

Mary Ever-Virgin

by Sebastian R. Fama

The Church has always believed that Mary was a virgin for her entire earthly life. But not everyone agrees. Detractors will point to Matthew 1:24-25, which reads: "When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had **no relations with her until she bore a son**, and he named him Jesus."

The word "until" seems to indicate that after the birth of Jesus there were normal marital relations. And if the original sentence were written in English that is exactly what it would have meant. However, the Greek word *heos* (ἕως) which is translated as until, does not imply that anything happened after Jesus' birth, nor does it exclude it. The point of the verse is that Joseph was not responsible for the conception of Jesus.

We can see how "heos" differs from the English word "until" by observing how it is used in 1 Corinthians 15:25. Speaking of Jesus it says: "For he must **reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet**." To put your enemies under your feet is to defeat them. Does that mean that once Jesus has defeated all His enemies he will resign as king? Of course not. The Bible makes that clear to us in Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and **he shall reign for ever and ever**.'" "

Another verse of Scripture that is used against the Catholic position is Luke 2:7 which reads: "And she gave birth to her **first-born son**." And so the argument goes, if Mary had a first-born, she must have had a second-born. But that is not necessarily so. In the Hebrew culture the term first-born is simply a title for a woman's first child. If she only had one child, he would still be her first-born. You can see this very point illustrated in Numbers 3:40: "The Lord then said to Moses, 'take a census of all the **first-born males of the Israelites a month old or more** and compute their total number.'" How many of those one-month-old babies do you suppose had younger siblings? I think it would be accurate to say none of them. And yet they are still called "first-born."

But what about the verses that speak about the brothers and sisters of Jesus? For instance, Matthew 13:55-56: "Is He not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother named Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Are not His sisters all with us?"

Could Matthew be referring to Jesus' cousins? Although both Greek and English have a word for cousin, Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, does not. Hence the words brothers and sisters are used. These terms can also be used to refer to friends. Observe how Jesus himself uses the word "brothers" in Matthew 28:10 and see what happens in verse 16: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go **tell my brothers to go to Galilee**, and there they will see me'...**The eleven disciples went to Galilee**, to the mountain which Jesus had ordered them.'" Were the disciples His siblings? Of course not!

A close look at what is commonly referred to as "*The Annunciation*" sheds a little more light on the subject: "Then the angel said to her, 'Behold **you will conceive** in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall name Him Jesus.'... But Mary said to the angel, '**How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?**' And the angel said to her in reply, '**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you**'" (Luke 1:30-35). Mary's statement wouldn't make any sense unless she intended to remain a virgin. The angel said; "you will conceive" not you have conceived. Surely Mary knew the facts of life. If she were to conceive, her normal thought would have been that at some future time she would have relations with a man. Her protest could only have meant that she was a virgin and that she would like to keep it that way. The angel's reply is an assurance that such would be the case. Mary's point becomes even more obvious when you consider the fact that she was already betrothed to Joseph. A woman who is betrothed will eventually marry. And it is not unusual for married women to have children.

Additional evidence can be found at the foot of the cross. In John 19:26-27 we find the following: "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple there whom He loved, He said to His mother, '**Woman, behold your son.**' Then He

said to the disciple, '**Behold your mother.**' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." If Jesus had siblings, why did He entrust the care of His mother to the apostle John? He did it because He had no siblings.

In Mark 6:3 Jesus is called "THE" son of Mary not "A" son of Mary. Elsewhere, Mary is called the mother of Jesus, but never the mother of anybody else. Even Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli taught that Mary remained a virgin. They believed that it was the clear teaching of Scripture. Martin Luther said: "Christ . . . was the only Son of Mary, and the Virgin Mary bore no children besides Him . . . I am inclined to agree with those who declare that 'brothers' really mean 'cousins' here, for Holy Writ and the Jews always call cousins brothers" (*Sermons on John, chapters 1-4*).

John Calvin wrote: "Helvidius displayed excessive ignorance in concluding that Mary must have had many sons, because Christ's 'brothers' are sometimes mentioned" (*From Calvin's Commentaries*).

In a sermon entitled "*The Perpetual Virginity of Mary*" Huldreich Zwingli said:

I have never thought, still less taught, or declared publicly, anything concerning the subject of the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our salvation, which could be considered dishonorable, impious, unworthy or evil . . . I believe with all my heart according to the word of holy gospel that this pure virgin bore for us the Son of God and that she remained, in the birth and after it, a pure and unsullied virgin, for eternity (September 17, 1522).

The Early Church Fathers agreed. Origen, in his "*Commentary on Matthew*" wrote:

The Book [*The Protoevangelium*] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now **those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end**, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And **I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first fruit among men of the purity which consists in [perpetual] chastity**, and Mary was among women. For it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first fruit of virginity (2:17 [A.D. 248]).

Hilary of Poitiers proclaimed:

If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons and not those taken from Joseph's former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" [John 19:26-27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate (*Commentary on Matthew 1:4* [A.D. 354]).

Athanasius of Alexandria, the great defender of Christian orthodoxy wrote: "Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that He took true human flesh from **the ever-virgin Mary**" (*Discourses against the Arians 2:70* [A.D. 360]).

The Catholic Church, the Early Church, and the Protestant reformers all agree that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life. Objections were raised at a later date. Once people accepted the erroneous idea that they could interpret Scripture for themselves, many new teachings were invented, and many apostolic teachings were rejected.