

The teaching of Mary's Perpetual Virginity in the Light of God's Word

In our introductory study of Jude we considered passages that reference Jesus' half-siblings—Jude himself being one of them. The question was then asked, "In view of these passages, how is it that some teach that Mary remained a virgin and had no other children?"

The following sheds light on that question as well as a broader view on what can be said about the virgin Mary.

The Bible speaks of Mary as blessed and chosen by God for a very unique and blessed role

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (Luke 1:30)

and [Elizabeth] exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! . . . And blessed is she who believed that there would be^[g] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:42,45)

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Mary was not holy), for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:46-48).

Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. . . (Luke 1:26-27)

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (lit. "since I do not know a man") And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[e] will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:30ff)

Mary's virginity is confirmed by Matthew and fulfills God's prophecy through Isaiah.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. . . . an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." . . . All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:18ff)

God speaks in such a way that points to Mary having other children

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. (Matthew 1:24-25)

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

The Bible mentions Jesus' half-siblings

"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?" (Matthew 13:55–56) See also: Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:32-35, 6:3; Luke 8:19-21; John 7:3.

How are these verses explained if Mary was "Ever a Virgin"?

- Some have suggested these brothers and sisters were cousins or more distant relations
 - But God didn't have His writers use the words for *cousin* or *relative*? He used the words most commonly translated *brother* and *sister*)
 - Additionally, the context of Matthew 13:55-56 is a negative view of Jesus because He is just one of the family of Joseph.
- They were children of another Mary.
- They were children from Joseph's first wife.

What is the source of the teaching that Mary remained a virgin?

The first known source for this teaching comes from an apocryphal book (though it is not included in the typical New Testament "Apocrypha"), *Infancy Gospel of James*, *The Protoevangelium of James*, or sometimes simply *Protoevangelium*. It is estimated that it was written in the middle part of the second century.

The Protoevangelium of James contradicts Scripture in a number of ways and was never recognized as a part of the Bible. It is, however, the source for several points of Roman Catholic doctrine concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It appears that this book arose in ascetic circles who believed that sex and marriage were symptoms of original sin, always tainted by sin, and "beneath" the dignity and holiness of Mary. There is much Scripture that can be cited to counter this false-teaching. There is no biblical or logical reason why Mary would have needed to remain a virgin following the birth of Christ.

The perpetual virginity of Mary is one of the four Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church (the others are her role as mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, and her bodily assumption into heaven).

Protoevangelium of James

“And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by [St. Anne], saying, ‘Anne! Anne! The Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive and shall bring forth, and your seed shall be spoken of in all the world.’ And Anne said, ‘As the Lord my God lives, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it shall minister to him in the holy things all the days of its life.’ . . . And [from the time she was three] Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there” (*Protoevangelium of James* 4, 7 [A.D. 120]).

“And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of priests, saying, ‘Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?’ And they said to the high priest, ‘You stand by the altar of the Lord; go in and pray concerning her, and whatever the Lord shall manifest to you, that also will we do.’ . . . [A]nd he prayed concerning her, and behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him saying, ‘Zechariah! Zechariah! Go out and assemble the widowers of the people and let them bring each his rod, and to whomsoever the Lord shall show a sign, his wife shall she be. . . . And Joseph [was chosen]. . . . And the priest said to Joseph, ‘You have been chosen by lot to take into your keeping the Virgin of the Lord.’ But Joseph refused, saying, ‘I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl!’” (ibid., 8–9).

“And Annas the scribe came to him [Joseph] . . . and saw that Mary was with child. And he ran away to the priest and said to him, ‘Joseph, whom you did vouch for, has committed a grievous crime.’ And the priest said, ‘How so?’ And he said, ‘He has defiled the virgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord and has married her by stealth!’” (ibid., 15).

“And the priest said, ‘Mary, why have you done this? And why have you brought your soul low and forgotten the Lord your God?’ . . . And she wept bitterly saying, ‘As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him, and know not man!’” (ibid.).

Roman Catholic Catechism

The teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity is not only within Catholicism. Some protestants have (and may still) hold to this as well. The Roman Catholic Catechism “answers” the questions by saying that the children in question were Mary the Mother of Clopas’ children and that “firstborn” Son references all of the further spiritual children through Christ Jesus.