

The Early Church Fathers on The Mother of God

The main objection to this title is that it is not Biblical. But that is not the case. In Luke 1:43 we hear Elizabeth address Mary as "The mother of my Lord." Now some will say, and rightly so, that the word lord can refer to God or to man. For instance, someone of high rank or from a royal family could be referred to as lord. But Jesus was neither of these, at least not in the earthly sense. Jesus is Lord because He is God. There is something else to consider; in Luke 1:43 Jesus is still in the womb. Elizabeth can only be referring to His divinity when she calls Him Lord. So, the mother of my Lord means the mother of my God. Or simply put, The Mother of God. It is also important to note that the title has more to do with Jesus than it does with Mary. It is an affirmation that He was both human and divine.

Irenaeus

The Virgin Mary, being obedient to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she would bear God (*Against Heresies*, 5:19:1 [A.D. 189])

Hippolytus

To all generations they have pictured forth the grandest subjects for contemplation and for action. Thus, too, they preached of the advent of God in the flesh to the world, His advent by the spotless and God-bearing Mary in the way of birth and growth, and the manner of His life and conversation with men, and His manifestation by baptism, and the new birth that was to be to all men (*On the End of the World* 1 [A.D. 217]).

Gregory the Wonderworker

For Luke, in the inspired Gospel narratives, delivers a testimony not to Joseph only, but also to Mary, the Mother of God, and gives this account with reference to the very family and house of David (*Four Homilies* 1 [A.D. 262]).

Peter of Alexandria

They came to the church of the most blessed Mother of God, and ever-virgin Mary, which, as we began to say, he had constructed in the western quarter, in a suburb, for a cemetery of the martyrs (*The Genuine Acts of Peter of Alexandria* [A.D. 305]).

Methodius

Hail to you forever, you virgin mother of God, our unceasing joy, for unto you do I again return.... Hail, you fount of the Son's love for man. ...Wherefore, we pray you, the most excellent among women, who boast in the confidence of your maternal honors that you would unceasingly keep us in remembrance. O holy mother of God, remember us, I say, who make our boast in you (*Oration on Simeon and Anna* 14 [A.D. 305]).

Alexander of Alexandria

After this we know of the resurrection of the dead, the first-fruits of which was our Lord Jesus Christ, who in very deed, and not in appearance merely, carried a body, of Mary Mother of God, who in the end of the world came to the human race to put away sin, was crucified and died, and yet did He not thus perceive any detriment to His divinity. (*Letter to Alexander Bishop of Constantinople* 12 [A.D. 324]).

Cyril of Jerusalem

The Father bears witness from heaven to his Son. The Holy Spirit bears witness, coming down bodily in the form of a dove. The archangel Gabriel bears witness, bringing the good tidings to Mary. The Virgin Mother of God bears witness (*Catechetical Lectures* 10:19 [A.D. 350]).

Ephraim the Syrian

Though still a virgin she carried a child in her womb, and the handmaid and work of his wisdom became the Mother of God (*Songs of Praise* 1:20 [A.D. 351]).

Athanasius

The Word begotten of the Father from on high, inexpressibly, inexplicably, incomprehensibly, and eternally, is he that is born in time here below of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (*The Incarnation of the Word of God* 8 [A.D. 365]).

Gregory of Nyssa

Just as, in the age of Mary the mother of God, he who had reigned from Adam to her time found, when he came to her and dashed his forces against the fruit of her virginity as against a rock, that he was shattered to pieces upon her, so in every soul which passes through this life in the flesh under the protection of virginity, the strength of death is in a manner broken and annulled (*On Virginity* 13 [A.D. 370]).

Epiphanius of Salamis

Being perfect at the side of the Father and incarnate among us, not in appearance but in truth, he [the Son] reshaped man to perfection in himself from Mary the Mother of God through the Holy Spirit (*The Man Well-Anchored* 75 [A.D. 374]).

Ambrose of Milan

The first thing which kindles ardor in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom Glory Itself chose? (*The Virgins* 2:2[7] [A.D. 377]).

Gregory of Nazianzen

If anyone does not agree that holy Mary is Mother of God, he is at odds with the Godhead (*Letter 1 to Cledonius* [A.D. 382]).

Jerome

As to how a virgin became the Mother of God, he [Rufinus] has full knowledge; as to how he himself was born, he knows nothing (*Against Rufinus* 2:10 [A.D. 401]).

Theodore of Mopsuestia

"When, therefore, they ask, 'Is Mary mother of man or Mother of God?' we answer, 'Both!' The one by the very nature of what was done and the other by relation" (*The Incarnation* 15 [A.D. 405]).

Cyril of Alexandria

I have been amazed that some are utterly in doubt as to whether or not the holy Virgin is able to be called the Mother of God. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how should the holy Virgin who bore him not be the Mother of God? (*Letter to the Monks of Egypt* 1 [A.D. 427]).

John Cassian

You cannot then help admitting that the grace comes from God. It is God, then, who has given it. But it has been given by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ is God. But if he is God, as he certainly is, then she who bore God is the Mother of God (*On the Incarnation of Christ Against Nestorius* 2:2 [A.D. 429]).

Vincent of Lerins

Nestorius, ... while pretending that he holds two distinct substances in Christ, brings in of a sudden two persons, and with unheard-of wickedness would have two sons of God, two Christs, — one, God, the other, man; one, begotten of his Father, the other, born of his mother. For which reason he maintains that Saint Mary ought to be called, not the Mother of God, but the Mother of Christ (*The Notebooks* 12[35] [A.D. 434]).