

*“And Mary said:
‘My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.’”¹*

In the Orthodox Church, Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, is called the “Most Holy Mother of God” (Theotokos), “Immaculate” Mary (the “Perpetual Virgin”), the “Most Powerful Protector and Patron” of the Christian family, and the crowned “Queen of Heaven”, which sits on the throne of God.

Before we discuss in detail this belief of Orthodox religion in light of the Bible and ancient history, let us examine Mary’s life based on the Word of God.

MARY IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The text which describes “our” first historical encounter with her in the apostolic writings is found in Luke 1:26-38:

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.”²

At that time, she grew up as a teenage girl (probably between 14 and 20 years of age, although the evangelists do not tell us this information), lived in Nazareth, and was betrothed to a man named Joseph. Matthew 1:16-25 and Luke 2:5 tell us that Joseph later became the husband of Mary, and that after Jesus’ birth, she bore at least six children:

*“When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers **James**,*

¹ Lk. 1:46-50.

² Lk. 1:26-7.

*Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?'"*³

According to the New Testament, Mary was a modest and pious girl who lived in the house of her parents. Although already betrothed by the custom of that time, she was allowed to spend one more year at home with her parents until the wedding and then move into the house of her husband.⁴

Just at that time, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced to her the good news about the miraculous conception and the birth of the Son of God. Having heard the angelic message about the conception of the child, Mary was shocked and frightened of his visit.

Although He had made His choice to give birth through Mary, even after the betrothal, the news of her pregnancy frightened her, since she knew that until then she had not had sex with any man. "How will this be since I am still a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). The angel's response was that this child will be the Son of God, and will be conceived of a virgin by the power of the Most High, without the participation of men (Luke 1:35). Mary, the pious girl, calmly replied: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said." (v. 38).

After having spent three months in the house of her cousin Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) in Judea, when John was born, Mary returned to Nazareth. It was the fourth month of pregnancy (Luke 1:56), and Joseph immediately saw that his betrothed was pregnant. He was very distressed by the fact (from his perspective) that Mary had cheated on him and got pregnant by another man. She was unable to persuade him that an angel visited her and told her the child she bore was of divine nature. Out of deep disappointment and pain in his heart, this man could not believe it. He came up with the idea to divorce her without telling most people about it. Otherwise, he would have to make a public announcement that Mary was unfaithful. According to the laws given to Moses by God, it most certainly would have resulted in death by stoning for Mary (Mt. 1:18-21; Dt. 22:13-21).

However, at precisely the time when Joseph planned to secretly separate from Mary, God's messenger appeared and told Joseph to take Mary as his wife freely and without fear, since the child in her womb was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Obeying the revelation of the Lord, they got married and continued to live in conjugal harmony and honor of the Lord.

It cannot be emphasized enough that Joseph and Mary lived in full marital relations (i.e. they were husband and wife in the true sense of the word). This contradicts the hardline Orthodox tradition that they were merely relatives. (The Orthodox claim that Joseph was an eighty year old man and took the girl Mary into his home in order to preserve her virginity.) Here are some verses that confirm Joseph was really Mary's husband:

³ Mt. 13:53-6. (Six additional children of Mary equals four brothers – James, Joseph, Simon, Judas – plus at least two sisters – hence “all sisters” means greater than one, at least two.) Translator's emphasis.

⁴ See the commentary by Dimitriye Stepanovic on Matthew (1923), 6.

*“Because Joseph **her husband** was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”*⁵

*“...to a virgin **pledged to be married** to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.”*⁶

*“He went there to register with Mary, who was **pledged to be married** to him and was expecting a child.”*⁷

Also, it is critical to emphasize that Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus, the firstborn and eldest of several siblings to follow, had more children. Joseph abstained from sexual relations with her only during her first pregnancy (Matthew 1:25). In translating the New Testament compiled by the Commission of the Holy Synod of the Archbishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, this verse reads like this:

*“And he did not know her **until the birth of the firstborn son**, and they called Him Jesus.”*⁸

Other translators translate this verse in similar ways. So, the word “he did not know” (i.e. “that he did not know”, the translation of Dr. Emilian Carnich) certainly cannot mean that Joseph knew Mary (in terms of introduction, i.e. a first meeting), because in the gospel we read that Mary was already betrothed to Joseph months before the dream, and that means that they already knew each other quite a long time. Also, the writers of the gospel show that Mary traveled with her husband to Bethlehem for the census (Luke 2:4-5), and they lived in marital union when the Lord through the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream (five months before they were supposed to travel). However, Scripture tells us that Joseph did not “know”⁹ his wife until the birth of Jesus (emphasizing the word “until”,¹⁰ which clearly says that Mary's husband “knew” his wife after the birth of her firstborn). The term “know your wife” is used in several places in the Bible and it is always a

⁵ Mt. 1:19. Author's emphasis.

⁶ Lk. 1:27. Author's emphasis.

⁷ Lk. 2:5. Author's emphasis.

⁸ Mt. 1:25. *New Testament, Translation Commissioned by Serbian Orthodox Church*, 4th Ed. (1998). Author's emphasis.

⁹ The Orthodox Church (citing St. Athanasius) explains the word “he did not know” as follows: “Truly Joseph did not know what was in her, what was taking place inside of her. And when she gave birth, then he knew her: then Joseph knew what forces were inside the Virgin, and what she was worthy of becoming...” Justin Popovic, *Lives of the Saints*, December, 734. This attempt at explaining the biblical text is more than naive, because Joseph knew very well that Mary bore the Son of God, for the angel revealed these facts about Mary before the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:20-21). In the same text promoting the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary, St. Athanasius says that Joseph bowed down and worshiped Mary and Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem, which is completely contrary to the New Testament, which does not mention any usage of “adoration” or worship before Mary.

¹⁰ According to St. Theophylact, the word “until” means: “[Joseph] never knew her as a woman... How he could lay his hand on a virgin to whom the Lord God promised perpetual virginity?” *Ibid.*, 726. Despite the efforts of Justin Popovic to defend his interpretation of the word “until” as “never”, there is no clear Biblical evidence to support his position. Does he truly believe that he can equate “until” with the same meaning as the word “never”? His position cannot be supported.

description of the establishment of sexual contact, after which they could produce children. Here are a few examples:

*“Now Adam **knew** Eve his wife, and **she conceived** and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the Lord.’”*¹¹

*“And Adam **knew** his wife **again**, and **she bore** a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’”*¹²

*“And Elkanah **knew** Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah **conceived and bore** a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, ‘Because I have asked for him from the LORD.’”*¹³

The translation of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church is consistent with other translations of the Bible. They all emphasize that Jesus was the firstborn child of Mary (and not the only child of Mary). This statement is consistent with other New Testament texts that speak of her other children conceived with Joseph.

The Interrelationship of Jesus and Mary

God's Word informs us that Mary, along with Joseph, took care of Jesus when he grew into an adult. Even during that time, Mary could not fully understand his words and the importance of his mission.

At the time of Jesus, when he was twelve years old, he got separated from his parents and remained in the Temple in Jerusalem, instead of setting out with them on the road home to Nazareth. Mary rebuked him: *“So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.’ And He said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’”*¹⁴

The next verse (Lk. 2:50) reveals that Joseph and his wife did not understand Christ’s response. Nevertheless, regardless of their limited understanding of spiritual truth, the child Jesus was obedient to His parents.

Eighteen years later, he began his Messianic ministry. After the baptism in the Jordan, Jesus' mother once again revealed her misunderstanding of His work and teaching. Of course, as a wonderfully pious woman, she quickly adjusted to the will of God and corrected her ways. Thus, during the wedding at Cana in Galilee, after the host ran out of wine, Mary approached her son and asked him to do something about this issue:

¹¹ Gen. 4:1. NKJV. Author’s emphasis.

¹² Gen. 4:25. NKJV. Author’s emphasis.

¹³ 1 Sam. 1:19-20. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁴ Lk. 2:48-9.

*“And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’”*¹⁵

In this way, the Lord showed that He was the One who would decide whether to perform messianic signs, instead of submitting to requests from His earthly relatives about the execution of God's work.

Another occasion (Mark 3:21-22, 31-35) included Jesus giving a sermon and performing some miraculous works to back His claims. Many Jews felt that Jesus' works came from the Evil One, since they believed that Jesus went mad and came under the influence of demons. (See Jn. 10:20.) Because of her great worry for Jesus, Mary and her sons came to seize and silence Him – in order to protect Him from His opponents. However, as in the first case, Jesus did not allow anyone to interfere with His ministry (even in spite of good but misinformed intentions). Since his mother and brothers in this way demonstrated a misunderstanding of Christ's activity and a bit of unbelief in the validity of His ministry, the Lord addressed his listeners, showing them as to who actually belong to His family:

*“And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘**Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.**’”*¹⁶

The Apostle John reveals that even Jesus' physical brothers (half-brothers by his mother) did not believe in His identity up to the resurrection (Jn. 7:3-10). They viewed Jesus in just the same way as the rest of the sinful world did. For these and other reasons, including a partial or even complete rejection of Him by His own blood family, Christ calls all His disciples “brothers, sisters and mother”, saying that they are his real family – those who believe in Him and understand Him.

On another occasion, after he delivered a series of magnificent spiritual lessons to the people who listened to him, one woman, thrilled by this revelation of divine truth, commented to the Lord that His mother must be very blessed and happy to have such a son. However, Christ responded to the words of her statement by saying that those who observe and obey the will of God enjoy a much greater blessing - and thus giving greater evidence that his mother does not enjoy any privileged status in God's people:

*“And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’ But He said, ‘**More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!**’”*¹⁷

¹⁵ Jn. 2:3-4.

¹⁶ Mk. 3:34-5. Author's emphasis.

¹⁷ Lk. 11:27-8. Author's emphasis.

These gospel passages clearly indicate that Jesus publicly stated that He considered His mother quite equal to His other disciples. So let us see if sacred tradition conforms to the truth presented in the Bible. As we will notice, this text was written to Mary, “Mother of God”, who was put on par with many millions of Christians who have lived throughout the centuries, as well as those who live today. All human beings were placed in a position superior and privileged over the whole creation. It is about a “vision of Heaven” allegedly seen by the Venerable Gregory, a student of Basil the New in the ninth century after Christ. After a very careful reading of the description of what was “recorded” in the startling vision of Judgment Day allegedly given to Gregory, compare it with the teachings of the Bible. Here is how our Orthodox literature describes this vision:

“The first one he saw was the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that hour, the Lord removed from His Immaculate Head a wonderful crown and put it on her head. He said to His Mother, ‘Receive My glory, which My Father gave to Me, for victory over the devil and death which I have overcome, because You received My Body.’ Then He gave her righteous robes with His Royal garb, which He Himself wore as the God-man. He gave her other spiritual gifts, venerating Her in word and deed as His Mother. She then approached Him and sat down on His divine throne in exaltation over all the saints... She exalted the Lord as Lord and King over all the heavenly hosts, who also rejoiced greatly.”¹⁸

This article gives an adequate summary of what the Orthodox Church believes about Mary. We will discuss these beliefs more in detail later. However, according to the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles inspired by His Spirit, these honors apply to all other Christian believers. Namely, all other believers, who are born again according to God's Word by the promise of the Lord, will receive God's glory and sit on the throne of Christ's divinity - not just Mary. In His intercessory prayer as High Priest, Jesus the Savior in addressing his heavenly Father stated that He would transfer His (divine) glory that He received from the Father to His disciples. Furthermore, Jesus promises to those who keep their faith in Him to the end and overcome sinful temptations that they will sit on His throne:

*“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.”*¹⁹

*“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*²⁰

In addition to these heavenly rewards which await the faithful of God (including the physical mother of Christ the Lord, who was merely one faithful person among millions), Jesus and the apostles mentioned many other honors. Among them is the right to eat of fruit from the Tree of Life that is in God's paradise (Rev. 2:7), receiving the crown of life

¹⁸ *After Death*, (Monastery Milesheva:1991), 29-30. See also www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/Smrt/StrasniSud.htm .

¹⁹ Jn. 17:22. Author's emphasis.

²⁰ Rev. 3:21. Author's emphasis.

(Rev.

2:10), and receiving power over the nations, ruling over them with an iron rod and the morning star (Rev. 2:26-28). Christ's believers will be also made a pillar in the temple of God the Father, and the name of God, the New Jerusalem, and Christ's new name shall be written on them (Rev. 3:12). Every believer will receive from the Lord a white stone written with his new name (Rev. 2:17). According to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, God sent angels to serve and to help those who will inherit salvation (Ps. 34:7, 91:11, 12; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 19:10; 22:8). Thus, the apostle Paul could declare that the saints shall judge the world (unbelieving people) and angelic beings (1 Cor. 6:3), all of which once again points to the glory of redeemed people in relation to the rest of creation. This glory is not exclusive to Mary.

So, as we observed, efforts Orthodox followers through such heavenly "visions" and other extrabiblical "revelations" to exalt Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the Mother of God superior to all other believers simply fall short of truth. Namely, Scripture testifies to the full equality before God of Christ's earthly followers, including his mother through whom His Father gave Jesus a human nature. However, despite the fact that the Lord Jesus has not exalted His mother to the top of the heavens, as the Orthodox believe, He, as the perfect Son, always worried about her, especially after the death of his stepfather and guardian Joseph. As He was obedient to her in His youth, so He also cared for her even a few moments before His death on the cross. Knowing that her husband had died and she had not remarried (Mark 6:3), and the children had not yet become His disciples (Jn. 7:5), Christ the Lord in that moment entrusted the care of his mother to His youngest apostle John (John 19:25-27).

But regarding specifically this New Testament text that describes the delegation of Mary's care to John, the Orthodox Church wants to affirm its teaching that Jesus' mother did not have any other children (because in that case, they believe, Mary would have been cared for by her other children). However, Eastern Orthodox theologians overlook some biblical facts mentioned before regarding this controversial issue. At this point I want to briefly mention them.

As stated earlier, John's gospel mentions the fact that Mary, Jesus' mother was present at the cross where her son was crucified:

*"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."*²¹

Surprisingly, none of the other evangelists in their gospels mention this event, not even the presence of the mother of Jesus at the cross. However, they do point out that certain females were present. Of course, it would have been a big neglect for the Apostles themselves to have forgotten her – if, in fact, she actually were present there (as the Apostle John wrote she was). The remaining gospels indeed offer us other descriptions of Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew describes Mary as the mother of

²¹ Jn. 19:26-7.

James and Joses. Mark mentions Mary as the mother of James the younger and Joseph, and Luke lists a number of women who had come with Jesus from Galilee:

*“And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, **Mary the mother of James and Joses**, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”*²²

*“There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, **Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses**, and Salome.”*²³

*“But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.”*²⁴

As stated before, the gospels inform us that Jesus' mother with her husband Joseph had several sons (and daughters). Among those children were James and Joseph (who was also known by his other name of Joses). On one occasion, after a noteworthy discussion with Christ, some of the people of Nazareth who knew Jesus from childhood began to mock Him, saying:

*“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers **James, Joses, Simon, and Judas**? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?”*²⁵

*“’Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of **James, Joses, Judas, and Simon**? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him.”*²⁶

Of course, what the Nazarenes did not recognize is that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but the Son of God. They were certainly aware that after the birth of Jesus, who was the firstborn, Mary gave birth to several children in the house of Joseph. Therefore, based on the gospel accounts, we can deduce the following about one woman who was present at Christ’s crucifixion:

- (1) Mary was the mother of Jesus. (John 19:26-7)
- (2) Mary was the mother of James and Joses. (Mt. 27:55-6; Mk. 15:40)
- (3) James and Joses were brothers by blood relationship of Jesus. (Mt. 13:55-6; Mk. 6:3)
- (4) Mary was from Nazareth, located in Galilee, where she raised Jesus as a boy in His earthly hometown. (Lk. 23:49; Mt. 13:55-6)
- (5) Mary is mentioned in all four gospels – Mary, the mother of Jesus, who came from Galilee, is the same as Mary, the mother of James and Joses.

²² Mt. 27:55-6. Author’s emphasis.

²³ Mk. 15:40. Author’s emphasis.

²⁴ Lk. 23:49.

²⁵ Mt. 13:55-6. Author’s emphasis.

²⁶ Mk. 6:3. Author’s emphasis.

(6) Therefore, Mary had other children and thus was not a “perpetual virgin” as alleged by Orthodox apologists.

On the day of Christ's resurrection, early in the morning, some of the women who were with Him came to His grave. The reason for their visit to the tomb was to anoint Jesus' dead body which had been removed a few days earlier from the tree (wooden cross) and laid in a tomb which was owned by Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57-60). Although the Lord repeatedly had told His disciples that He would resurrect from the dead on the third day after the crucifixion²⁷, they did not believe Him (Mark 16:9-14). Thus, even the women who came to the tomb of Jesus did not do so because they expected to confirm the reality of His resurrection. Rather, they were convinced that He was still dead. To complete the rite of burial, they wanted to complete the anointing of the corpse that they failed to do when the body was taken to the grave. That day was the Sabbath, the day of rest (which began on Friday after sunset, Jn. 19:42):

*“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and **the other Mary** came to see the tomb.”*²⁸

*“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, **Mary the mother of James**, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.”*²⁹

*“It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, **Mary the mother of James**, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles.”*³⁰

From all these texts, we see the presence of Mary, mother of the Lord, during the crucifixion, burial and "unsuccessful" anointment of Jesus, with the difference that the apostles called her the mother of James and Joses. Nevertheless, a clear question arises from these texts: why do some of the gospel writers refer to Jesus' mother in this manner?

As we know, the evangelists wrote down their accounts of the events of Jesus' life only a few decades after his ascension to Heaven, rather than immediately when they occurred (in other words, they did not just write articles quickly like journalists). In the meantime, the brothers of Jesus whom John described as not believing in Him during Christ's earthly mission (Jn. 7:5), then went on to believe in the Lord after his resurrection. The book of Acts reveals that they all had joined the apostles and other believers during the first meetings of the Church:

“And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all

²⁷ Mt. 17:22-3; Mk. 9:31-2; Lk. 9:44-5.

²⁸ Mt. 28:1. Author's emphasis.

²⁹ Mk. 16:1. Author's emphasis.

³⁰ Lk. 24:10. Author's emphasis.

*continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and **Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.***"³¹

At the time of the murder of the apostle James (brother of John, Acts 12:2), James, the Lord's brother, was the head of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17, 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7, Gal. 2:9, 12). The Apostle Paul, during his visit to this one Church, met the son of Mary and said:

*"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except **James, the Lord's brother.**"*³²

It is obvious that Paul was familiar with the fact that Jesus had brothers "in the flesh," who were sons of Mary, not just from Joseph's first marriage (as the Orthodox believe, and which will be discussed in more detail later). If these brothers had only come from Joseph's previous marriage, Paul would have been mistaken to call James the brother of the Lord. However, they both knew that James was the son of Mary.

In the same way as James became one of the first leaders of the church (and author of the Epistle of James), so someone named Judas became the author of the Epistle of Jude named after him. This Judas also was a half-brother of Jesus, not the apostle who called himself "Judas, son of James".³³ We note that from Jude's own epistle, where the author James calls himself a brother of James and a servant of Jesus Christ. He does not call himself an "apostle" – in contrast to the way Peter and Paul introduce themselves at the beginning of their epistles. Also, the writer in Jude 17 excludes himself from the company of the original Apostles: "*But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Precisely because these half-brothers of Jesus became prominent teachers in the Church at the turn of the first half and the second century, they became well-known among a wide circle of believers at the time when the New Testament gospels and writings were recorded. When Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote about Jesus' mother as a participant in the events surrounding His death and resurrection, they referred to her as the mother of these famous leaders in the first century church.³⁴ It is hard to believe at that time (when Jesus' disciples were few – after His death, many deserted Him – see John 6:66) there

³¹ Acts. 1:13-4. Author's emphasis.

³² Gal. 1:18-9. Author's emphasis.

³³ Lk. 6:16.

³⁴ The same is the case with Simon of Cyrene, whom the Romans forced to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha. Luke in his gospel mentions: "Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country..." (23:26). Mark, however, mentioned that this was Simon and his sons Alexander and Rufus (Mark 16:21). It is certain that the apostles did not know these people at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, even though they were part of the Jewish diaspora. Cyrene was located about 1,000 km. from Jerusalem in northern Africa west of Egypt. However, when Mark wrote his gospel about 60-65 A.D., Simon, Alexander and Rufus were already known to Christians in the first Church. Therefore, when Mark mentions Simon in his gospel, he clarifies his identity in explaining that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus; most Christians were known by their father's name.

were still some of Mary's children that bore the same name of the mother as did our Lord.

In this way, we have seen most of the details pertaining to the life of Christ's mother Mary and His close relatives. I intentionally omitted all other details for now so that we can examine them later in this chapter when discussing "Mary in the tradition of the Orthodox Church."

MARY IN SACRED TRADITION

"The Orthodox Church reveres the Virgin Mary as "more honorable than the cherubim and incomparably more famous than the seraphim", the One who surpasses all creatures. The Church views her as the Mother of God and the Intercessor before the Son for the entire human race and Who prays for all people without other mediation. **Love and veneration for the Virgin is the soul of Orthodox piety**, its heart that warms and revives the entire body... **Whoever does not venerate Mary does not know Jesus** nor have faith in Christ. Whatever religion itself does not include reverence for the Virgin is a different faith, an apostasy to Christianity apart from the teaching of the Church."³⁵

"The mother of Jesus was a pure godly young woman named Mary. **According to tradition and the best and oldest apocryphal, that is unauthentic** [non]apostolic, gospels, she was a God-fearing daughter of pious parents, Joachim and Anna, who descended from the tribe of David and resided in Nazareth in Galilee."³⁶

On the Orthodox Church calendar, there are several holidays related to the veneration of the Mother of God. The most important of these days relate to the **birth, presentation, and assumption** of the Holy Mother of God. My goal is to examine all these events and to make an informed judgment, in accordance with the apostolic confession of the first century as recorded in the Bible.

First of all, I must emphasize that no apostle anywhere in the New Testament ever mentions anything about the events just listed that are present in the Orthodox confession of faith. If these events were truly so important events to the Christian Church and the salvation of people around the world, it is simply unforgivable that the apostles who knew such important matters would have concealed them from the general public. Not even the author of the gospel Luke himself mentions anything concerning Mary's youth, not even in the period after Christ's Ascension (except for Acts 1:14), even though Luke writes in the beginning of his gospel:

*"...it seemed good to me also, **having had perfect understanding** of all things from the very first, **to write to you an orderly account**, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things **in which you were instructed**."*³⁷

³⁵ Sergey Bulgakov, *Orthodoxy* (1991), 183. Author's emphasis.

³⁶ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 110. Author's emphasis.

³⁷ Lk. 1:3-4. Author's emphasis.

As we can see, Luke writes an orderly account, about what he truly experienced and what was taught to Theophilus. Therefore, if this gospel writer (and others) recorded absolutely nothing about the events of which Orthodox tradition informs us, it certainly means that they did not know something of which they should have been aware and neglected to teach other Christians (if those things actually existed).

The Apostles Matthew and Luke focused their narratives on the critical events of salvation that culminated in the birth of Jesus Christ, not the events from the early youth of the mother of Jesus. Nonetheless, in the writings of the first disciples of the Lord, we can find enough information to examine the claims of sacred tradition and to verify their accuracy.

The Birth of the Virgin Mary

“The canonical Gospels otherwise give little information about Mary, the mother of Jesus, so that the complete picture of its mythical - divine personality can be appreciated only by considering the great amount of apocryphal and hagiographical literature, folk legends, and medieval iconography. Most of all, this requires the published apocryphal work *The Book of the Birth of Mary* (later known as the *Protoevangelium of James*) from the second century, *The Book of the Death of Theotokos* from the third century, or *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy* of Jesus' childhood from the sixth century. Some of these **legends** were collected in the Middle Ages in an entire compendium that comprehensively describe many events in the life of Mary. According to these imaginative descriptions, the non-canonical Virgin Mary as a three-year old child was raised in the temple in Jerusalem, performed manual work, and was fed from the hands of angels. At the age of twelve, Mary made a vow to perpetual virginity.”³⁸

The Orthodox Church tells us (based on apocryphal non-canonical literature) that Mary was born out of the marriage of two old parents, Joachim and Ann, who had to wait fifty years until God blessed them with their child. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic in his "Prologue of Okhrid" says that after their persistent prayers, God sent his angels to announce the birth of “**a daughter most-blessed, by whom all nations on earth will be blessed and through whom [will come] the salvation of the world.**”³⁹ Additionally, the same writer states:

“For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson-but what a daughter and what a Grandson! Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood,

³⁸ Milan Vukomanovich, *Early Christian Myths* (1997), 58. Author's emphasis.

³⁹ Bishop Nikolai Veilimirovich, *The Prologue from Okhrid* (Voice of the Church: 2000), 650 (September 9). Author's emphasis. See also <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> .

the Fount of virginity and purity-this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna.”⁴⁰

In the Prologue for September 9 (under the old Julian calendar), Bishop Nikolai alludes to a reference that Joachim was the son of Varpafir, came from the tribe of Judah, and was a descendant of King David.⁴¹

However, the Evangelist Luke never states anything about Mary’s male forerunners, including nothing about Joachim or Varpafir. (This is in spite of Luke’s effort to give a perfect understanding of “all things from the beginning”). Namely, when we compare the genealogy of Christ starting in Matthew 1:1-16 with that recorded in Luke 3:23-38, at first glance we see that they greatly differ. The genealogy from Luke’s gospel not only is longer (and goes back from Christ to Adam), but also differs with Matthew, which descends only from Abraham to Jesus.⁴² Matthew presents to us the family tree of Mary’s husband, Joseph, whose father is Jacob, a descendent of David, the famous king of Israel, through his son Solomon. Of course, we know that this genealogy has no real connection with Jesus Christ, because Joseph was not his father but His foster father (stepfather). Therefore, even Joseph's ancestors were not the real ancestors of the Lord Jesus.

If we examine the eleventh verse of Matthew chapter one, we see that Matthew mentions the name Jeconiah (Jehoiachin). The Lord promises in Jeremiah 22:30 that none of his descendants will ever sit upon the throne and rule Israel. Then it becomes truly clear that Jesus has no physical origin through Solomon, son of David - who was a distant ancestor of Joseph. However, although we found that this is not a genealogy of Christ, but Joseph, why does Matthew record it? Why does Matthew call it the Lord’s genealogy? The audience of Matthew’s gospel was the Jews who lived in the then occupied state of Israel. Their belief about the Messiah stemmed from Old Testament prophecies⁴³ manifested through the anticipation of the divine ruler descended from King David who was from the tribe of Judah. Although Joseph was not Jesus' real father, Jewish society from an earthly perspective would view Jesus from the perspective of His stepfather. Featuring the origin of Jesus' royal guardian, Matthew wanted to inform the Jews that Christ belonged to the royal family, e.g. He was the expected Messiah.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 648 (September 8).

⁴¹ See <http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/prolog/index.php?m=9&d=9&a=1&date=9-2009>. (Serbian language – for some reason, this is not in the English translation, but the full quote is: “St. Joachim and St. Anne. **St. Joachim was the son of Varpafir**, from the root of Judah, and a descendant of King David.”) There are no links in English either on the Orthodox or Catholic side with this information, but the Serbian link should be considered the most reliable as the Prologue of Okhrid is in Serbian language. Translator’s note.

⁴² There is also a view that Matthew’s genealogy refers to Jesus’ legitimacy as Messiah of Israel through the bloodline of His foster father Joseph, while Luke’s genealogy refers to Jesus’ legitimacy established through the bloodline of Mary. See Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), 35-9. (Translator’s note.)

⁴³ Gen. 49:10; Is. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6.

From another perspective, Luke's gospel shows another genealogy for the Lord Jesus. It starts with:

*“Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Janna, the son of Joseph.”*⁴⁴

Since we have already determined that Joseph's father was named Jacob, and Jacob's father Mathan, etc., we see that the two family trees do not match. However, it is true that in that time people could be known under different names. For example, the Apostle Peter (Cephas) was called Simon, the name given to the Apostle Bartholomew after his circumcision was Nathaniel (Bartholomew means "son of Tolmay", e.g. Nathaniel's father was named Tolmay), and the Evangelist Mark had a different name of John.⁴⁵

But it is quite unlikely that Luke merely listed the nicknames of people, yet Matthew records their actual names (assuming, in fact, the names on both lists are the same people). To affirm this more clearly, Luke identifies Nathan, as the son of David, not Solomon as listed by Matthew (Lk. 3:31). Therefore, Joseph cannot simultaneously be the son of Jacob – a descendant of Solomon – and the son of Heli – a descendant of Nathan. Based on this observation, the logical conclusion is that Luke's genealogy is not a list of Joseph's family tree. Since Luke tells us about Jesus in verse 23: "He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli...", it is clear that the Jews assumed a familial connection that, in fact, did not exist. The simple answer to this "riddle" about the two genealogies is that Luke records Jesus' true physical ancestors all the way to Adam. Thus, the person called Heli is not the father of Joseph, but the father of Mary.⁴⁶ Indeed, Heli is actually Joseph's father-in-law. However, no separate terms for "father", "father-in-law", "grandfather", "great-grandfather", "grandson", "son-in-law", and other words related to "father" or "son" existed in the Aramaic or Hebrew languages at that time.

In this way we have found that the Orthodox tradition does not tell the truth about Mary's parents, because instead of Joachim and Varpafir, we find Heli and Mathat. Earlier, we also refuted the allegation that Mary bore only one son. The Bible also tells us that Mary was not the only daughter, but in fact had a sister (John 19:25).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Lk. 3:23-4.

⁴⁵ Mt. 10:2-4; Jn. 1:45-9; Acts 15:37.

⁴⁶ Sacred tradition alleges that Heli was Joseph's legal father (by the law of "Levitical" marriage), and Jacob was Joseph's natural father. Specifically, Jacob married the widow, a descendant of Nathan, of his deceased brother Heli. Thus, in accordance with Dt. 25:5-6, although Joseph's natural father was Jacob, Joseph's legal father was Heli. See *Lives of the Saints*, December, 751,

But in the end, these explanations do not answer the big question: what connection does Christ have with all the ancestors of Joseph (and Jacob, and Heli), since he (Joseph) is not the natural father of the Lord Jesus? Also, Melki in Lk. 3:23-24 considers Heli as his great-grandfather and not his father (i.e. the man who married his mother). It is much more likely that Luke's genealogy actually lists the true family tree of Jesus' ancestors by nature, specifically the ancestors of Mary through her father Heli.

⁴⁷ Compare Luke with the text in Mt. 1:1 which uses the term "son" instead of the term "descendant".

Compare also 1 Ki. 16:28 with 2 Ki. 8:18, which uses the word "daughter" rather than "granddaughter".

The Presentation of the Blessed Mary

An analysis of the presumptions of sacred tradition of the Presentation of Mary (the Entry of Theotokos) at the Jerusalem Temple, and the time of her residence there once again will demonstrate that the Orthodox Church does not possess the truth in its confession of faith and, in fact, adheres to historical fraud.

The previous section proved that the names of Mary parents were not Joachim and Anna, nor was she an only daughter. This is a basic starting point to see that further disseminated legends about Jesus' mother alleged of her youth have no basis in reality. This stands in direct contrast to the assurances of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The event of "Presentation" occurs when Mary is three years old and is taken to the temple to be dedicated to God, thus fulfilling a vow her parents had made even before she saw the light of day. The New Testament records nothing about such an event. However, Bishop Nikolai sets things in order about this event and says the following:

"When the Most-holy Virgin Mary reached the age of three, her holy parents Joachim and Anna took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem to dedicate her to the service of God according to their earlier promise... Many kinsmen of Joachim and Anna gathered in Jerusalem to take part in this event, at which the invisible angels of God were also present... The virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the 'King's daughter, the Bride of God'." ⁴⁸

After they arrived in front of the Temple, Mary climbed the stairs to the top where she met the high priest Zechariah (the future father of John the Baptist). He grabbed her by the hand and led her to the most holy place of the Temple - the Holy of Holies. At the Temple, Mary ministered to God and read Scripture over the next nine (or eleven) years until she turned twelve (or fourteen, as Bishop Nikolai contradicts himself ⁴⁹). She then submitted herself in betrothal to the elderly Joseph of Nazareth and kept her virgin chastity.⁵⁰

In the text cited above by Bishop Nikolai and known in Eastern Christianity for centuries, we notice several obvious differences with the records of the Bible inspired by God.

First, despite the presence of the angels at this unknown historical event, the Holy Scriptures never refer to Mary as "the King's Daughter, the Bride of God". Furthermore,

According to Hebrew custom, women were never included in the genealogy instead of men. For this reason, Joseph is mentioned as the bearer of the father's rights instead of Mary in Lk. 3:23. Mt. 1:3, 5-6 does not violate this rule because these verses mention women in the context of the bearers of the family line - their husbands.

⁴⁸ Bishop Nikolai, *Prologue of Okhrid*, November 21, 850. See also <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi>.

⁴⁹ See the entries for March 25 and November 21 in *Prologue of Okhrid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the “Presentation” refers to Zechariah as the high priest, although Luke calls him (and looking chronologically about 15 years later) a “common” priest:

*“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a **certain priest** named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.”*⁵¹

If it were true that this Zechariah (Zacharias) fifteen years previously participated in such an important event such as “the Presentation of Mary, Mother of God” in the Holy of Holies (which would have been unprecedented), surely Luke would have written something about it to remind us (and also Matthew in the case of the death of John the Baptist in Mt. 14:1-12). Also, as already pointed out, this legend makes up for one absolutely unbelievable event, that is, the introduction of a three year old girl into the most sacred place of the Temple. Anyone who has knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures knows the regulations for the ministry of a high priest to God in the sanctuary. The religious law of the Lord allowed entry into the Holy of Holies only in strictly prescribed circumstances, namely on the “Day of Atonement” (Yom Kippur) once a year. Moses communicates to his brother Aaron, the first Jewish high priest, God's warning about the manner of entry into the Holy of Holies:

*“...and the Lord said to Moses: ‘Tell Aaron your brother **not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil**, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat... And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself. Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die. He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times... Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness. **There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out**, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel... This shall be **a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month**, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD... This shall be*

⁵¹ Lk. 1:5. Author's emphasis.

*an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.’ And he did as the Lord commanded Moses.”*⁵²

Pay attention to the part of this text that clearly defines the **only circumstance** when the High Priest could ever **dare** to enter the most sacred room of the Temple (i.e. “the Tent of Meeting” or “Tabernacle” before the Temple was built):

- (1) It had to be during the Day of Atonement, which took place on the tenth day of the month Tishra (the seventh month of the Jewish calendar) (Lev. 16:29-30);
- (2) Wearing special attire for the occasion, the High Priest had to sacrifice for atonement on behalf of the people and their sins (3-11);
- (3) The High Priest had to burn incense on the altar of incense that was in the sanctuary, which was located in front of the curtain which divided the sanctuary from the “Holy of Holies” (12-13);
- (4) The High Priest could enter only with the blood of sacrificial animals (34);
- (5) The High Priest had to go twice to the Holy of Holies of the temple (behind the curtain), first with the blood of a bull, and then with the blood of a goat, then sprinkling blood on the mercy seat and on the east side seven times with his finger seven times dipped in a bowl full of blood (14-15);
- (6) No one dared to accompany the High Priest into the Temple while he was performing the purification of sins before the Lord on behalf of the nation of Israel (17);
- (7) The Lord intended this ordinance to be observed as an eternal decree (i.e. fully unchanging for all time) (29, 34);
- (8) Every High Priest had to abide by all the regulations firmly established in God's law given to Moses. Otherwise, the Lord would certainly punish them by death (13).

This ordinance was mentioned and confirmed by the New Testament:

*“Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.⁷ But into the second part the high priest went **alone once a year, not without blood**, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance...”*⁵³

If the author of Hebrews had known an exception to this rule, a deviation from the commandments of God, without a doubt he would have mentioned it after the seventh verse of this chapter. Since this letter was written at least seventy years after the alleged entry of Mary into the Temple with Zechariah, surely this writer inspired by God would have known of this event. The fact of the matter is that neither the author of this text, nor any other apostle elsewhere in the New Testament mentions anything of the sort. Therefore, we have to conclude that the story of the Presentation of Mary, based on non-biblical texts, never happened.

⁵² Lev. 16:2, 11-17, 29-30, 34. Author’s emphasis.

⁵³ Heb. 9:6-7. Author’s emphasis.

Of course, Bishop Nikolai was well aware of all the contradictions to the Orthodox traditions by the biblical texts. Yet, he wished to provide a convenient rationalization that would assist the case of Eastern theologians of the church. Bishop Nikolai mentions an explanation made by the Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Okhrid (who lived in the 9th-12th century after Christ, his life is related in the *Prologues of Okhrid* on December 31, page 959):

“St. Theophylact of Ohrid says that Zacharias ‘**was outside himself and possessed by God**’ when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain - otherwise, his action could not be explained.”⁵⁴

So, in the opinion of the Blessed Theophylact, this act of Zechariah is completely inexplicable - as in all situations that violate God’s commandments. However, he attempts to rationalize this myth by saying the High Priest was “outside himself and possessed by God.” However, it remains unclear how it is possible that in one moment, a prohibition that God had commanded suddenly leads to another case where a person feels “overwhelmed” and does the opposite of God’s will? The Apostle Paul gives very clear instructions:

“*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*”⁵⁵

and

“*...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*”⁵⁶

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle clearly speaks from God to the hearts of his servants. He gives instruction to obey His will, not to violate it. Again, this principle clearly shows that the event of the “Presentation of Mary”, in fact, never took place.

The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The Orthodox Church strongly champions the belief that Mary remained “chaste”, i.e. a perpetual virgin. As we earlier examined the issue, this is not true. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to delve into this topic a little deeper from some different angles and to arrive at a correct conclusion.

“When the All-Holy Virgin completed the fourteenth year after her birth and was entering her fifteenth year, after having spent eleven years of living and serving in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests informed her that, according to the Law, she could not remain in the Temple but was required to be betrothed and enter into marriage. What a great surprise to the priests when the All-Holy Virgin answered that she had dedicated her life to God and that she desired to remain a Virgin until death, not wanting to enter into marriage with anyone! Then, according to Divine Providence, Zacharias, the high

⁵⁴ Bishop Nikolai, *Prologue of Okhrid*, (November 21), 850-1. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁵ Eph. 5:17.

⁵⁶ Phil. 2:13.

priest and father of the Forerunner, under the inspiration of God, and in agreement with the other priests, gathered twelve unwed men from the Tribe of David to betroth the Virgin Mary to one of them to preserve her virginity and to care for her. She was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth who was her kinsman.”⁵⁷

“Under the acceptable role of one betrothed, she could live in virginity and thus fulfill her desire and formally satisfy the Law, for it was then unknown in Israel for maidens to vow virginity to the end of their lives. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ.”⁵⁸

From just these texts we learn about the alleged oath attributed to Mary before the Lord, which committed herself to eternal virginity and celibacy. We learn also that the elderly man Joseph received the young girl Mary with full knowledge that she would become the future mother of the Savior - and that she would give birth as a virgin, without having intercourse with a man.⁵⁹ However, it remains unclear why sacred tradition has to mention the issue that the “elderly man” Joseph wanted to divorce Mary, who was more than sixty years his junior, when he discovered her pregnancy? Should Joseph not have rejoiced instead since Zechariah told him everything in advance? Also, why did the angel have to come to Joseph in a dream and tell him to marry Mary when he was supposed to only be her guardian?!⁶⁰ (Remember that marriage and custody are not synonyms for one and the same phenomenon.) Scripture describes the angelic command to Joseph regarding Mary in the following manner:

⁵⁷ *Prologue from Okhrid*, March 25, 210. In complete contradiction of “sacred tradition”, Orthodox theologian Dr. Lazar Milin in his book *The Scientific Justification of Religion* says that Scripture clearly shows that Joseph planned to unite with Mary in true marriage, saying: “And Joseph? According to the words of the Bible, Joseph had **a really serious intention to take Mary as his wife**... So it is no wonder that **he really wanted to take** Mary as his wife, and thus the gospel and even the angel of the Lord called her his wife.” It is obvious that Mr. Milin either does not believe in his own “sacred tradition” or else considered it normal that an elderly man who was eighty years old to marry a young girl who was old enough to be his great-granddaughter. By that logic, when he found out Mary was pregnant, it was natural for Joseph to assume she cheated on him. See: *Church and Sect*, 201. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, (November 21), 851.

⁵⁹ This whole story is understood because the “high priest” Zechariah certainly knew who “entered” into the Holy of Holies 11 years ago. (He knew that she was no ordinary girl, but the “Most Holy Mother of God”.) Joseph also would have realized this fact and accordingly should have expected Mary’s pregnancy and birthing of the Son of God – that is, if the Orthodox story really were true.

⁶⁰ The Holy Fathers Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, and John of Damascus say that under the guise of “marital union” of Mary with Joseph, the Lord wanted her to conceal the birth of the Virgin from the Devil. This is, according to these church authorities, the only reason that Mary lived with an old man under the guise of marriage. Since the devil closely monitored all the young girls since the time of Isaiah, Mary is “married” to Joseph in order to deceive the Evil One to think that Jesus was born from the natural marital conception. See: Justin Popovic, *Lives of the Saints*, December, 723.

Of course, this interpretation is quite naive. If he really were closely monitoring the young girls in Israel, Satan would certainly have noticed the arrival of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth and the occasion that was foretold, as well as the departure of Mary from Elizabeth (Luke 1:26-55), since all this happened before Mary moved into Joseph's house.

“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...**”⁶¹

Joseph’s Children in the Light of Sacred Tradition and Scripture

This section will examine the claims of Orthodoxy that James, Joseph (Josiah), Simon, and Judas were not sons conceived by Mary, but rather the elder sons of Joseph from his first marriage.

Bishop Nikolai asserts that these other sons of Joseph came from an earlier marriage, in which he also had several daughters.⁶²

“Not only was he made worthy of the Kingdom of God but also his sons and daughters were. What father would want anything more than that his son would be an apostle of Christ? And Joseph had two sons who were apostles.”⁶³

But, not all the "holy fathers" concur with the idea that they were children of Joseph. Orthodox Church historian Eusebius Popovic tells us in his *General Church History*:

“In place of His brothers and sisters at the time of His death, Jesus commanded His disciple John to perform the duties of a spiritual son in relation to his mother Mary. From this event, **the oldest church tradition interpreted it one way, while the oldest apocryphal gospel interpreted it another way.** Rather than understanding these other siblings to be the children of Mary, **some** thought they were children of Joseph from an earlier marriage, while **others** considered them to be the children of Cleopas and Mary the ‘sister’ of the Mother of the Lord.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Mt. 1:20, 24. Author’s emphasis.

⁶² From the Orthodox book *Light of the World*, Third Edition, (Belgrade, 2001), 61, we learn that this belief comes from sources outside of the Bible in the Eastern churches, one of which is the Greek historian Nikephoros: “According to the Greek historian Nikephoros, Joseph was married to Salome, daughter of Haggai, who was also Zechariah’s brother (father of St. John the Baptist). Joseph with Salome spawned four sons: James, Simon, Judah, and Josiah, and three daughters: Esther, Tamar (or Martha, or Mary) and Salome. Salome married Zebedee, whose sons James and John were apostles of the Lord. After the death of Salome, Joseph was a widower living honestly and fairly. After eighty years of life, the priests including the high priest Zacharias chose him, after the fourteenth birthday of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, to become her guardian. He died ten years later.”

⁶³ *The Prologue from Ochrid*, December 24, 942. However, the Orthodox, not only believe that Joseph was the father of two of Christ’s apostles (those who are not among the twelve), but that he was also the grandfather of two more of the Apostles (which are included among the twelve). In the previous footnote, the quoted text from Orthodox literature tells us that Joseph’s daughter from first marriage, Salome, gave birth to James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Therefore, according to Orthodox belief, Joseph, who in the Bible is called the husband of Mary, Mother of Jesus, was the grandfather of the Apostles James and John, about which the Bible says nothing.

⁶⁴ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, 115. Author’s emphasis. According to the view of George Kedrin, Mary, the “Mother of the Lord”, had a sister who was a daughter of Joseph from his first marriage. This other Mary later married her uncle Cleopas. See: *Lives of the Saints*, December, 752.

It is obvious that there has not been unanimous agreement on the Orthodox view that Joseph had children from a prior first marriage (even today, not everyone agrees with this supposition). Consequently, we can conclude that the information Bishop Nikolai has communicated is not verified facts, but rather a matter of debate even among sincere members of the Ecumenical Church.⁶⁵

Although no consensus exists among the holy fathers on the identity of whose children are the brothers and sisters of Jesus, it is obvious that they will definitely not admit the possibility that these brothers and sisters are the children of Mary born in marriage to Joseph. If they admitted this case, then the entire teachings of the traditional churches of the East and the West regarding the “Mother of God” would be devastated. After all, it is not at all clear how the Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians arrive at the conclusion that these children cannot claim both Joseph and Mary as parents, but instead they attribute them as “second class relatives”. Specifically, their arguments rely on the words in the Greek New Testament text used to describe Jesus' brothers and sisters as close relatives (brothers and sisters in the example of uncles, cousins, etc.). Former Catholic James G. McCarthy responds to the Roman Catholic belief (which is identical to that of Orthodoxy) in his book *The Gospel According to Rome*, which was translated into the Croatian language:

“While it is true that the Greek words 'adelphos' (brother) and 'adelpa' (sister) can be interpreted in a broader sense at times, the primary meaning of these words refers to those that have common parents. Unless the context otherwise demands [that one should] apply a secondary meaning, one [should] apply the primary meaning of the words. If the Holy Spirit had intended for Christians to venerate Mary as the ‘perpetual Virgin’, then surely there never would have been any mention of His relatives without explanation of why they were called His brothers and sisters. Then, the Holy Spirit could have explicitly said they were not brothers and sisters and, in fact, could have used two other Greek words. When Paul calls Mark the nephew of Barnabas (Colossians 4.10), he uses the Greek word 'anepsios'. Luke uses the word 'sungenis' in a general reference to the fact that Mary and Elizabeth were relatives (Luke 1, 36).”⁶⁶

Looking ahead of what was just quoted, it would be interesting to observe the age of the brothers of Jesus from the perspectives of the Bible and sacred tradition. Namely, as we shall see, the data coming from this study once again confirm the claim of Holy Scripture that it was Mary who gave birth to these children through her marriage to Joseph.

“In the house of Joseph, the All-Holy Virgin continued to live as she did in the Temple of Solomon, occupying her time in the reading of Sacred Scripture, in prayer, in Godly-thoughts, in fasting and in handiwork. She rarely went anywhere outside the house nor was she interested in worldly things and events. She spoke very little to anyone, if at all,

⁶⁵ Western (i.e. Roman Catholic) ecclesiastical authorities subscribe to the view that Joseph was never previously married, while the Eastern (i.e. Orthodox) authorities claimed he was married previously. (This disagreement occurred while the Eastern and Western Churches were still unified and “Orthodox” before the 11th century A.D.). See: *Lives of the Saints*, December, 751.

⁶⁶ James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome*, (Krapina, Croatia: 2004), 164-5.

and never without special need. **More frequently she communicated with both of Joseph's daughters.**"⁶⁷

"James is called the Lord's brother because he was the son of the righteous Joseph, the betrothed of the Most-holy Theotokos. When the righteous Joseph was near death, he divided his estate among his sons, and wanted to leave a portion to the Lord Jesus, the son of the Most-holy Virgin, but all the other brothers opposed this, not regarding Jesus as their brother. James greatly loved Jesus and declared that he would include Jesus in his share. **That is why he is called the Lord's brother.** From the beginning, James was devoted to the Lord Jesus. According to tradition, he traveled to Egypt with the Most-holy Virgin and Joseph, when Herod sought to slay the newborn King... The Lord numbered him among His Seventy Apostles... **He was Bishop of Jerusalem for thirty years and zealously governed the Church of God... James was sixty-six years old when he suffered for Christ.**"⁶⁸

These texts and traditions lead us to one main conclusion: all of the brothers (and sisters) of the Lord Jesus Christ were older than Him. The first text says that when the 15-year-old Mary came to the house of Joseph, the old man, he already had adult daughters. The other texts (the Prologue for October 23 as well as December 26) state that James, the brother of the Lord, was already an adult man (a full-grown man) at the time of Jesus' birth.

The sacred tradition of the Orthodox Church adheres to the belief that Joseph was eighty years old when he took custody of Mary. If we assume that Joseph had married his first wife between the age of 20 and 30 years old (although it was custom in Jewish society for men and women to marry at a much younger age), and then she gave birth to her children over the next thirty years, then it would be quite realistic to expect that his youngest child during the birth of the Savior would be about 20 years old and the eldest about 50 years old (which would mean that all the children from his first marriage would have been older than the mother of Jesus). If this were the case, which is precisely what sacred tradition would lead us to believe, then these logical conclusions would strongly contradict what is written in Scripture.

When he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians in about 55 A.D., the Apostle Paul mentions the Lord's brothers (i.e., all other sons of Joseph were called "brothers of the Lord", not only James) as itinerant preachers of the gospel:

*"Do we have no right to eat and drink? **Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?"**"⁶⁹*

⁶⁷ Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue from Okhrid*, (March 25), 210. Author's emphasis. See also <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, (October 23), 773-4. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 9:4-6. Author's emphasis.

The reason for citing these verses is that they directly mention the brothers of the Lord who were married and traveled together with their wives on missionary trips (v.5). At the time Paul wrote this letter, according to the tradition of the Eastern Church, the Lord's brothers would have been between 80 and 110 years old. Yet, Paul highlights them as active preachers who travel with their wives. Now Luke 2:36-37 tells us that the prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, was 84 years old at the time of Christ and considered very old. It is highly unlikely that the brothers of the Lord could have been much older than Anna, nor thereby could they have been very active in the apostolic ministry. On the other hand, this writing of the Apostle Paul makes sense if James and the other sons of Joseph were also offspring of Mary who were born after Jesus came into the world! Even Bishop Nikolai, probably inadvertently, gives us the correct age when James suffered martyrdom, by which date we can also determine when he was born.

If we know the fact that the Lord Christ was born probably around 4 or 5 B.C.⁷⁰, then that means His public ministry began around 27 A.D. when He was 30 years old. The Lord publicly preached about three and a half years, and His earthly ministry concluded at His death in 31 A.D. According to Bishop Nikolai and historical records, in that same year, He founded the first Christian church in Jerusalem where the first overseer (i.e. bishop, which means "overseer" among the main elders of the church) was the Lord's brother James. The fact cited by Bishop Nikolai shows that James was only **63 years old** at the time of his martyrdom. According to the historians Joseph Flavius (first century A.D.) and Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (fourth century A.D.)⁷¹, the overseer of the church of Jerusalem was killed in 62 A.D., which is consistent with the thesis that James served in the church for thirty years. But if these dates are accurate (and certainly that they are), then simple math would lead us to the conclusion that **James, the brother of the Lord, was born in 1 B.C., approximately three years after the birth of Lord Jesus Christ.** This calculation is completely in line with the Bible which claims that Jesus was Mary's firstborn son, and after His birth, Mary gave birth to several other sons and daughters. Consistent with this data, the brothers of the Lord at the time of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians would have been between 35 and 55 years of age. This age bracket seems much more consistent with Paul's description of them as being active in missionary travels accompanied by their wives.

But, there is still more evidence that confirms the historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth had younger brothers and sisters who were the children both of Mary and Joseph. One such testimony comes from one of the ancient messianic psalms penned by God's anointed servant, David, King of Israel. As is known, King David as God's prophet predicted many events in the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ and described them in

⁷⁰ Jesus Christ was not born in 1 A.D. This date was established by the Roman monk Dionysius Exiguus in the year 525 A.D. However, his calculation of the exact year of Jesus' birth was inaccurate by 4-5 years. Recent historical calculations show that Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Jesus was born some time before that, so in accordance with the time and the beginning of the new era, His actual birth date had to be several years before 1 A.D. (but it is unlikely that the historical calendar will ever be readjusted). See: Pavel Borovic, *The Bible Handbook*, v.2 (1987), 597.

⁷¹ See: *New Testament Commentary: Acts of the Apostles* (Good News: Novi Sad, 1986), 176.

the Old Testament. For example, David predicted the way that Christ would suffer during His death as well as His resurrection from the dead.⁷²

⁷²⁷² Here are some verses from the Psalms that are directly related to the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross at Golgotha, and the words that would be recited by the Messiah and His opponents in those moments. During this review, first I will cite one verse from the prophetic Psalms, and then its parallel (fulfillment) in the writings of the New Testament:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?” (Ps. 22:1)

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Mt. 27:46; see also Mk. 15:34)

“All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’” (Ps. 22:7-8)

“And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ... ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Mt. 27:39-43)

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.” (Ps. 22:15)

*“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, **that the Scripture might be fulfilled**, said, ‘I thirst!’”* (Jn. 19:28) Author’s emphasis.

“They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Ps. 69:21)

“...they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink... Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink.” (Mt. 27:34, 48)

“For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet... They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.” (Ps. 22:16, 18)

*“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,’ **that the Scripture might be fulfilled** which says: ‘They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.’ Therefore the soldiers did these things.”* (Jn. 19:23-4) Author’s emphasis.

In relation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, King David, nearly a thousand years before that glorious event, wrote the following prophetic words:

*“I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. **Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.** For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”* (Ps. 16:8-10) Author’s emphasis.

The Apostle Peter confirms the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in his sermon on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Paul also did a few years later:

These verses from the Psalms of David, which are listed in the previous footnotes, will serve as proof of my next claim. Psalm 69:8 refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, i.e. a prophecy about Him from ancient times. King David wrote this verse to predict the fact that the Lord Christ will not be accepted as the promised Messiah of Israel even in His own home, i.e. among His close blood relatives in the household. John wrote this:

*“His brothers therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ **For even His brothers did not believe in Him.**”*⁷³

However, the events which took place in the home of Jesus of Nazareth, which included unbelief and mockery from His closest relatives, David foretold by the prophetic Spirit centuries earlier. Speaking on behalf of the Jewish Messiah, who was the father and Messiah (as in anointed – the Anointed True Messiah Christ) the son of Jesse said:

*“I have become a stranger to my brothers, **And an alien to my mother’s children...**”*⁷⁴

This verse from the Psalm mentioned above stresses that the Messiah would be rejected **even by the sons of His own mother**, i.e. by His very own brothers! The proof of this verse from Psalm 69 refers just to Jesus Christ and not to David himself (as the Orthodox would likely protest). The following verse, which is interconnected to the previous verse, demonstrates the link to the Messiah:

*“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.”*⁷⁵

*“For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. **For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.** You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ ‘Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, **foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.** This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.’” (Acts 2:25-32) Author’s emphasis.*

“Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ ‘For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.’” (Acts 13:35-7)

⁷³ Jn. 7:3-5. Author’s emphasis.

⁷⁴ Ps. 69:8. Author’s emphasis.

⁷⁵ Ps. 69:9.

Anyone who reads the Holy Scriptures knows this verse, as it is, indeed, “split” into two parts and quoted in the New Testament. This verse exclusively relates to the ministry of Jesus the Son of God. By applying this verse to the Savior Jesus, the apostles describe for us the Lord of life:

*“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’ **Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’**”⁷⁶*

*“For even Christ did not please Himself; **but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’**”⁷⁷*

Even after all the previously presented Biblical and historical facts, it might be possible that Orthodox theologians would still need more evidence that Jesus' mother Mary had other sons and daughters. Psalm 69:8 clearly describes the rejection of the Messiah by His very own brothers born of the same mother as Jesus. Note also that the verse is written in the third person. “He” cannot refer to David, as David is the author of the Psalm. He would have written “I”, not “he”. But for those who still seek more evidence, here is further proof.

Nowhere do the Old Testament books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles mention such a fate for David. Furthermore, based on the speeches of Peter and Paul in the book of Acts, it is obvious that the Psalms refer to Jesus as prophet and king (Ps. 16:10; Acts. 2:26-31, 13:35-37). Even in spite of referring to them in the first person, the David Psalm describes the incorruptibility of the Messiah’s body and His resurrection from the dead. Given that King David had physically died a long time ago, they consider the prophecies to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. The same also applies to the Messiah’s garments, and men throwing dice for them (Ps. 22:18), as well as other prophecies. All these statements are fulfilled one hundred percent only in the life of Christ the Lord. Therefore, Psalm 69:8, together with verse 9, which is also directly linked to Jesus, refer exclusively to Him and His brethren in the body (half-brothers born of His mother). Jesus’ own half-brother subjected Him to unbelief and mockery (consistent with John 7:5).

The Historical Setting of the Introduction of the Doctrine of Mary’s Perpetual Virginity Was Introduced into Christian Dogma

Holy Tradition informs us that not only did Mary conceive Jesus and retain her virginity, but she remained a virgin during and after childbirth.⁷⁸ Bishop Nikolai writes:

⁷⁶ Jn. 2:13-7. Author’s emphasis.

⁷⁷ Rom. 15:3. Author’s emphasis.

“When the Most-holy Virgin immaculately gave birth to the Lord and Savior, Salome came to visit her. She was amazed that such a young girl could give birth without the aid of a midwife, swaddle the Child herself, and beside all of that still be on her feet. When it was explained to Salome that this birth was of God and not man, that it was immaculate and without pain, and that the Virgin Mother remained a Virgin after birth as she was before birth, Salome did not believe it, but rather she stretched out her hand to the body of the Most-holy Virgin to examine it, after the custom of a midwife, and to find out if this was indeed so. And because of her unbelief and insolence, a punishment befell her: her hand was seized and withered. The aged woman was greatly frightened by the miracle and lamented over her withered hand. However, when she touched the Divine Child later, her hand was restored to health like it was before. Thus, Salome believed in the virginity of the Most-pure Virgin Mary and in the Divinity of Christ.”⁷⁹

It is completely evident that in the absence of God-inspired biblical texts to prove their beliefs, Orthodox teachers are forced to resort to very dubious sources of tradition. Previously, I have already explained in sufficient detail the teaching of sacred tradition about Mary and her children, so there is no further need to dwell on that issue. Suffice it to say only that the evangelists never mention these “miracles” of the “drying up” and healing of the hands of Mary’s judgmental midwife during the Lord’s birth. Such a “miracle” would have come to the attention of the New Testament writers had it truly occurred.

As demonstrated earlier, the first century Church had completely different teaching about Mary than those in the Orthodox Church would have us believe. (This chapter will deal with this subject in more detail.) However, it is necessary to understand the historical setting when this doctrine appeared in Christian dogma.

Starting with the second century after Christ and the ceasing of apostolic prophecies, false teachings began to seep into the Church. One of these teachings was the interpretation which came from some of the church fathers that Adam’s wife Eve, the mother of all human beings, committed the first sin not by eating the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 3:6), but rather by having sexual intercourse with the serpent (i.e. Satan).⁸⁰ These religious authorities began to teach the concept that Mary was Eve’s counterpart. Death came through Eve and life through Mary. Eve gave birth by the words of the serpent, while Mary conceived “by the words of the Lord.”

⁷⁸ The hymen (Latin: hymen) is a thin membrane at the entrance to the vagina in women. Typically, after the first act of sexual intercourse, the hymen is torn. According to sacred tradition, when Mary conceived and gave birth to Christ, her hymen remained intact.

⁷⁹ Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue from Okhrid*, (December 29) 954. Justin Popovic informs us that this story was taken from the apocryphal, non-canonical *Protoevangelium of James* which was allegedly written in the 2nd century, which means that it would have been too late for the apostles to have written it, unlike the New Testament gospels. See: *Lives of Saints* (December), 732.

⁸⁰ The basis of this theory is probably this verse: “Not as **Cain who was of the wicked one** and murdered his brother.” (1 Jn. 3:12) Author’s emphasis. Some modern cults hold to such an interpretation. See: Ann Brown, *The Form of a Woman*, (Step Press: Zagreb, 1996) 48-49.

For the church fathers who interpreted the sin of Eve to be adultery, the virginity of Mary stood in opposition to the immorality of Eve. Her sin and perverted sexuality contrasted with the faith and virtue of Jesus' mother. Already at the end of the second and early third century, the emergence of monasticism in certain Christian circles corresponded with a special exaltation of the concept of the life of celibacy. Church fathers including Ambrose, Athanasius, Cyprian, and Jerome made Mary out to be a model of Christian virginity. At the end of the fourth century (383 A.D.), Jerome wrote the work in which he claimed that Jesus was the only child of Mary, while he considered the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the gospels to be more distant relatives. By the middle of the fifth century, Mary was proclaimed "Immaculate" (a Perpetual Virgin). In the year 649 (in the sixth century), her permanent virginity was proclaimed as official church dogma.⁸¹

Therefore, it is clear that the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Jesus' mother derived from the minds of later church leaders and not from the Holy Scriptures. This conclusion is completely true, and the following text from Orthodox literature will further demonstrate it. In it we clearly see that the Eastern Church finds support in its belief, first of all, in the apocryphal texts and specific interpretation of certain texts of the Bible. In truth, neither has anything to do with Jesus or Mary. Here is the interesting text from an Orthodox magazine:

"With the name of the Most Holy Virgin, and only with Her name, are two Divine attributes:

She is eternally a Virgin (Innocent Girl) and She gave birth to God, She is the Theotokos.

No one else has these attributes, nor will any other woman have them, nor anyone who ever existed on this earth.

The Eternal Virginity of the Most Holy Mother of God is threefold: She was a Virgin when she conceived God's Son, She remained a Virgin during the birth of Her Son, and She remains a virgin after He was born. 'A Virgin conceiving, a Virgin bearing, a Virgin pregnant, a Virgin bringing forth, a Virgin perpetual,' says **the inspired Blessed Augustine**.⁸² About Her Virginity, Isaiah prophesied: 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.'⁸³ The Holy Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai saw the burning bush that was not consumed and from there the Angel of the Lord spoke to him. This burning bush symbolizes the Most Holy Mother of God; just as the bush burned, but was not consumed, so also the Most Holy conceived, gave birth, and still remained a Virgin. As the Divine Word moved into Her without breaking the seal of Her virginity, so He also enabled her to give birth without violating Her virginity. The Holy Prophet Ezekiel had a

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 48. (Translator's note: "When defining Mary's virginity as a dogma at the Lateran Council in 649, Pope Martin I proclaimed solemnly: Mary is virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus." Cited from <http://www.es.catholic.net/sacerdotes/430/996/articulo.php?id=19021> .)

⁸² See *Sermons* 186:1 (AD 411) on http://www.catholic.com/library/Mary_Ever_Virgin.asp . Translator's note.

⁸³ Isa. 7:14.

vision of the east gate and was told, ‘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.’⁸⁴ Regarding this holy place, **[John] the Damascan** interpreted as follows: ‘As the LORD kept a Virgin the One who conceived Him, He also kept Her virginity inviolate when He was born. He only went through the gate and kept it closed.’ **The Canonical books of the New Testament books, and even more so the apocryphal gospels, support the dogma of the perpetual virginity of the Most Holy Mother of God.**⁸⁵

We offer a few brief comments on this excerpt. First, it is true that the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah Jesus would be born of a virgin without intercourse with a man, just as the apostle Matthew confirms in his gospel (Mt. 1:22-3). However, neither the prophet Isaiah nor the apostle Matthew state anywhere the idea that this girl will remain a Virgin after His birth (in terms of her whole hymen remaining intact). Furthermore, the texts from Isaiah and Matthew do not confirm the so-called “church dogma” that the Messiah is the only child of His mother. One cannot simply read into the Bible that interpretation which the Word does not support. A faithful interpreter of the Bible can only read what the Bible clearly presents in its own text. The only thing that was important to Isaiah and Matthew is the emphasis on the fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in a completely supernatural way. Neither Isaiah nor Matthew promoted teaching that Mary's hymen remained “unbroken”.

However, we notice that the text of the magazine states that the authority of this Orthodox teaching rests not upon the first century apostolic accounts inspired by God. Rather, Orthodoxy bases its teaching of Mary upon the “inspired” interpretation of the blessed Augustine who lived in the fourth and fifth century after Christ, therefore, more than four hundred years after the birth of the Lord Messiah. It is even a more blatant example of distorting the Book of Ezekiel when the magazine alleges the passage refers to the Mother of Christ. Nor does it properly cite examples from the apostolic writings (in contrast to the justifiable citation of Isaiah from the Matthew text). The interpretation of St. John of Damascus is as close to truth as the sky is to the land. Let us prove the following facts from the Old Testament books.

First, in order to gain the proper understanding of this passage, we need to read it in its proper context. From the perspective of Orthodox theologians who read into Ezekiel 44:2 the bride, they should carefully read the whole context of chapters 40-48. If they had done so, they would have recognized that the prophet describes in these chapters the vision of the future restored Temple of Jerusalem, and the residence of God's glory among His people, Israel. According to the historical record in Ezekiel 40:1, Ezekiel received this vision in 572 B.C. This vision occurred twenty-five years after the partial scattering of the Jews from Judea over the Babylonian Empire by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C., i.e. fourteen years after the final destruction of Jerusalem and the beautiful temple of Solomon's temple in 586 B.C.

⁸⁴ Eze. 44:2.

⁸⁵ *Holy Prince Lazar*, No. 1 (5), Prizren, 1994, 60. Author's emphasis.

The reason for the scattering of the Jews among the Gentiles and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple stems from complete national apostasy from their Lord and their wide acceptance of idolatrous customs over several centuries previously. After the union of David and Solomon's empire broke up into two parts, Jeroboam, the ruler of the northern kingdom, legislated idolatry and introduced idols of pagan deities into his own territory (1 Ki.12:26-33). Shortly thereafter, the southern territory fell into apostasy as a result of popular rejection of repentance preached by Old Testament prophets. The northern kingdom suffered defeat at the hands of Assyria in 722 B.C., while the southern kingdom finally succumbed to Babylon in 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was looted and the temple collapsed to the ground.

The Temple of God, which represented the place where the glory of the Lord was supposed to be manifested as a sign of His presence among His chosen people⁸⁶, was demolished. Similar to the time of Samuel when the Ark of the Covenant was stolen by the Philistines and transferred to the pagan temple of their idols, the people could also say, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (1 Sam. 4:22)

The vision of Ezekiel, described in chapters 40-48, is set while the people had been weeping about their captivity for years, with Jerusalem and the temple lying in ruins. The Lord reveals to His servant future restoration. He strongly emphasizes that the time will come when His glory once again will dwell among the Jewish people assembled in the country. The Lord also discloses to the prophet the smallest details of the dimensions of the future temple and all its auxiliary facilities, and tells him the Israelites will once again worship and revere Him. After God shows Ezekiel the vision of how the future temple (along with the surrounding area) will be arranged, the Lord commands Ezekiel examine and measure the dimensions of the wall on all sides surrounding the Temple complex. On this wall there were three doors of equal size facing the north, south and east. While one could enter through any of these doors by walking straight up to the temple court, i.e. the altar where sacrifices were performed, the very doors of the entrance to the sanctuary (the first room in the temple reserved for priests) and the most holy things faced in the direction of the eastern wall. It is from this direction, the east, that the prophet Ezekiel saw the return of the long lost glory of God to the temple:

*"Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory... And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple."*⁸⁷

After Ezekiel received some commandments that are related to the future regulation of worship, the Lord just spoke the text that is the subject of our study, which refers to the

⁸⁶ See Ex. 29:42-6; 40:32-5; 1 Ki. 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 5:13-14.

⁸⁷ Ez. 43:1-2, 4-5.

prohibition against passing through the eastern gate of the future prophecy once the glory of God re-enters the Temple:

*“Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. 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.’”*⁸⁸

So based on the contextual analysis of Ezekiel, how is it possible that anyone could read into these verses a meaning that the prophecy never intended in the first place? How can anyone turn the gate of the Temple of God into the womb (more technically, the hymen, birth canal, and uterus) of Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ?

However, if the Orthodox want to still persist in asserting that the prophecies of the east gate on the wall of the Temple of Jerusalem, through which the glory of the Lord will enter only in the future⁸⁹, symbolizes Mary's female sexual organs (the next step in the

⁸⁸ Eze. 44:1-2.

⁸⁹ Like many other Old Testament prophecies, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple has "repeated" fulfillments. The parts of the text from Ez. 40-48 are written to encourage the people of Israel who were in exile, saying the day would come when they would return to the land of their fathers, as well as the rebuilding of the demolished temple. However, if you pay good attention, verses 43:1-5 and 44:1-2 inform us that God's glory, after going through its eastern gate, will remain in the Jerusalem temple once and for all, and God will not leave his people. This is confirmed in verse 43:4-7a. The text from Ez. 47:1-12 clearly testifies that under the future temple, a source for water will gush out and flow towards the sea. Verse 12 is almost completely identical to that of Rev. 22:1-2, thus showing that these events that will take place in the distant future. We compare these verses, starting first with the Old Testament and then the New Testament:

“Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar... Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.” (Ez. 47:1, 12)

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:1-2)

After we saw in this way that the fullness of the prophecies of Ezekiel for the restoration of the Temple will be completely fulfilled only after the arrival of the Messiah and the Kingdom and the creation of a New Earth and a New Heaven, we must emphasize that the prophecy of the entrance of the glory of the Lord through the east gate (44:2) has yet to be fulfilled in history. Namely, although the Jerusalem temple was re-built several decades later, by Jewish exiles returning from captivity led by Zerubbabel and then Ezra and Nehemiah, the oracle of the Lord's glory returning to the sanctuary never took place. The reconstructed temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. This temple did not satisfy the word from Ez. 43:7 which the Lord proclaimed to the sons of Israel that He will dwell among them forever. On the other hand, the New Testament gives us the answer as to when the glory of the Lord will return and forever dwell among the people of God. In Revelation, it is written that it will be only after the establishment of God's Kingdom:

logic of this misinterpretation of the holy fathers), they will have to answer some more, and one could even say, somewhat bizarre questions. One question, for example, would relate to the remaining two gates on the wall of the future temple in Jerusalem. Unlike the eastern gate through which only the Lord's glory would pass, many godly worshipers would be able to continuously enter and leave the Temple (Ez. 46:8-10). Which of Mary's other bodily organs do these other gates represent? Also, if we accept the Orthodox belief that the east gate symbolizes Mary's womb, which gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ, how would Orthodoxy explain the meaning of the next verse 43? Who then is the "prince" who is permitted to sit in the gate and eat bread there and to enter and exit through the north or south gate? Of course, it logically follows that the Orthodox would be unable to give meaningful answers to these questions, because their teaching clearly is unfounded. Their teaching relies upon the distortion of Biblical texts outside of their proper contexts.

After everything that we have learned about the true meaning of Ezekiel's visions, we can only conclude that the argumentation of Orthodoxy, in the absence of biblical evidence to confirm their doctrines, is forced to resort to distorting verses and prophecies and misquoting verses completely out of their actual context. Such desperation clearly indicates their helplessness and inability to contradict the crystal clear teaching of the Bible that Mary gave birth to other children after Jesus was born. Of course, this fruitless effort by the Orthodox to deny the clear teaching of Scripture clearly cannot even compare to the grave they have dug for themselves in equating sinless Mary with the burning bush where Moses encountered the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament (Ex. 3:1-10).

Such comparison of various biblical events and personalities, which in general have nothing to do with one another (such as the burning bush that is not consumed with Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus) are used deliberately to rationalize and preserve the unbiblical doctrines of the so-called "Church of Christ" (Orthodox Church) regarding the perpetual virginity of Mary.

"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God... And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.'" (Rev. 21:2-3, 22:3-5)

From all these proofs, it now becomes completely clear that the prophecy mentioned in Ez. 44:1-2 has absolutely nothing to do with Mary the mother of Jesus, nor is there any statement whatsoever that she would remain a "Perpetual Virgin". This arbitrary interpretation of Scripture by St. John of Damascus is probably the result of his insufficient knowledge of the Old and New Testament. The saint mentioned lived in the eighth century after Christ, a period of significant spiritual ignorance and flourishing of various unbiblical doctrines and religious practices. In the end, these false doctrines and practices found their place in official Ecumenical Christianity, which today is manifested in the form of modern Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

However, as much as the holy fathers try to compare Mary with bushes and temple gates, it still remains unclear why they could not find other comparisons. For example, what about the ass of Balaam, the only animal that God created, at some point it spoke with a human voice and communicated to a stubborn prophet a meaningful message (Num. 22)? The logic would follow that just as the ass was permitted only one time in its life to speak in a human voice, so Mary was the only one worthy to give birth to the Son of God once, and afterward could never have any more children again. Well, perhaps we can breathe a sigh of relief that the Orthodox apologists have not completely fallen into such blasphemy and lunacy.

Our long study of the tradition held by the Eastern Church has nearly touched on most of the beliefs that are related to Jesus' mother. As was the case until now, once again we will demonstrate that Orthodox doctrine is completely contrary to Biblical revelation.

The Assumption of the Holy Mother of God

The belief of the Orthodox Church, which finally crowned Jesus' mother on the throne as the Heavenly Queen and Mediatrix, and which has no foundation in Scripture, is the doctrine of Mary's Resurrection and Assumption into Heaven. Here is a narrative from sacred tradition:

“John had a home on Zion in Jerusalem in which the Theotokos settled and remained there to live out the end of her days on earth. By her prayers, gentle counsels, meekness and patience, she greatly assisted the apostles of her Son... On one occasion, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and revealed to her that within three days she will find repose. The angel gave her a palm-branch to be carried at the time of her funeral procession. She returned to her home with great joy, desiring in her heart once more to see in this life, all of the apostles of Christ. **The Lord fulfilled her wish and all of the apostles, borne by angels in the clouds, gathered at the same time at the home of John on Zion.** With great rejoicing, she saw the holy apostles, encouraged them, counseled them and comforted them. Following that, she peacefully gave up her soul to God without any pain or physical illness. The apostles took the coffin with her body from which an aromatic fragrance emitted and, in the company of many Christians, bore it to the Garden of Gethsemane to the sepulcher of [her parents], Saints Joachim and Anna. By God's Providence, they were concealed from the evil Jews by a cloud. Anthony, a Jewish priest, grabbed the coffin with his hands with the intention of overturning it but, at that moment, **an angel of God severed both his hands.** He then cried out to the apostles for help and was healed since declaring his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. **The Apostle Thomas was absent,** again according to God's Providence, in order that a new and all-glorious mystery of the Holy Theotokos would again be revealed. On the third day, Thomas arrived and desired to venerate [kiss] the body of the Holy All-pure one. But when the apostles opened the sepulcher, they found only the winding sheet and the body was not in the tomb. That evening, the Theotokos appeared to the apostles surrounded by a myriad of angels and said to them: **‘Rejoice, I will be with you always’.** It is not

exactly known how old the Theotokos was at the time of her Falling Asleep but the overwhelming opinion is **that she was over sixty years of age.**"⁹⁰

So, as we did with the previous "celebrations of the Mother of God", so this case will also demonstrate the utter inconsistency of these beliefs in relation to the apostolic New Testament writings.

We start from the previous assertion that Mary lived more than 60 years. If this statement is correct (and this is the only statement that could be in accordance with the Bible), it means that she died between 35-50 A.D., which assumes she was between 15-20 years when Jesus was born - which is very likely. This would mean that Jesus' mother died before any of the books of the New Testament were written, e.g. during the time when Christ's teachings were still transmitted via word of mouth. Shortly afterwards, the apostles began to record the epistles and other canonized works. The first question that arises is this: why did the apostles not write a single word about Mary's Assumption, which, apparently, would have been a very important event for the salvation of the whole world? Such an event would have been much fresher in memory than those events from the time of Jesus' childhood, youth and messianic ministry!

The book of Acts describes the events that transpired from Christ's Ascension, roughly 31 A.D., to Paul's time in Rome around 60 A.D. So what is believed to be the "Assumption" would have occurred roughly midway through this time period. Regarding the alleged "Ascension of the Virgin", we can safely say it would have been considered a super miraculous even for that time period.

Despite the great miracles performed by the apostles, such as, for example, the healing of the paralytic at the entrance to the temple, the deaths of Ananias and Saphira, the martyrdom of Stephen and his vision of the glory of God and Christ in heaven, the healing of the lame at Lystra, healings by the shadow of Peter and the handkerchief of Paul, the narrative of the Resurrection and Ascension of the Theotokos contains several major miracles within just one event. We read about the angelic proclamation of the death of Mary, the apostles riding on the clouds to be in her presence, and the preaching to the apostles by a woman who was terminally ill.

However, this was not the end of the miracles. The most amazing ones are yet to follow. After the death of Mary, the apostles put her body in a coffin (though Jewish tradition and custom tells us that people at that time in Israel used open burial a lot more often than closed coffins; burial was not done in coffins, but by laying the body in a curved funeral dress in a tomb carved in rock) from which an aromatic fragrance emitted and was concealed from her enemies by a cloud. Also, we have the hands of Anthony the priest that were cut off and then healed. (This incredible event resembles the slashing and subsequent healing of the ear of Malchus, slave to the High Priest in Lk. 22:49-51 and Jn. 18:10.) This tradition in many respects mirrors events in the gospels, such as the absence of Thomas from the burial and assurance of the resurrection. Of course, the greatest sacrilege is the episodes ascribing to Mary "omnipresence" – a property which no created

⁹⁰ *The Prologue from Okhrid*, August 15, 582. Author's emphasis.

being possesses, but only God. What else could that sentence attributed to Mary mean: "**Rejoice, I will be with you always**"?⁹¹ Compare Mary's "omnipresence", which is solely a divine attribute to that which the Lord Jesus Christ applied to himself in Matthew 28:20, when he said: "*And surely I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.*"

The wise Solomon in his prayer said:

*"O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way... But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"*⁹²

The Psalmist also declares that God is present everywhere:

*"O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.*

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall^[a] on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You."⁹³*

Therefore, anyone other than the Lord who makes a claim that he (or she) will be with his disciples everywhere and in every place – this person must be omnipresent and also omniscient, all-wise, omnipotent, etc. Someone has calculated that in the present

⁹¹ *Catechism in the Home*, 4th Ed. (Religious Charity Trusteeship: Belgrade, 1991), 55. Author's emphasis.

⁹² 1 Ki. 8:23, 27. Author's emphasis.

⁹³ Ps. 139:12.

time, from the mouths of one billion and three hundred million Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers (because they all pray to God), each second of time ascend into Heaven about fifty thousand prayers - from all over the world. It is certain that no one except the Triune God can process so much information in seconds and at the same time.

The last thing I want to point out to solve the mystery of the "Assumption" is the prayer pronounced by the apostles after they saw Mary ascending. This short prayer (which is much more like a cry for help) follows:

“The apostles cried out, **‘Most Holy Mother of God, help us!’**”⁹⁴

As stated previously, Scripture not only tells us nothing about this complex event, but nowhere does it ever mention that the first Church ever named Mary “Theotokos”.⁹⁵ Not one of the verses of the New Testament that mention the mother of Jesus⁹⁶, be they spoken or written by the apostles, evangelists, or other figures mentioned in the Bible, ever refer to Mary except simply by her first name, without any other epithets.⁹⁷ If it had been customary to refer to Mary as “the Mother of God”, then one must wonder why the apostles never recorded it anywhere in the New Testament.

The German author Ernst Benz, an excellent scholar of Orthodox theology, wrote his book *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church* in gratitude to his "very valuable living and dead teachers of the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. He mentions the following:

“The development of the title Mother of God as ‘Blessed Virgin’ - Theotokos - and the evolution of the respective dogmas comprise one of the most astonishing events in the history of the ancient church. The New Testament provides only insignificant bases for this development, indeed, proofs for the creation of a special title for Mary are quite insufficient, because in contrast to Jesus Christ, who is in the center and

⁹⁴ *Catechism in the Home*, (Belgrade, 1991) 55. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁵ Although the Orthodox seminary professor Jevrem A. Ilic, in his book *The Feasts of the Orthodox Church* (Royal Serbian State Printing House: Belgrade, 1886) claims that from the moment of the resurrection of Mary, “the name of the Most Holy Mary has been glorified in all places where the name of Jesus Christ is glorified,” no such data exists neither in the apostolic writings nor in historical documents. Actually, this statement quoted by the Orthodox derives from sacred traditions and teachings of “the holy fathers,” who possessed a strong desire to impose on first century Christianity a significant part of their own erroneous beliefs. In fact, in the excerpt which I only partially quoted, Professor Ilic admitted that Mary was not called “Mother of God” in the first century, but rather it was “... **our church called her the Theotokos and Mother of God.** A commemoration of her death established the feast of ‘The Great Lady’... Observance of the feast of ‘The Great Lady’ allows us to glorify the Mother of God in Heaven, and warns us that we are obliged to pray the Mother of God, as our intercessor before God.”

⁹⁶ Mt. 1:20, 2:13, 14, 20, 13:55; Mk. 3:31-35, 6:3; Lk. 1:27, 30, 38-39, 46, 56, 2:5, 16, 19, 34, 51, 8:19-21; Jn. 2:3-5, 19:25-27; Acts. 1:14.

⁹⁷As is known, the apostles wrote their gospel accounts some 30 to 60 years after the events occurred. Therefore, they would have known if Mary were called “Theotokos”, or else even they themselves would have done it. Almost all the gospel verses where Mary is mentioned would have been dramatically different than what we have in our Bibles today. However, since epithets such as “Mother of God” and “Most Holy One” were not included into Christian dogma until the next century under the influence of paganism, it is clear that the Lord’s disciples simply called Mary by name only and not otherwise.

foreground of all four gospels, Mary is completely in the background. The gospels clearly show that Jesus' development as a preacher of the kingdom of God took place in very sharp opposition to his family, which, according to Mark's Gospel, was so skeptical of his mission that they considered him crazy (Mk. 3:21). Consistently, all the Gospels suggest that Jesus was separated from his family and that, also, his disciples attached value to that separation. John's gospel also contains traces of very tense relations between Jesus and his mother. **However, Mary appears twice without naming labels as the mother of Jesus, however, Jesus himself regularly does not mention her name and addressed her by the word 'woman', which, according to Jewish custom, was unusually offensive. It is a hard word - 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?' (Jn. 2:4) This is the most powerful expression of conscious distancing.**"⁹⁸

Since we have demonstrated that even this Orthodox tradition has nothing in common with the divine Biblical accounts, we now can work with the historical facts that can disclose the source of the origin and beliefs of the majority church in Serbia on the issue of the "Mother of God."

Pagan Origins of the Mother of God

"In one sense, it is comparable – by the religious and mythological context of the archetypal personality of the Virgin Mary (who from that century at the Ephesian Synod was pronounced to be Theotokos), it could have been, we believe, converted into the cult of the Mother of God which had already been prepared in the traditional religions of the East and the West. In various ancient cultures, both Oriental and Hellenized, she was known as Isis, Aphrodite, Inana, Sybil, Maya, or Shakti."⁹⁹

The successors to the apostles, the elders of the fellowships at that time, in many cases proved negligent in maintaining the "faith once and for all delivered unto the saints", and in the early church communities there began to sprout beliefs that had not originally been Christian, but had origins in the pagan religions of the people and various philosophical movements. One such belief was the proclamation of Jesus' mother as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven.

God's fiercest enemy, Satan, knew the Lord's prophecy about the birth of the Savior from the womb of a virgin mother¹⁰⁰ and planned for centuries a vicious hoax.

As was the case in the fallen world before the Flood, and even after the great catastrophe of the Flood, the devil seduced people with pagan polytheism. One of the characteristics of paganism in ancient Sumer was the mockery and imitation of the divine Trinity, in the form of the triad of gods who are named Nanna (Sin), Inanna, and Utu (Shamash). Nanna was the "god of the moon" and the father of Inanna and Utu. Inanna was actually

⁹⁸ Ernst Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, (Svetlost Press: Sarajevo, 1991), 55-6. Author's emphasis.

⁹⁹ Vukomanovich, *Early Christian Myths*, (1997) 58-9.

¹⁰⁰ Gen. 3:15.

the planet Venus (the Dani star), the goddess of fertility, love, and war, and Utu was the sun god.¹⁰¹

Professor Miroslav Markovic in his *Study of Classical Religion*, speaks about the Greek goddess Aphrodite and notes that it does not come originally from its local area areas (from Greece), but was “imported” from the Middle East:

“So let us start from the beginning. A long time ago (circa 3000 B.C.) there lived in the Mesopotamian cities of Uruk and Babylon a powerful Sumerian goddess named **Inanna**. She had many lovers, but her beloved was a mortal shepherd named Dumuzi. Unfortunately, Dumuzi died young. Starting around 2400 B.C., the Akkadian name of this goddess is Esh-tar, and the Babylonian name is **Ishtar**.”¹⁰²

“Now let us turn to the ancient Aphrodite, also known as the Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar. She was a **powerful goddess of sexual love and fertility** since the beginning of the third millennium B.C. But as war was the main activity of every king of Assyria, and as Ishtar was his divine spouse, she felt it her duty as his wife **to become the goddess of war**. She followed her husband to the military expeditions to ensure success of his many conquests. The third feature was for her to become the **‘Queen of Heaven,’** which shows that Ishtar was identified with the planet Venus.”¹⁰³

So this goddess Ishtar was called the "Queen of Heaven" and had a significant role in the Pantheon of the gods at that time. Encyclopedia sources tell us that this goddess was portrayed mainly in statues as a mother holding in her arms a little male child.¹⁰⁴ This goddess was probably known before the dispersion from the area of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), such that all the tribes brought with them its worship cult following the confusion of their languages. Thus, each nation continued to submit to the Queen of Heaven, just under a different name. In China, it was known as **Sheng-mu** (Holy Mother). She was depicted with a child in her arms and rays of glory around his head. The old Germans worshiped the Teutonic virgin goddess **Hertha** which is also shown with a child in her hands. The Scandinavians knew this goddess under the name of **Disa**, the Etruscans **Nutria**, and the Druids **Virgo Partitura** (Mother of God). The Indians had several of these "divine Mothers" – Krishna, the son of **Devaki**, and **Isi** with the child Iswary. The Greeks knew the heavenly queen as **Aphrodite**, the Romans **Venus**, in Asia **Cybele**. The Egyptians celebrated the Mother Goddess **Ist (Isis)** and her child as Horus. The Old Testament Israelites knew her as **Astarte**, which came from the religion of the Phoenicians.¹⁰⁵

Speaking about Adonis, the lover of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, historian N.A. Kuhn tells us some of the characteristics of the goddess:

¹⁰¹ See Mircha Elijade, *Guide to World Religions*, (People’s Press Alfa, 1996) 222. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin_%28mythology%29 .

¹⁰² Miroslav Markovic, *Study of Classical Religion*, (Nikshic: 2001), 13. See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inanna> .

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14-5. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ See *Encyclopedia Encarta, Deluxe 2000*, (Published on CD-ROM), “ISHTAR”.

¹⁰⁵ See Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, (1991) 11-18.

“Aphrodite was originally a **goddess of the sky** - which sent the rain - and also, it seems, the goddess of the sea. In the myth of the goddess, Aphrodite really showed the impact of the East, mostly from the cult of the Phoenician goddess Astarte. Aphrodite, however, gradually became the goddess of love. God of love is Eros - Amor - her son.”¹⁰⁶

“The Greeks borrowed the myth of Adonis and Aphrodite from the Phoenicians. The name Adonis is not of Greek origin, but Phoenician, and means 'lord'. However, the Phoenicians borrowed this myth from the Babylonians: the myth of the Babylonian goddess of love Ishtar and her beautiful son Tammuz, who died and every spring would resurrect.”¹⁰⁷

Over a period of several centuries, with short breaks when they were ruled by God-fearing kings, the Israelites worshiped the pagan gods Baal and Ashtar (Queen of Heaven) instead of Yahweh God (Jehovah):

*“Then the children of Israel **did evil in the sight of the LORD**, and served the Baals;¹² and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.¹³ They forsook the LORD and **served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**”¹⁰⁸*

It is tragic that those who had God's Law (i.e. the Scriptures) and knowledge of the true God still turned their backs on Him and served pagan idols. Moreover, under the influence of paganism, the wise Solomon, king of Israel, fell because of his attraction to his many pagan wives, who later caused him to minister at the altar of Ashtar i.e. the Queen of Heaven:

“For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.”¹⁰⁹

At the time of God's prophet Jeremiah (7th and 6th century B.C.), the Lord used sharp words to warn the Israelites of their apostate behavior. Among other things, he warned them not to worship or serve the “Queen of Heaven”:

*“Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. **Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the***

¹⁰⁶ N.A. Kun, *Legends and Myths of Ancient Greece*, (Dechiya Books: Belgrade, 1990) 61. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Judges 2:11. See also Judges 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3-4, 12:10, 1 Ki. 1:5; 2 Ki. 23:13, Eze.8. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Ki. 11:5-6.

*fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the **queen of heaven**; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.”*¹¹⁰

The end result of rejecting worship of the True God and glorifying the false Queen of Heaven was not exactly a happy one for the Jews. The Lord allowed the Babylonians to conquer their land, kill many of the Israelites, and take the rest into slavery.¹¹¹

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as “Queen of Heaven”

“Having conquered the natural death of humanity in Her Ascension, She was not abandoned to decay, according to church belief, She was resurrected by Her Son after three days, and dwells in his celebrated body of His right hand in heaven as **Queen of Heaven**.”¹¹²

Although nowhere do the writers of the gospels ever suggest even the slightest idea that Jesus' mother could be the “Queen of Heaven”, the Orthodox Church considers its reverence for Mary as correct and faithful. It is obvious that the history of the church at some point adopted syncretism, i.e. the fusion of pagan ideas with Christian belief. Ernst Benz confirms specific examples of syncretism:

“It is instructive that the cult of the Mother of God gained strong momentum at a time when Constantine gave official state recognition to the Christian church by making it the official religion of the Empire and when the pagan masses of the Roman Empire began to have access to the church. The peoples of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, whose piety and religious awareness over thousands of years created **a large cult of the mother-goddess and divine virgins – which developed from the ancient folk religions** of Babylon in the mystery cult of Ashtarte during the Hellenistic periods and resulted in devotion to the cult of the goddess as a voluntary, uniting factor for all peoples and nations - **could not accept exclusively the rule of God the Father** and the strict patriarchal structure of the Jewish concept of God **as captured in early Christian teaching.** By the thousands they requested **deity worship through the cult of devotion to the Great Virgin and Mother** to be also in the Christian Church, **despite unfavorable conditions, a new opportunity for expression was found in devotion to the Virgin Mother of God,** which produced the mysterious union of the divine Logos with human nature. The spontaneous impulse of folk piety, which was penetrated by this direction, went far ahead in the practice and doctrine of the Church.”¹¹³

It is fascinating to read the information from Professor Miroslav Markovic that confirms the strong influence of paganism on the development of doctrine about the Mother of God:

¹¹⁰ Jer. 7:16-18. Author's emphasis.

¹¹¹ See 2 Ki. 24 and 25.

¹¹² Sergey Bulgakov, *Orthodoxy*, (1991) 185. Author's emphasis.

¹¹³ Ernst Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, 56. Author's emphasis.

“It logically follows that the ‘**queen of heaven,**’ is the planet Venus, the morning star (**Phosphoros**) and Hesperus (**Hesperos**), the goddess Ishtar-Aphrodite-Ashtarte with power **over the sea**. It chases away the storm clouds and stills the waves. Therefore, it became the protector of sailors and received the epithets **Pontia, Euploia and Limenia** ("goddess of navigation, happiness, and peaceful harbor").

The early Christian Virgin Mary inherited the functions of Aphrodite as ‘**the Queen of Heaven**’ (**regina caeli**), Ruler of the Sea (**Venus Marina**),¹¹⁴ and the protector of sailors. Even to today, many rural churches on the Aphrodite island nation of Cyprus **under the name of Theotokos pray to the Panagia Aphroditissa** (‘**most holy Aphrodite**’).”¹¹⁵

Icons of the Most Holy Mother of God (Queen of Heaven)

Mother Goddess, among the nations where it was known, was called "Mylitta", which in translation means “intercessor”.¹¹⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising that they call Mary “intercessor” in Orthodoxy, though such a name has no Biblical basis. History also claims that at the time of the paganization of Christianity, the Egyptian Church bishops issued a special decree where they renamed the statues of Isis and Horus as Mary and Jesus, without any break in continuity.¹¹⁷ In this way, the pagan icon worshipers continued to worship the same images only with different names.

Ernst Benz gives us very useful information about the time of the first Icon of the Mother of God:

“Regarding the image of Mary, there is nothing clearly defined directly in the New Testament. Assumptions for the creation of icons of the Mother of God were devised only in the Mariology of the fourth century. **The New Testament gives very few physical details about Mary.** The Eastern Orthodox Church has **numerous legends** about Mary, which primarily focuses on the amazing appearance of the miraculous image of the Mother of God.”¹¹⁸

What is particularly important is that the Orthodox icons of Mary generally depict her holding Jesus in her arms. These portraits are identical to those of the Queen of Heaven with her divine child as seen in many, previously listed, old religions and cults. (If you were to visit the home of followers of Hare Krishna, you would most likely see, among other images, one of the virgin Devaki with her son, which is similar to the Orthodox icons of Mary and Jesus.) On one icon called “Holy Virgin Giving Breast Feeding”, Mary is shown to breastfeed the baby Jesus. Professor Markovic says a few words:

¹¹⁴ A booklet entitled *Holidays of the Most Holy Virgin*, (Library of Glory Grafopan: Belgrade, 2000) 25 states among other things that the name Mary means "ruler" and "highest", and its adjectival form has other important meanings such as “ruler of the sea”.

¹¹⁵ Miroslav Markovic, *Study of Classical Religion*, (2001) 16. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Woodrow, 16.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁸ Benz, 18. Author’s emphasis.

“Lastly, my argument concerns the motifs, ‘**Mother and Child**’, Aphrodite and Eros... We are here restricted to the so-called type “**curotrofni**” representation of the goddess, that is, Aphrodite with the baby Eros on her breasts, which was on the side... The goddess of love and her babies have become a popular theme in Greek art... Painted vases from the Lipari Islands (330 B.C.; LIMC 1238) shows a **happy mother breastfeeding her baby**, Venus lactans. Similar terracotta from the British Museum shows the same position Isis lactans (first century B.C.), with the great Egyptian goddess Isis breastfeeding the baby Harpocrates (in Egypt, "the baby Horus"). **Our next step is to compare Isis lactans from Karanisa in Egypt (around 300 A.D.) with Maria lactans (Virgin Mary breastfeeding Christ), with bas-reliefs from Medinet Madi (about 500 A.D., now in Berlin): they are identical**, the only important difference is that the artist drew two crosses for Mary.

The conclusion is clear: the type of archaeological Venus lactans influenced the type of Isis lactans, and this influence is reflected again in the early Christian icons as Maria lactans (i.e. the Orthodox icon of “Holy Virgin Giving Breast Feeding”)... To take a step further - kampanska oinochoe (around 350 BC, now in Paris, LIMC 1241) shows how Aphrodite adores her son Eros, just as Mary adores her baby Jesus in the most famous Russian icon, the Virgin of Vladimir, which was painted by a Byzantine artist about 1125 (now in the church in the Kremlin). **In short, religious traditions have long histories, and many versions of Aphrodite were transferred to the Virgin Mary.**”¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Our conclusion would be identical to that presented by the above author. Based on a detailed study of Scriptural texts that speak of Jesus' mother Mary, and the views of pagan religion, we can safely conclude that the beliefs of Orthodox Christianity are not based on the teachings of God’s inspired and infallible Word. With sorrow, we must note that the theologians and believers mentioned in this branch of the Christian faith are sorely misinformed and misguided by the teachings of the “holy fathers”, who seduced them to pursue this path.

The Israelites in the Old Testament time were warned by the prophet of God that to revere the Queen of Heaven violates the will of the Almighty:

“...all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, ‘You speak falsely! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to dwell there’... As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our

¹¹⁹ M. Markovic, 25-26. Author’s emphasis. The Orthodox priest Bozidar Mijac admits in his own words that although visual representations of the pagan deities Apollo and Artemis are not easily comparable to the icons of Christ and the Virgin, “but also one image borrows from the other certain elements of the corresponding image, thus a painter’s technique could use the same expression to reflect the character of the other.” See: *The World of Icon Painting*, (Parthenon: Belgrade, 1997), 30.

*kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble.”*¹²⁰

I sincerely hope that a certain percentage of my Serbian people will realize that the Word of God is very clear, and that those who continue to violate His will, such as those during the time of Jeremiah, the Lord will later punish with His holy wrath.

In addition to these truths proven about the beliefs of Eastern churches along with other historical facts in consideration of its other dogmas¹²¹, once again we emphasize the point that the Orthodox Church is definitely not an extension of the first apostolic Church founded by Christ.

¹²⁰ Jer. 43:2; 44:16-7. Author's emphasis.

¹²¹ Additional information about issues of Mary are found later in the chapter on Ecumenical Councils (information about how and why the official proclamation of Mary as Virgin and Mother of God took place, the rationalizations Orthodox use want to prove their Creed, including further misinterpretations of verses outside the context of the entire Bible).