

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MOTHER OF GOD

Since the **Hypostatic Union** of the two Natures in Christ was accomplished from the **moment** of **Conception**, the Mother of the Saviour, **St Mary** is truly honoured to be called “*the Mother of God*,” “*Ever-Virgin*” and “*Theotokos*,” for she did not give birth **merely** to a fine **Man** but to the Incarnated Word and Son of God **Who is** the unique and only True God-Man.¹ This Truth was proclaimed by the four Ecumenical Councils who interpreted the **Teachings** of the New Testament and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church. **They** acknowledged the real **Motherhood** of the **Ever Virgin** Mary in relation to Christ and the **Conception** by her of the **Incarnated Son** and Word of God. Conceiving the God-Man in her **Womb** from the Holy Spirit, she remained Ever-Virgin. She is the only woman to **ever** be simultaneously a Mother and a Virgin. Her **Supernatural** and **Immaculate Conception** and **Birth-giving** of the God-Man did not **damage** her virginity **at all**, neither before the **Birth** nor during the Birth of her **Child** because even after the **Birth** she remained a virgin. Mary, the Mother of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, never had any sexual relationship with **St Joseph the Betrothed** before or after the Birth of the Incarnated Son of God. The “*brothers*” of Christ **who are** mentioned in Holy Scripture are not the children of the **Ever Blessed** Mary but of St Joseph’s first marriage.

*“The election of the Virgin Mary is therefore, the culminating point of Israel’s progress toward **Reconciliation with God**, but God’s final response to this progress and the beginning of **New Life** comes with the Incarnation of the Word. Salvation needed ‘...a new root...’ ‘...for no one, except God, is without sin; no one can give life; no one can remit sins.’ This ‘new root’ is God the Word made Flesh; the Virgin Mary is His ‘temple.’”²*

From the beginning the Orthodox Church proclaimed **St Mary** to be Ever-Virgin and Theotokos. **Her** virtuous and spotless life made her higher **in Holiness** than the Cherubim and more honorable than the Seraphim, for she gave Birth to the God-Man. Although we confess her **as** Ever-Virgin, spotless, stainless and undefiled from any personal sins, she was not free **of** Original Sin. We believe that she was cleansed from **Ancestral Sin** at the **Annunciation** when the Holy Spirit descended upon her and she conceived the Incarnated Word of God **Supernaturally**. **Addressing her as** “*Panagia*,” meaning “*Above all Saints*,” we proclaim and confess that she surpassed all **Righteous** men and women of all times in Holiness. **However, she** was not completely sinless as having been born of Adam, she was guilty of Original Sin, **although** her Son, the God-Man, is **the only** sinless One.

1. The Term THEOTOKOS

The 4th Ecumenical Council in Ephesos, using the first **Anathema** of St Cyril of Alexandria, condemned Nestorios who insisted that the Ever-Virgin Mary gave Birth to the **Man** Christ and consequently she should be referred to as “*Man-bearer*” (**i.e.** Mother of the **Man** **Who** was never united with the Word) or “*Christotokos*” (**i.e.** Mother of Christ but not Mother of the God-Man). This Council proclaimed the Ever-Virgin to be Truly “*THEOTOKOS*” for she had **indeed** given **Birth** to the Word of God **Who** became **Flesh**. This

¹ Cf. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 202-209.

² Meyendorff, *Theology*, p. 147.

term was repeated by the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, which proclaimed that Christ “...during these last days for us and our **Salvation...**” was **Born** “...from Mary the **Virgin and Theotokos according to His Humanity.**”

The 6th Ecumenical Council also proclaimed “...*Mary to be Virgin...*” “...*mainly and Truly Theotokos.*” Obviously by calling her “*Above all **Saints Virgin***” (i.e. “*Panagia*”), it is proclaimed that she is “*Mother*” for she gave real birth to the human **Nature** of the God-Man, whereas **she is certainly the** “*Mother of God*” because she conceived, carried and gave birth to the Incarnated Word and Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. She did not give birth to His Divine Nature but only to His human Nature, which He took up Hypostatically.

The Ever Blessed Mary was Truly, not **falsely**, the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **This fact** is witnessed by Holy Scripture **that refers** to her as “...*the **Mother of Jesus...***” or “...*His **Mother...***”³ **and by the Archangel Gabriel when he announced** that she **would** conceive in her “...*womb and bring forth a Son.*”⁴ To St Joseph **the Betrothed** the same Archangel **announced** that “...*that which is Conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*”⁵ **The Ever Blessed Virgin** Mary was first addressed as “...*the Mother of the Lord...*” by St Elizabeth, the mother of St John the Baptist.⁶ St Paul **stated** that “...*when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...*”⁷ and that “...*Jesus Christ our Lord, ... was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.*”⁸

The real motherhood of **the Ever Virgin** Mary in relation to the Lord was defended by the Holy Fathers and Ecclesiastic Writers of the Orthodox Church, **such as** St Ignatios the Theophoros **who declared** that our Lord “...*is truly of the family of David with respect to human descent...*” and that He was “...*truly born of a Virgin.*”⁹ Elsewhere the Apostolic Father **said**: “...*For our God, Jesus the Christ was conceived by Mary.*”¹⁰

St Irenaeos confessed that because He was born **of** the Virgin Mary, a descendant of men and **a human being, the Lord** was born as a Man and thus He became “*The Son of Man.*”¹¹ He **added** “...*for what reason then **was** He nourished in her, if He did not **receive** anything from her?*”¹²

Tertullian proclaimed that Christ was not born as the Gnostics **claimed** “*per virginem*” (“*through the Virgin*”) or “*in virgine*” (“*in the Virgin*”), but “*ex virgine*” (“*from the Virgin*”).¹³

The term “*Theotokos*” was first used by Origen and then by the Holy Fathers. St Athanasios the Great of Alexandria believed that the Son of God became Man **by** taking flesh “...*from the Virgin Theotokos.*”¹⁴

³ Matth. 1:18; 13:55. Mark 3:31, 32; 6:3. Luke 2:33, 43, 48. John 2:1; 19:26. Acts 1:14.

⁴ Luke 1:31.

⁵ Matth. 1:20.

⁶ Luke 1:43.

⁷ Gal. 4:4.

⁸ Rom. 1:3.

⁹ St. Ignatius, *To Smyrnaeans*, 1, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, *To Ephesians*, 18, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 92.

¹¹ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, III, 19, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 941. Cf. *Ibid*, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 244-245.

¹² St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, III, 22, 1-2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 955-956. Cf. *Ibid*, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 252-253.

¹³ Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 20, in Migne, *P.L.*, 2, 830.

St Gregory of Nazianzos accused all those “...who do not take *into* consideration the Holy Mary as being Theotokos...” “... of being without God.”¹⁵

St Cyril of Alexandria **emphasised** that “...Truly and Theotokos and Virgin-Mother the **rightly Blessed** should be called. For Jesus **Who** was **Born** from her was not merely a fine **Man**.”¹⁶

St John of Damascus, **rejecting** the title “Christotokos” observed that “...rightfully and truthfully we should call the Holy Mary Theotokos...” “...for He Who was Born from her is Truly God.”¹⁷

Mogilas observed that “...the Incarnation of Christ was realised by the Cooperation of the Holy Spirit. As the Virgin, before she had Conceived was a virgin, likewise at her Conception and after the Conception she remained a virgin even during the **Birth**; for from her He was **Born**, preserving her virginity. So, even after the **Birth**, she remains forever a virgin.” For this reason “...the **Most Pure Virgin Mary... the Theotokos...**” who was worthy to fulfill such a **Mystery**, all Orthodox **Christians** are obliged to glorify accordingly and to honour her as **the** Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in other words as the “Theotokos.” “The Word of God, **Who** is beginningless, came down from **Heaven** without carrying flesh with Him, but in the **Womb** of the **Holy Virgin** and from her pure blood took up **Flesh**, with the **Cooperation** of the Holy Spirit and was **Born** from her as from a **Pure Mother**.” “We also call her ‘Theotokos,’ because she gave birth to God according to His Humanity, and from her Christ was Born, perfect God and perfect Man.”¹⁸

2. The Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos According to Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers

Holy Scripture clearly bears witness to the **Virginity** of the Theotokos in relation to the time of the Conception and Nourishment, **primarily** in the question of **the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary who said**: “...how can this be, since I do not know a man?”¹⁹ St Matthew the Evangelist **bore** witness to this **by** proclaiming that “...the Virgin shall be with child...”²⁰ and “...that which is Conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”²¹

Consequently, the Teaching of the Church from the time of the Apostolic Fathers was that the Son of God was born “...truly from the Virgin...”²² and that “...the **Power** of God came down upon the Virgin and overshadowed her and made her to be with child, being a

¹⁴ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, III, § 29, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 385.

¹⁵ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 101, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 37, 176.

¹⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily against those who do not confess the holy Virgin to be Theotokos*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 76, 260.

¹⁷ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. That the holy Virgin is Theotokos*, III, 56, 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1028.

¹⁸ Mogilas, in Karmeris, *Τα Δογματικά*, v. II, pp. 613-614.

¹⁹ Luke 1:34.

²⁰ Matth. 1:23. Is. 7:14.

²¹ Matth. 1:20.

²² St. Ignatius, *To Smyrnaeans*, 1, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 110.

virgin...”²³ according to the Prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah: “Behold, the Virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name Immanuel.”²⁴

St Irenaeus referred to the above Prophecy by underlining the part that speaks about Mary being a “virgin” and stressed that this was given to her through the Incarnation of God. He also condemned those heretics who dared to “...misinterpret the Scriptures...” by changing the word “virgin” to the word “young girl” and saying: “Behold, the young girl shall be with child...” as did Theodotion the Ephesian and Acylas Ponticus in their translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew text. The heretic Ebionites, preferring to use these translations instead of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), were led to renounce the Supernatural Conception of Christ in the Virgin proclaiming that “...He was born from Joseph.” Oh! What blasphemy!!! Comparing the Virgin Mary to Eve he observed that “...as Eve had a husband, but still being a virgin, she disobeyed and through this disobedience she became the cause of death to herself and for all the human race, likewise Mary being betrothed but being a virgin showed obedience and became the Reason for Salvation to herself and to all the human race.”²⁵

Tertullian²⁶ repeatedly spoke of the Virgin’s Supernatural Conception, which preserved her virginity. With one voice, all the Fathers and Ecclesiastic Writers of the Orthodox Church proclaimed that Mary was “...a virgin before the Birth, during the Birth and after the Birth.” No one renounced this great honour of the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, except the heretic Ebionites, Celsus,²⁷ Julian the Offender, contemporary Protestants and Pentecostals heretics who have renounced Apostolic Tradition.²⁸

During the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Blessed Theotokos, remained a virgin. We must take note that her purity and spotlessness as a virgin consisted of the purity of her heart and the preservation of her mind as well as her complete inner and external existence, which was far from any corruption of the flesh, thought, desire or will. This purity and chastity of her heart was preserved during the time that she gave Birth as “virginity of mind” (“virginitas mentis”), “virginity of senses” (“virginitas sensus”) and “virginity of body” (“virginitas corporis”).²⁹

Origen referred to the Prophecy that proclaimed that “...every male who opens the womb shall be called Holy to the Lord...”³⁰ and he commented that: “...only Christ opened the womb of a virgin when He was born; for no one before Christ touched that Sacred Womb; all the firstborn, although are firstborn, yet, they do not open the womb, but the husband.” And he concluded that “...not all the virginal gates have been opened by the will of those who are nourished in them, according to the Prophecy: ‘This Gate shall be shut; it shall not be

²³ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *Apology* 1, 33, § 4, in **B**, v. 3, p. 178. Ibid, *Dialogue*, 76-78, in **B**, v. 3, pp. 280-282.

²⁴ Is. 7:14.

²⁵ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book III, ch. 21, § 1 and 22, 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 946 and 951. Cf. Ibid, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 247-248 and 2553-254.

²⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 21, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 453. Ibid, *De virg. vel.* 6, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 2946. Ibid, *De carne Christi*, 17, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 827. Ibid, *De monogamia*, 8, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 989.

²⁷ Origen, *Against Celsus*, I, 32, in **B**, v. 9, p. 92.

²⁸ Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. II, p. 208.

²⁹ Ibid, *Dogmatique*, v. II, p. 208-209.

³⁰ Luke 2:23. Ex. 13:1.

opened and no one shall pass through it; for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it and it shall be shut.”³¹

Clement the Alexandrian held the opinion that “...when Mary was giving birth, she was found to be a virgin.”³²

St Ambrosios of Mediolan **also** stated that when Mary was giving birth, she remained a virgin.³³

St John of Damascus, proclaiming the above Truth, observed: “As Christ was Conceived He preserved the Virgin, and thus when He was Born, He preserved her virginity unharmed, for He alone passed through her and it remained shut....” “... for it was not impossible for Him to pass through this Gate and not to harm her virginity.”³⁴

To the above we can add that the spotless and Most-Holy passing of **our** Lord through the Ever-Virgin Mary and Theotokos not only preserved the purity of her virginity but **also** exalted **it** and raised it to a higher Glory.

3. The Theotokos After the Birth Remained a Virgin

The **D**octrine that the Ever-Virgin Mary remained a virgin even after the Birth of the Lord, was renounced by the heretic Antidicomarianites,³⁵ Helvidios,³⁶ Bonosos the Bishop of Sardica and the contemporary heretic Protestants, although **Martin** Luther accepted the Ever-virginity of the Theotokos. The reason for this renouncement was based on the Gospel of St Matthew: “...and did not know her **until** she had brought forth her firstborn Son.”³⁷

Concerning this biblical **phrase** “... **until** she had brought forth her firstborn Son...” we must stress that Holy Scripture **often expresses** such terms for limited time, but does not exclude the continuation after that period. For example, in Genesis it is written: “...and he sent forth a raven; and it went forth and returned not until the water was dried from off the earth...”³⁸ although the raven never **returned to** the Ark. The Lord said: “... lo, I Am with you always, even to the end of the age...”³⁹ **although** this does not mean that He **would** not be with His Disciples after the end of the age, for St Paul **said**: “... thus we shall always be with the Lord...”⁴⁰ after the **General Resurrection**. The term “*firstborn*” means the first to be born,

³¹ Origen, *To Luke*, Homily 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 13, 18 and 34. Jez. 44:2. St. Amphilochius of Iconium, *To the Presentation of the Lord*, Homily II, in Migne, *P.G.*, 39, 48-49.

³² Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, VII, ch. XVI, in Migne, *P.G.*, 9, 529.

³³ St. Ambrosius, *Epist.* 42, in Migne, *P.L.*, 16, 1172-1177.

³⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the geneology of the Lord, and about the holy Theotokos*, IV, 87, 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1161.

³⁵ St. Epiphanius, *Panarion, Heresy LXXVII*, book III, § 1, *P.G.*, 43, 641-699.

³⁶ St. Jeronymus, *De perpetua virginitate B. Marie Adversus Helvidium*, in Migne, *P.L.*, 23.

³⁷ Matth. 1:25.

³⁸ Gen. 8:7.

³⁹ Matth. 28:20.

⁴⁰ 1 Thess. 4:17.

even if he is the only child.⁴¹ The children of St Joseph “...were not from Mary...” but “...from the first wife which lived together with Joseph before Mary.”⁴²

It is a real and natural result that “...the Office of Mary (as a Virgin) be preserved in virginity till the end, in order that her *body...*” before the descent of the Holy Spirit, was found worthy to serve the Mystery of the Incarnation.⁴³ It was **therefore** impossible for **her**, being *...the beginning of purity...* among all women, to have a relationship with a man **having been the one** who “...gave birth to God and learned *the Miracle* from experience.”⁴⁴

Many Holy Fathers besides Origen, such as St Ambrosios of Mediolan,⁴⁵ St Jeronimos,⁴⁶ St Augustine⁴⁷ and St Epiphanius,⁴⁸ defended the Truth of this Doctrine against all the heretics who opposed the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos. St Augustine’s words became **the** classic testimony: “As a Virgin she conceived, as a Virgin she gave birth and as a Virgin she remained.”⁴⁹

4. The Relative Sinlessness of the Theotokos

The Orthodox Church teaches that the sinless condition of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos⁵⁰ was a “...relative condition and by Grace...” not by nature, “...for only God is *absolutely sinless by Nature.*”⁵¹ The Mother of God was born a human being and thus a descendant of Adam. She participated in Original Sin as do all human beings. She **achieved a state of relative sinlessness due to** her virtuous life and the Grace of God **that** overshadowed her at the **Annunciation** when she **humbly and obediently** accepted **Motherhood** of the Son of the Most High. She became “*blameless*” as St Paul **said of himself when** he became “*blameless*” **according to** “...the Righteousness which is in the Law.”⁵²

Amongst all the ancient Fathers and scholars of the Church only St Augustine accepted the Ever-Virgin Mary and Theotokos **as being** completely sinless and free from any personal **sin**. All men should consider themselves **as** sinners **“...except the Holy Virgin Mary, about her, for the honour of the Lord, when it comes to refer about sin, I do not want to place the matter”**⁵³. These words **referred** to the sinless condition of the Ever-Virgin Mary and **did not imply** that she was free from the Original Sin.⁵⁴

⁴¹ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the geneology of the Lord, and about the holy Theotokos*, IV, 87, 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1161. St. John Chrysostom, *To Matthew 1:25*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 57, 58. Zigabinos, *To Matthew 1:25*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 136.

⁴² Origen, *To Luke*, homily 17, and *To Matthew*, 13, 55, in *B*, v. 13, pp. 13 and 29.

⁴³ Origen, *To Matthew*, 13, 55, in *B*, v. 13, p. 29.

⁴⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the geneology of the Lord, and about the holy Theotokos*, IV, 87, 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1161.

⁴⁵ St. Ambrosius, *De inst. Virgin et S. Mariae virginitate perpetus*, in migne, *P.L.*, 16, 319-348..

⁴⁶ St. Jeronymus, *De perpetua virginitate B. Marie Adversus Helvidium*, in migne, *P.L.*, 23.

⁴⁷ St. Augustine, *De haeresibus* 56 and 84, in migne, *P.L.*, 42, 40 and 46.

⁴⁸ St. Epiphanius, *Panarion, Heresy LXXVII*, book III, § 1, *P.G.*, 43, 641-699.

⁴⁹ St. Augustine, “*Virgo concepit, virgo peperit, virgo permansit*”, *Sermo* 51, 11, 18, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 343.

⁵⁰ Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 151-154.

⁵¹ Karmeris, *Synopsis*, p. 50.

⁵² Phil. 3:6.

⁵³ St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, XXXVI, 42, in migne, *P.L.*, 44, 267.

⁵⁴ Ott, *Precis*, p. 288.

St John of Damascus proclaimed **that** the Theotokos “...became the **Source** of all **Virtues**, of all **Life** and rebuked the sexual desire from the mind ... thus she preserved the soul and body in virginity, as should the one who was to receive within her bosom God.” For this reason, we the Orthodox, confess her to be above all Saints (“*Panagia*”).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the genealogy of the Lord, and about the holy Theotokos*, IV, 87, 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1160.