

# Eternal Virgin Mother

**Question:** The Church teaches Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ. Scripture testifies to the first, but I was wondering about the sources of the Church's teachings on the other two dimensions.

– **Joann Capone**, via email

**Answer:** As noted, the virginity of Mary prior to and in the conception of Jesus (*virgo ante partum*) is attested in Scripture (e.g. Lk 1:26-27; 34-35; Mt 1:18, 23; Is 7:14).

As to her ongoing virginity after Christ's birth (*virgo post partum*), it is widely attested in the ancient Church by most of the Church Fathers, (e.g. Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Basil, Damascene, et al.).

Scripturally there is indirect evidence that Mary had no other children of her own. When Jesus was dying on the cross, he entrusted her to the care of St. John (Jn 19:26-27). There is also Mary's question to the Angel Gabriel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Lk 1:34), which makes little sense unless there were some expectation by Mary that, despite her impending marriage to Joseph, she would not engage in the marital act.

St. Augustine believed that she had made some formal vow of virginity. While this view seems odd to us, it is joined to another idea among some of the early Church Fathers that Joseph was a widower and that his marriage to Mary was arranged for her care, and also that she might help in the care of Joseph's family.

Whatever one thinks of the merits of these theories, we should note that they are attempting to answer Mary's question. If she was intending to enter a normal marriage with Joseph, the answer to her question is obvious: namely, that she will

conceive this child in the normal marital way. Her question, however, presupposes that this was not something she envisioned.

As for her virginity in giving birth (*virgo in partu*), Church scholars throughout history have widely attested that Mary gave birth miraculously in such a way that the physical dimensions of her virginity were not altered. While some modern scholars may be dismissive of this as an overly physical understanding of virginity, the objection may also say a lot about our modern tendency to divorce the physical from the spiritual.

Scripturally there are allegories and hints to the miraculous virgin birth. Isaiah announced that a young woman, a virgin, would give birth (7:14). But if that be the case, her virginity is not altered in giving birth. Ezekiel 44:2 speaks allegorically of closed gates, and the Song of Songs speaks of her garden as closed. Isaiah 66:7 speaks of her giving painless birth.

As for the brothers of the Lord, the full answer to this question has been addressed in previous articles. Here it suffices to say that the early and current Church holds that these brethren are cousins or step-brothers of the Lord. No where are they called the “sons of Mary.”

## **The Transfiguration**

**Question:** During the Transfiguration, how did the disciples know it was Moses and Elijah speaking to Jesus?

– **Bob McBride**, Cheswick, Pennsylvania

**Answer:** There is no supplied answer to this. The story is told looking back. It is possible that they could hear the conversation of the three and deduce they were Moses and Elijah or that Jesus explained it later. The event is related for our consideration and so the details are supplied. Moses

represents the Law and Elijah the prophets. And Jesus is the one to whom they pointed.

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