

THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT
BOOK 4

SAINTE MARY
IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

The Orthodox Concept
Book 4

SAINT MARY

In The Orthodox Concept

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE

ST. VIRGIN MARY CHURCH,
5 Epsom Road, Kensington
Vic. 3031 - Australia.

ST. MARY & ST. MENAS CHURCH
24A Railway Street,
Sydenham NSW - Australia.

ST. MARY CHURCH,
4900 Cleland Avenue,
California 90042 - USA

ST. MARK CHURCH
Allen Street, Kensington
London W.8 - U.K.

ST. GEORGE CHURCH
Sporting - Alexandria
Egypt.

ISBN 0 908000 07 3 - Australia.



Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and Lord of lords



The Virgin St Mary The Theotokos
Icon designed by Dr. Youssef Nassief and Dr. Bedour Latif



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

This book, originally, was a set of lectures held in St. Virgin Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Melbourne, in 1975, and was published in our “weekly Bulletin” for the help of our Sunday - School teachers.

I am deeply indebted to Miss Marlene Butler for her sincere help and to the staff of Ormond College Library.

Fr. TADROUS Y. MALATY

*Feast of St. Anthony the Great,
January 30, 1978*

1 ST. MARY'S VIRGINITY

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

2 THEOTOKOS OR THE MOTHER OF GOD

3 OUR NEW EVE

4 FULL OF GRACE

5 OUR MEDIATRIX

6 ST. MARY THE MODEL OF VIRGINS

7 ST. MARY & THE CHURCH

8 ST. MARY IN THE COPTIC RITE

1. ST. MARY IN THE DAILY HYMNS

2. ST. MARY IN THE KEYAHK'S HYMNS

3. TYPES AND SYMBOLS OF ST. MARY IN THE COPTIC HYMNS

4. ST. MARY IN THE COPTIC LITURGIES

5. ST. MARY IN THE FESTIVAL CEREMONIES

6. ST. MARY IN THE CANONICAL HOURS

7. ST. MARY IN THE ETHIOPIAN LITURGIES

8. FEASTS OF ST. MARY IN THE COPTIC CHURCH

9. ST. MARY'S ASSUMPTION

We the Copts⁽¹⁾, are very honoured that the Holy Family visited our land. Our spiritual love towards the Saviour Jesus Christ and His mother is deep-rooted in our hearts, and appears in our daily life.

We love St. Mary, the Virgin and mother of God, through whom we discover the nature of her Son as the Incarnate Son of God. Her life speaks of God's redeeming deed, and explains man's role in attaining the heavenly life by the divine grace.

St. Mary is our sister, who became an archetype of the Church, receiving a universal maternity to man. She loves the whole world, longing for the perfect salvation of every body.

This is the spirit of the whole treatise which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sustained by the Holy Scripture, the Patristic thought and our church liturgies, I hope to discuss.

⁽¹⁾ Christians of Egypt

*Awake, o my harp, your chords,
in praise of the Virgin Mary!
Lift up your voice and sing
the wonderful history of this Virgin,
the daughter of David,
who gave birth to the Life of the world!*

St. Ephram the Syrian

1 **ST. MARY'S VIRGINITY**

*Aaron's rod, in fact, is Mary.
It is a type of her virginity. She
conceived and bore the Son of the Most
High, the Word, without human seed.*

Theotokia⁽¹⁾ of Sunday.

Biblical Reality

The virginity of St. Mary is not a matter of her own private life, but rather a 'biblical reality', which belongs with our faith in Jesus Christ. For when the Word of God was Incarnated, He was not particular about the kind of place where he would be cradled, or the clothes He would wear, or the food He would eat; but He was definitely very particular about the Virgin who was to be His mother⁽²⁾.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a prophetic sign of the Virginal Birth.

⁽¹⁾ Theotokia is a hymn praises St. Mary the Theotokos "Mother of God"

⁽²⁾ J. B. Carol: Mariology, 1955, Vol. 1, p. 51

“Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.”

Here the text refers to St. Mary the virgin mother of Emmanuel, directly and literally. It is very accurate, describes St. Mary’s state as being virgin and engaged at the same time. For the Hebrew term used for “virgin” is ‘almah’ and not ‘betulah’ nor ‘issa’. The word ‘almah’ means a virgin maiden who may be engaged, while ‘betulah’ means a virgin who is not engaged. The word ‘issa’ means a married lady.

If the Scripture uses the word ‘issa’, it does not signify an extraordinary miracle about to be performed by God. (Isaiah 7:10,11), for the married woman can conceive and bear a son. If it uses the word ‘betulah’, it does not describe the state of St. Mary, who was engaged to St. Joseph. But it uses the word ‘almah’, which fits her state accurately, as a virgin and engaged to St. Joseph who protected her and became a faithful witness of her chastity, leaving no chance for any doubts or suspicion.

It is worth noting that this word ‘almah’ is etymologically used in this sentence to mean the continuation of the state of virginity, and for this reason it has been translated ‘the virgin’, and not ‘a virgin’, to describe the Emmanuel's mother as the virgin even after her child's birth.

Another prophet confirms St. Mary's perpetual virginity, as he says:

“When he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looked towards the east, it was shut.

Then the Lord said to me:

This gate shall be shut,

*it shall not be opened,
and no man shall pass through it,
because the Lord, the God of Israel,
has entered by it,
therefore it shall be shut.
It is for the prince;
the prince himself shall sit in it...*

(Ezk. 44: 1-3).

This sealed eastern gate is a figure of St. Mary's perpetual virginity.⁽¹⁾ For the Lord alone entered her womb, and this gate was never opened to another; its seals were not broken.

In this effect the Coptic Church sings the following hymn:
“Ezekiel witnessed and told us:
I have seen an eastern gate.
The Lord, the Saviour entered it,
and it remains shut as it was before”.⁽²⁾

One of the titles given to the Virgin Mary in the Byzantine rite is: “Hail O unique gate, through which only the Word passed”.⁽³⁾

Virginity & Christology

The Virginal Birth which happened once, never to be repeated, is a proof of our faith in Jesus Christ, that He is not of this world, but from on high, the Son of God. This is what the

⁽¹⁾ Schaefera Brossart: *The Mother of Jesus in the Holy Scriptures*, p. 63 f.

⁽²⁾ Psalia (Adam) for Sunday.

⁽³⁾ Akathistos (not sitting) hymn, is sung on the fifth Saturday of the Lent

angel Gabriel proclaimed to St. Mary herself when she asked him: “How can this come about, *since I do not know man?!*”, “ the Holy Spirit will come upon you ”, the angel answered, “and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and so the Child will be called Son of God” (Luke 1: 34, 35). Subsequently, this Virginal Birth formed a principal element in all the creeds of the Early Church, not because it says something about St. Mary, but rather because it reveals the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ.

For example, the Creed of St. Hippolytus (c. 215) states:

“Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.....?”⁽¹⁾

This argument was used also by the early Christian apologists, such as St. Justin and Athenagoras, in their defence on behalf of Christianity.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (m. 110 A.D.), preached this Virginal Birth as one of the great Christological (dealing with Christ) mysteries, which were loudly proclaimed to the world in his time:

“The virginity of Mary,
her childbirth,
and also the death of the Lord”.

These were hidden from the prince of the world. Three mysteries loudly proclaimed but wrought in the stillness of God.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus 21:15

⁽²⁾ St. Ignatius: Epist. Ad Ephes. 19:1

In brief, this doctrine “the Virginal Birth” in fact is the outward sign of the mystery of Incarnation. For it affirms that Jesus Christ who is the real son of a real mother, was not conceived of human seed, but of the Holy Spirit. Although the Son of Man, He has no hereditary sin, but stands at the Head of a new human race.⁽¹⁾

Virginity and Our Salvation

1. God comes to us, born of a virgin and conceived not of human seed. He unites Himself with us (humanity), not because of our human efforts or merits, but rather as a divine grace bestowed on us. It is the free gift of love which only comes from God.

In other words, St. Mary's virginity is, therefore, a sign of man's poverty and his inability to work out his own salvation; to bring into being One who can save him.⁽²⁾

2. St. Mary's virginity does not mean that we have to be passive in our spiritual life. For God did not force *Himself* in St. Mary's womb, nor did she conceive Him unwillingly, but played an active role. God asked her to accept! The Divine Incarnation was realized by the free grace of God, but she herself humbly accepted obedience.

⁽¹⁾ John McHaugh: *The Mother of Jesus in the N.T.*, N.Y. 1975, p. 339

⁽²⁾ Max Thurian: *Mary, Mother of all Christians*, N.Y. 1964. p. 32

3. Jesus Christ was born of the “*Virgin*”, the archetype of the New Church, to declare the *heavenly nature* of the Kingdom which made its appearance with Christ, for virginity is the law of the heavens, while marriage occurs only in the present world.

Marriage with its effect - “the procreation of children” - ensures the continuity of human life on earth; for the succession of new generations. But in heaven, no one dies, subsequently there is no need of marriage or bringing forth children for the continuity of the heavenly kingdom.... Virginity is the state of all the creatures there.

Now, St. Mary's virginity at the Incarnation of God's Son, means establishing the heavenly kingdom among the human race. People of God are called to new life; they have to practice the heavenly life (virginity) in their hearts, minds and souls, through their fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, the Virgin Bridegroom. This is the nature of the Church in the New Testament, of which the Virgin Mary is the first and ideal member.

Virginal Birth & Spiritual Birth

In the Coptic Church the Lord's Nativity (Christmas) is correlated with His Baptism (Epiphany), and in the early centuries these two Lord's feasts were celebrated in one day. For at Christmas the Lord took on what was ours, i.e., our humanity, while at his Epiphany the Church hidden in Jesus Christ received what was His own, i.e., His relation to the Father. He became Son of Man, and we became sons of God.

This reality is declared in the following Church hymn:
“He took what was ours,
and bestowed on us what was His own;
may we praise Him and glorify Him”.

This correlation between the Lord’s Virginal Birth according to the flesh and our spiritual birth, is paralleled by the divine Incarnation, in the holy womb of the virgin. For, there, the Lord took His body, which ‘mystically’ is the Church united with Him. There the bride (Church) is created to be united with Her Divine Bridegroom.

To this effect Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 429) says⁽¹⁾ :

“The holy Mary is the workshop of the union of natures,
the market place of the salutary exchange,
the bridal chamber wherein the Word espoused flesh”.

To this effect I excerpt some quotations from the sayings of the Fathers:

* Chastely Christ opened the chaste womb, so that
thence man also might similarly be reborn.

St. Irenaeus⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Encomium on holy Mary, Theotokos 1:1

⁽²⁾ Adv. Hear. 4:33:11. PG 7:1080

- * Those who proclaimed Him Emmanuel, born of the Virgin, (Isa.7: 14) proclaimed also the union of the Word of God to His handiwork,
“because the Word will become flesh,
and the Son of God will become the Son of man, the Pure one opening purely that pure womb, which generate men into God...”

St. Irenaeus⁽¹⁾

- * Christ opened the silent, spotless and fruitful womb of the Holy Church, for the birth of God's people.

St. Ambrose⁽²⁾

- * Your divine birth, O Lord, gave birth to all creatures....
Mankind gave birth to You in the body;
and You gave birth to mankind in spirit....
Praise to You, who became a Child,
to make all things new!

St. Ephram the Syrian⁽³⁾

- * As Christ appropriated a body taken from a woman and was engendered by her according to the flesh, He recapitulated in Himself the generation of man.

St. Cyril of Alexandria⁽⁴⁾

(1) Ibid 4 : 33 : 12 PG 7 : 1181

(2) Com. On Luke 2:57 PG 15:1573

(3) Hymn 3 on Nativity

(4) PG 76 : 23

- * We affirm that the Only Begotten Son became man (oikonomia)... so that, born of a woman according to the flesh, He might recapitulate in Himself the human race and by the flesh united to Him, He might incorporate all in Himself .

St. Cyril of Alexandria⁽¹⁾

- * From on high came the divine Word, and in your (St.Mary's) holy womb reformed Adam (new creation in Christ).

St. Gregory the Wonder-Worker⁽²⁾

- * The Son of God has become the Son of David; do not doubt that you, a son of Adam, may become the son of God.

If God had stooped to such an extreme depth, He has not done so in vain, but to raise us to a sublime height.

He was born of flesh that you might be born again according to the spirit!

He was born of a woman that you might become a child of God.

St. John Chrysostom⁽³⁾

(1) PG 76:15-18

(2) PG 10:1151

(3) In Mat., hom. 2.2

- * The Son of God made Himself man, that we might welcome Him as a member of our own family, and despite our sins we might be born again to hope....
- * We have fled far away from our Teacher, leaving behind the grace He offered us; and what does this Master in His mercy? He pursues the fugitive to bring him back.

He approaches him not clothed in majesty but with a lowly aspect adopted in Mary's womb, and in that guise becomes his familiar and his friend, making Himself a servant with us that we may become masters with Him.

Theodosius of Ancyra⁽¹⁾

St. Mary's Virginity & Spiritual Virginity

In the Old Testament a virgin, without hope of marriage and motherhood, was in the same position as the childless woman, a sad state and a sign of God's wrath.

In the New Testament, the Virgin, for the first and last time, gave birth to the Messiah, i.e., her virginity is no longer a matter of shame since it has become fruitful by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Virginity became a sign of the intimacy between God and man. For this reason St. Paul calls the Church "Christ's Virgin". And in the book of Revelation the unnumbered crowd of God's elect are represented by 144,000 virgins who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes" (14: 4, 5).

⁽¹⁾ In Sanctam Delporem, hom 4

On this account, virginity is correlated with sanctity, but not in the way that every virgin is considered as a holy one, and every holy person must be a virgin, lest we devalue the Christian marriage which is holy. What we mean is that the literal virginity is merely a sign of the spiritual one. Virginity - in its essence - is the total consecration to God and permanent union with Him in Jesus Christ. It is a virginity of soul, heart, mind, senses and desires, which Christians can receive by the Holy Spirit who sanctifies our bodies, souls and spirits, preparing us for the eternal wedding feast.

- * (Virginity) is honoured not for itself, but because it is dedicated to God.

St. Augustine⁽¹⁾

- * (Virginity) is a necessary door to a holier life.....
It is the channel which draws down the Deity to share man's state, it creates wings for man's desire to rise to heavenly things, and it is a bond of union between the Divine and the human, by its mediation bringing into harmony these existence's so widely divided.....

- * It has been proven as well that this union of the soul with the incorruptible Deity can be accomplished in no other way than by attaining the greatest possible purity - a state which, being like God, will enable one to grasp that state of virginity which reflects the purity of God like a mirror in which one's own image becomes moulded with beauty at the touch and sight of the Archetype of all beauty....

St. Gregory of Nyssa⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ De Sacr. Virginitate 8. PL 40:400

⁽²⁾ De Virginitate 2, 11

- * *(Sermon on Christmas Day)*
On this day the virginal birth is celebrated by the virgin church
The virginity which Christ desires in the heart of the Church He assured first in the body of Mary.
But the Church can only be virginal if she has a spouse, to whom she can give herself entirely, and He is the Virgin's Son.

St. Augustine⁽¹⁾

- * Your virginity should be something spiritual.
There cannot be many in the Church who are physically virgins,
but spiritually everyone of the faithful should be a virgin.....
Watch therefore, watch o my soul, and guard your own virginity.

- * Christ's mother is a virgin,
and likewise is His bride, the Church...

St. Ambrose⁽²⁾

- * Your example is now the life of Mary, from which shines forth, as from a mirror, all the beauty of Chastity and the pattern of every virtue....

St. Ambrose⁽³⁾

(1) Serm. 178:4 PL 38:1005

(2) De Virginitate 1:5:22 PL 16:195

(3) Ibid 2:2:6 PL 16:208

Perpetual Virginity

*Emmanuel, whom you had brought
forth, preserved you in incorruption,
and kept your virginity sealed!*

Theotokia of Saturday 7:2

Did St. Mary remain a virgin while giving birth to Jesus?— This question was raised early perhaps from the first century, and many orthodox and apocryphal works discuss this question.

Early Apocryphal Documents

There are three early apocryphal documents, of the second century, affirming St. Mary’s perpetual virginity:

1. In “the Ascension of Isaiah” we read that, “her womb was found the same as before she had conceived”.⁽¹⁾
2. According to the “Odes of Solomon”, she travailed and brought forth a son without incurring pain.⁽²⁾
3. The “protoevangelium of James” relates that a woman called Salome “made trial of St. Mary’s virginity soon after Jesus’ birth”.⁽³⁾

If we leave aside the details mentioned in these documents they in fact reveal a strong current of popular opinion

⁽¹⁾ R. H. Charles: The Ascension of Isaiah, London 1900, p. 74-76

⁽²⁾ Odes of Solomon 19:8 ⁽³⁾ Protoevangelium of James 18 - 20

in the second century, that St. Mary did not cease to be a virgin in giving birth to the Lord.

The Patristic Thought

It is believed that St. Peter of Alexandria (m. 311 A.D.) is the first known witness to St. Mary's title "αειπαρθενος"⁽¹⁾ i.e., "ever-virgin", as he said :⁽²⁾

"Jesus Christ..... was born according to the flesh from our holy and glorious lady, Mother of God "θεοτοκος" and ever-virgin "αειπαρθενος" Mary".

He is not the first Father who believes in St. Mary's perpetual virginity, i.e., before Christ's birth (ante-partum), in childbirth (in partum) and afterwards (post-partum).

In the second century, St. Irenaeus takes Isaiah 66:7, where the prophet foretells a remarkable repopulation of Jerusalem through Mother Zion and interprets it as spoken of the Virgin Mary who gave birth to a man child in unique fashion, without birth pangs. "Also concerning His birth, the same prophet (Isaiah) says in another place: "Before she who was in labour brought forth, and before pains of labour came, there came forth delivered a man child. He proclaimed this unlooked

(1) Hilda Graef: Mary, A History of Doctrine & Devotion, London 1963, vol. 1, ch. 2

(2) St. Peter of Alexandria: Frag 7. PG 18:517

- for an extraordinary childbirth of the Virgin⁽¹⁾ , thus affirming her virginity.

In Egypt St. Clement states that St. Mary continued as a virgin, refusing the assumption that she became a woman owing to the birth of her Son⁽²⁾ .

Origen affirms St. Mary's perpetual virginity in his homilies on Leviticus⁽³⁾ . In another place he says:⁽⁴⁾

“A certain tradition has come to us to this effect.... Mary, after giving birth to the Saviour, went in to adore and stood in that place for virgins (in the Temple). Those who knew that she had borne a son tried to keep her away, but Zachary said to them: She is worthy of the place of virgins, for she is still a virgin”.

“It would have been unbecoming to attribute to anyone other than Mary the title of ‘The First of Virgins’.”

St. Athanasius used the expression “aeiparthenos”⁽⁵⁾ and St. Didymus the Blind proclaimed her virginity “in partu and post partum” and addressed her as the aeiparthenos⁽⁶⁾ .

Hereafter I cite some quotations from the sayings of the Fathers concerning St. Mary's perpetual virginity:

(1) St. Irenaeus: *Demonstratis apostolicae praedicationis*, 54. (Pat. Orientalis 12:701); Carol, vol. 2, p. 104, 105

(2) *Stromata*, lib 7:16

(3) In Lev. 8:2 PG 12:493f

(4) Com. In Mat. 25

(5) *Contra Arianos* 2:70

(6) Quasten: *Patrology*, vol. 3, p. 99

* We are ignorant of many things, as for instance, how the Infinite is in a womb, how He that contains all things is carried, and born, by a woman, how the Virgin gives birth and continues a Virgin?

St. Chrysostom⁽¹⁾

* The womb of the holy virgin, which ministered to an immaculate birth did not annul the virginity, nor did the virginity impede so great a birth.

St. Gregory of Nyssa⁽²⁾

* Only Christ opened the closed gates of her virginal womb, and yet the gates remained unfaithfully closed.

St. Jerome⁽³⁾

* Although the door was shut, Jesus entered into the sepulchre that was Mary, which was new and hewn in hardest rock, no one either before and afterwards was laid. She is a “garden closed, a fountain sealer” (Cant. 4:12).

She is the eastern gate, which Ezekiel speaks of (14:2), as always shut and full of light; which, closing on itself, brings forth from itself the Holy of Holies; whereby the order of Melchisdech, enters in and goes out.

Let them tell me how Jesus entered when the doors were closed and I will answer how holy Mary is both

(1) Ibid. p. 476. Hom. In Matt. 4:3

(2) De Virginitate 19

(3) Epist. to Pammachius 49 (48): 21

mother and virgin; virgin after childbirth, and mother before she married.

St. Jerome⁽¹⁾

- * If in His birth her virginity had been destroyed from that moment He would not have been born of a virgin, and the whole Church would falsely have proclaimed, which God forbid, that He was born of the Virgin Mary.

St. Augustine⁽²⁾

- * Just as (the Lord) made His entrance when the doors were closed, in the same way did He come forth from the Virgin's womb, because this virgin really and truly gave birth without pain.... Her virginity remained safe and sound.

St. Ephram the Syrian⁽³⁾

- * The Lord Jesus would never have chosen to be born of a virgin if He had ever judged that she would be so incontinent as to contaminate with the seed of human intercourse the birthplace of the Lord's body, that court of the Eternal King!

Bishop Siricius⁽⁴⁾ (392)

- * O marvellous mystery! Mary was virgin after marriage, virgin after conception and remained virgin after childbirth .

(1) Dialogue against Pelagianos

(2) Enchiridion ad Laurentium 34. PG 40:249 Ancient Christian Writings, vol. 3, p. 42

(3) Explanatis evangelli concordantis, ch 2:6, 8.

(4) Epist to Anysius Bishop of Thessalonica

Finally if anything had been better than virginity, the Son of God would rather have given that to His mother, whereas He gave her to rejoice in the honour of divine virginity.

Fr. Zeno of Verona⁽¹⁾ (d. 372)

- * (In his comparison between the Lord's birth and His resurrection, St.Ephram describes the birth in the following terms) :

When the glorious Spouse wished to go forth,
He left the virginal organs asleep, so that they should
not feel His going forth.

St. Ephram the Syrian⁽²⁾

- * Nature no longer acknowledges a virgin after childbirth, but grace made her parent and kept her virgin, grace made her mother and did not violate her virginity....

O earth unsown that flowered forth fruit that saves!
O virgin who surpasses Eden's garden of delights!..

The virgin is made more glorious than paradise. For paradise was cultivated by God, but Mary cultivated God Himself according to the flesh, willing as He was to be united to man's nature.

Fr. Theodotus of Ancyra⁽³⁾ (432)

⁽¹⁾ Trectatus 1:5:3

⁽²⁾ St. Ephram Syri Hymni et Sermones, ed. T. 1. Lemy, vol. 2, p. 573-6 K. McNamara: Mother of the Redeemer, N.Y., 1960 p. 114

⁽³⁾ On the Nativity of our Saviour 2, Palmer p, 52

Vow of Virginity

According to the apocryphal work “protoevangelium” of James, which reflects the popular trends of second century, St. Mary was born of Joachim and Anne, when they were already old. The mother vowed that she would serve the Lord all her life.

At the age of three, she was presented to the Temple, where she was nourished by angels. According to the Coptic tradition the Marian feast of “her presentation to the Temple” is celebrated on the third of Keiahk”, in which we remember the Child Mary as a virgin lives among the virgins. We sing the following two hymns:

“At the age of three,
you were presented to the Temple, O Mary.
You came as a dove,
and the angels hurried to you”.
“She was among the virgins,
praising and giving hymns with them,
when she entered the Temple in glory
and honour.”

At the age of twelve, the priests assembled to discuss what they had to do with Mary as she should leave the Temple. They called twelve men from the tribe of Judah and deposited their rods at the Temple. On the next day, the high-priest Abiathar brought the rods and gave each one his rod. As St. Joseph stretched his hand to receive his rod, immediately a dove went forth from its top, whiter than snow and most beautiful, and fluttering a long time among the pinnacles of the temple, until at last it flew towards the heavens. Then all the people

congratulated the old man, saying “You become blessed in your old age, father Joseph, in that God has shown you fit to receive Mary”.

St. Joseph, at first refused because of his age, but then obeyed when the priests threatened him with the wrath of God⁽¹⁾.

Marriage or Betrothal !!

According to the Jewish tradition, the nuptial consists of two steps: betrothal and marriage proper. After certain financial arrangements, the couple were betrothed to one another in the house of the bride. The betrothal was in every respect equivalent to our marriage except without any sexual relationship. The betrothed woman was called the man’s wife; and she became widow if her betrothed died, and she claimed the financial settlement accorded to a wife when widowed or divorced. In case of infidelity she was liable to the same punishment as an adulterous wife. Like a wife she could not be dismissed without a bill of divorce.

If the betrothed woman had not been married previously, she usually waited a year before the second step, the marriage proper, was taken⁽²⁾.

Now, we can understand why St. Mary was called “St. Joseph’s wife”, although they were betrothed and not married.

⁽¹⁾ Protoevangelium of James, 8, 9

⁽²⁾ W. L. Strack & P. L. Billenbeck: Kommentar Zum Neuen Testamentaus Talmud und Midrasi, Munchen, 1924, vol. 2, p. 377-394

Someone might ask if there was an agreement between St. Mary and St. Joseph to live in virginity even after the second step of marriage was taken?

St. Augustin confirms this in his comment on St. Mary's question to the angel: "How shall this be since I know not man!?" (Luke 1:34), saying⁽¹⁾ :

"Surely she would not say that, unless she had previously vowed her virginity to God" and intended to keep it.

Objection

Helvidius, in the fourth century, used the sentence of St. Matthew 1:25 "and he did not know her till she brought forth her firstborn Son", to indicate that the gospel opposed the perpetual virginity of St. Mary, as Jesus was her firstborn Son Who had other brothers, also sons of Mary.

St. Jerome answered: "It is the custom of the Scriptures to designate with the title "*firstborn*" not one who subsequently has brothers or sisters, but one who is born first". (See: *Exod. 34: 19-20*)⁽²⁾ As St. Jerome stated so trenchantly, from scriptural sources, "Every only child is a firstborn child but not every firstborn is an only child".⁽³⁾

Likewise, the expression "he did not know her until she brought forth her firstborn Son" by no means necessarily implies

⁽¹⁾ St. Augustine: De Sacra Virginitate 4. PL 45:398

⁽²⁾ St. Jerome: In Mat. PL 26:26

⁽³⁾ St. Jerome: Adversus Helvidium de Perpetua Virginitate Beatae Mariae. PL 23:202. J. B. Carol: Mariology, vol. 2, p. 233.

that St. Joseph “Knew her” after the birth of Christ. For the term “until” does not in any way prejudicate what may happen in the future. For example, when the Scripture states “No son was born to Michol, the daughter of Saul *until* her dying day”, it does not mean that she bore a son after her death.

The Brothers of Jesus

Around the year 382 A.D. Helvidius wrote a book asserting that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary consummated their marriage, and that Mary later gave birth to other children, “the brothers of Jesus” mentioned in the Gospel. This book has not survived, but its arguments are well-known because of St. Jerome’s reply to it.

A few years later, the same idea was put forward by Jovinianus⁽¹⁾ and Bonosus, bishop of Naissus in Yugoslavia⁽²⁾

They refer to the expression mentioned in the Gospel “brothers of Jesus” (Mark 6:33), (Mat. 13:55, 56).

The Great Origen says, “No one whose opinion on Mary is sound would claim that she had any child save Jesus”. What, then, does the Gospel mean by the words “the brothers of Jesus”?

⁽¹⁾ Jovinianus died c. 405, an unorthodox monk, condemned twice: in Rome under Siricius (390) and in Milan under Ambrose (391). He denied that virginity as such was a higher state than marriage. He also teaches that fasting has no greater merit than thankful eating, and there is no inequality based on status in life in heavenly reward, and that those who receive baptism in full faith cannot be led again into sin. St. Jerome wrote two books against him, and St. Augustine did the same.

⁽²⁾ He was deposed after the Council of Capua (391).

1. The Epiphanian View

The writer of the apocryphal work “Protoevangelium of James”, in defending the virginity of St. Mary, referred to “the brothers of Jesus” as sons of St. Joseph from a previous marriage. Some Coptic, Syrian and Greek documents followed the same idea.

Even some great Fathers did the same, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hegesippus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Hilary of Potiers, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose, and Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus who advocated this idea warmly so that it was attributed to him.⁽¹⁾

Nevertheless, this idea is rejected by some theologians for the following reasons:

- A. If these brothers of Jesus were in fact older than Jesus, having born of an earlier marriage, why are they not mentioned in the Infancy narratives, especially the escape to Egypt?
- B. The impression left by the Gospel (Luke 2:41-52) concerning the story of Jesus in the temple is that even twelve years after Jesus’ birth, the Holy Family consists of the three persons only.
- C. St. Matthew refers to Jesus as the heir of Joseph, the son of David; but if there were other older brothers of Jesus, (sons of Joseph) Jesus would not have been his heir.

⁽¹⁾ McHaugh: *The Mother of Jesus in the N.T.*, ch. 7

D. If Jesus had brothers, He would leave His mother in their home and would not trust her to St. John.

2. *St. Jerome's View*

St. Jerome replies that the term “brothers” is used in the Holy Scripture for:

- A. Blood brotherhood.
- B. Common nationality.
- C. The close relatives.
- D. Friendship.

In the case of the Lord's brothers, the third meaning applies. Abraham called his brother's son, Lot, his brother (Gen. 13:8), and Laban used the same term for his son-in-law (Gen. 29:15).

It is well-known that at that time cousins were called brothers, for they often lived under one roof in one large family. Until today the same term is used in some villages in Upper Egypt, where they feel very ashamed when a person does not call his cousin “brother”. In the Aramic language all these types of relationships were referred to simply as “brothers”.

According to St. Jerome's theory, the brothers of Jesus were the sons of St. Mary of Clopas, the wife of Alphaeus and the sister of Virgin Mary (John 19:25).

OR

THE MOTHER OF GOD**St. Mary's Maternity in the Bible**

The Holy Scripture witnesses to St. Mary's motherhood of the Son of God, for it calls her Son "God" (John 20:28).

At the annunciation, angel Gabriel speaks of the Child St. Mary is to conceive as "the Son of the Most High", "the Holy One" and the "Son of God".

When St. Mary entered the house of her kinswoman St. Elizabeth and greeted her, the babe maturing within her womb leaped for joy (Luke 1:41, 44) and she was filled with the Holy Spirit who led her to understand the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. The old woman, St. Elizabeth, wife of a priest and pregnant with a great prophet, belittled herself before the poor young orphan girl, as she discovered St. Mary her Lord's mother. She said: "How did this happen to me, that my Lord's mother should visit me?!" (Luke 1:43).

While the whole world knew nothing about the annunciation to St. Mary, St. Elizabeth declared St. Mary's motherhood of her Lord in the absence of any external sign of this divine event.

The wonder is, that all these marvellous things happened just as St. Elizabeth listened to St. Mary's greeting, for the Son of God who was dwelling in her holy womb, spoke through her mouth and acted through her life.

St. Mary's Motherhood in the Early Church

Through the Church's combat with heresies, the dogma of St. Mary's motherhood has been developed and declared, to emphasize two Christological facts:

- A. Jesus was genuinely born of St. Mary. He was not a phantom, but took on real flesh from a real mother.
- B. Jesus Christ born of St. Mary is the eternal Son of God, who has no beginning.

1. Gnosticism

Most of Gnostic systems were based on the distinction between the "Demiurge or the Creator God" and the supreme remote and unknowable Divine Being. In some systems the creations of the material universe is believed to result from the fall of Sophia (wisdom); this creation is viewed as evil.

Usually, they divide men into two or three classes:

- A. The spiritual men (pneumatics), receive a spark of divine spiritual substance, and through "gnosis" (knowledge) and the rites associated with it this

spiritual element is returned to its home in Divine Being.

- B. Other people who are fleshly or material, (hylics) engrossed in matter, and given over to eternal perdition.
- C. Some gnostics add a third intermediate class “the psychics” after (1 Cor. 2:14). They are other Christians who are not gnostics, and they attain only the middle realm of the Demiurge (Creator God) through faith and good deeds.

The function of Christ was to come as the emissary of the supreme God, bringing “gnosis”. As a Divine Being He neither assumed a properly human body nor died⁽¹⁾. They refused to accept that the Redeemer became flesh, or was born of a woman.

One of the Gnostic forms was the ‘*Docetism*’, a heresy that threatened the young church. The Greek word ‘dokein’ means “to seem” or “appear to be”. The docetists believed that Jesus Christ was not a real man but seemed to be so and to have a body, but simply passed through the Virgin without being fashioned of her substance.

According to St. Irenaeus,⁽²⁾ Saturninus (c.120) “declared that the Saviour was unborn, incorporeal and without form..... For to marry and bear children, he says, is of Satan”.

⁽¹⁾ Oxford Dict. of the Christian Church, p. 573

⁽²⁾ Against Hear. 1:24:2 PG 7:674-5

Valentinus (2nd century) also taught that Christ united himself with the man Jesus who “was born through Mary and not of Mary”⁽¹⁾. He passed through her as through a channel.

Marcion’s doctrine is: Jesus did not have a human soul nor an earthly body. He was not born of Mary, but appeared suddenly in Judea with imaginary flesh, a full-grown man ready to enter immediately upon his ministry⁽²⁾.

Appelles conceded genuine flesh to Christ, but a celestial body. It came down from heaven into this world, and not of Mary.

The Fathers of the Church, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen warned the Christians against such doctrines and many of them took up openly with those heretics, emphasizing St. Mary’s real motherhood, with the aim of declaring the mystery of Incarnation, the real humanity of Christ.

St. Ignatius wrote to the Christians of Trallia:

“Stop your ears therefore when anyone speaks to you who stands apart from Jesus Christ, *from David’s scion and Mary’s Son, who was really born...*”⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Origen: In Epist. ad Galatus. PG 14:1298

⁽²⁾ Origen: In Epist. ad Titum. PG 13:1304

⁽³⁾ Ad Trallianos 9, 10 PG 5:681

2. **Manichaeism**

Its founder is Mani, Manes or Manichaeus, of the third century.

Mane's system was a radical offshoot of the Gnostic traditions of East Persia. It was based on a supposed primeval conflict between light and darkness, God and matter. The object of the practice of religion was to realise the particles of light which Satan had stolen from the world of Light and imprisoned in man's brain, and that Jesus, Buddha, the Prophets and Manes had been sent to help in this task.

The appearance of Adam was a counterplot to retain Light imprisoned, through reproduction. Jesus, "the Brilliant Light" redeemed him by a vision⁽¹⁾. The religious practices of abstaining from eating meat and of abnegating the sexual life are the means of continuing the process of gradual liberation.

It is no wonder that the Manichaeans assumed that Jesus Christ was in no sense the Child of Mary.

St. Alexander, Pope of Alexandria, defends the true humanity of Christ and hence the true motherhood of St. Mary, against the gnostics and manichaeans.

St. Athanasius did the same, saying: "The body of the Lord was real ... because it was the same as ours, for Mary is our sister"⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Oxford Dict. of the Christian Church, p. 864 J.D. Douglas: Dict. of the Christian Church, p. 624

⁽²⁾ St. Athanasius: Epist. to Epictetus 7

St. Ambrose also states: “The Virgin had something of her own which she transmitted; the mother did not give Him something foreign (to her), but she conferred on Him what was of her own flesh, indeed in an unusual way, but by a normal function. For the Virgin had flesh, which she conferred on the fruit”.⁽¹⁾

3. Arianism

Contrary to the Gnostics and Manichaeans the Arians deny that Jesus, the Son of Mary, is the Uncreated Son of God, one with the Father in the divine essence. They deny Christ’s divinity and subsequently St. Mary’s motherhood to God.

For this reason, the Alexandrian Fathers such as SS. Peter, Alexander and Athanasius gave to St. Mary the title “θεοτοκος” (Mother of God), on confronting Arianism.

In his encyclical letter to the bishops (c. 319), St. Alexander announces the deposition of Arius and made the first indisputable use of the title Theotokos, as he writes⁽²⁾ :

“After this we know of the resurrection of the dead, the first fruit of which was our Lord Jesus Christ who in very deed, and not in appearance merely carried a body born of Mary, Mother of God (Theotokos)”.

The word “Theotokos” flows from his pen so naturally, his use of it is so nonchalant, that it leaves an impression of

⁽¹⁾ St. Ambrose: De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacraments 104

⁽²⁾ Epist. and Alexandrum Constant 12. PG 18:568

everyday usage, long established and uncontroverted⁽¹⁾ .

St. Athanasius, in his controversy with Arianism, stresses that Christ is born of the Father but took His humanity from “the unploughed earth”⁽²⁾, ever-virgin⁽³⁾ and Theotokos⁽⁴⁾ .

St. Ambrose of Milan, wrote the Christmas hymn which he taught his people to strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ, the true God, and their combat against the Arians:

“Come, Redeemer of the nations,
show forth the birth of the Virgin.
Let all the world marvel, such a birth befitted God!”

4. The Nestorianism

In the Basilica of the Theotokos, St. Cyril of Alexandria preached before the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), saying:

“Hail.... to Mary, Mother of God,
majestic treasure of the whole world,
the lamp unquenchable,
the crown of virginity,
the sceptre of Orthodoxy,
the indestructible temple,
the dwelling of the Illimitable,
Mother and Virgin ..

(1) J.B. Carol: Mariology, vol. 2, p. 120

(2) Or. 2:7 PG 26:161 B

(3) Or. 2:70 PG 26:292 B

(4) Or. 3:14 PG 26:349 C.

Hail to You, who contained Him, Who cannot be contained in your holy virginal womb”⁽¹⁾ .

In fact, the controversy which raged between St. Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius was not centred upon the title of St. Mary “Theotokos” in itself, but was based on Christological concepts.

The circumstances which led to the intervention of St. Cyril in the Nestorian controversy must be briefly told⁽²⁾ .

It was on April 10, A.D. 428, that Nestorius, a priest of Antioch and disciple of Theodore was consecrated Bishop of Constantinople. He used the term Christokos (mother of Christ) for St. Mary, and not Theotokos. The battle lines were clearly drawn when one of his priests “Anastasius”, whom he took with him from Antioch, preached before him in December 428, saying:⁽³⁾

“Let no one call Mary “Theotokos”, for Mary was but a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman”.

This teaching Nestorius publicly approved, and he himself preached a course of sermons in which he drew a plain distinction between the man Jesus, born of Mary, and the Son of God Who dwelt in him. There were two distinct persons in Christ, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, who were united

⁽¹⁾ Schwartz: Acts conciliorum oecumenicorum 1, 1, 2 p. 102 Palmer: Mary In the Documents of the Church, p. 50

⁽²⁾ T. H. Bindly: The Oecumenical Docum. of the Faith, London 1899, p. 99

⁽³⁾ Socrates: H.E. 7:32

not hypostatically but only morally. Christ should be called not God, but “God-bearer” (Theoporon), in much the same way as the saints can be called, because of the divine grace given to them. Subsequently, Mary was not the mother of God, but the man Jesus in whom the God-head dwelt.

Nestorius and his followers criticised the Wisemen for their kneeling to the Child Jesus, and preached that the divinity was separated from the humanity at the moment of Crucifixion.

The matter came to St. Cyril, Pope of Alexandria, who took occasion in his annual paschal letter (A.D. 429), without any personal reference to Nestorius, to state the doctrine of the Incarnation in the clearest and simplest terms:- namely that the real, true and perfect manhood in Christ was united to His divinity in one divine Person. Again, four months later, he wrote another letter to the monks on the same subject. These letters coming to the notice of Nestorius stirred him to great wrath, and he engaged one Photius to answer them⁽¹⁾.

St. Cyril sent two letters to Nestorius in which he explains the nature of Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, one Person..... and declared St. Mary’s right to be called “Theotokos”.

In his second letter he writes:

“We do not say that the nature of the Word became flesh by undergoing transformation, nor that it was transformed into an entire man of soul and body ; rather we say that the Word,

⁽¹⁾ W. P. Du Bose: The Ecumenical Councils, Edinburgh 1897 Introduction (1).

in an indescribable and incomprehensible manner personally (hypostatically) united to It flesh animated by a rational soul and thus became man and was called Son of Man....”

Nor was He first born of the Holy Virgin as an ordinary man, in such a way that the Word only afterwards descended upon Him; rather He was united (with flesh) in the womb itself....

For this reason the (Holy Fathers) confidently called the Holy Virgin “Theotokos”; not meaning that the nature of the Word or His Godhead received its beginning from the Holy Virgin, but that, inasmuch as His rationally animated body, to which the Word was personally united, was born of her, He is said to have been born after the flesh.

I have thus written to you out of the love which I have in Christ, and I beseech you as a brother and “charge you before Christ and the elected angels”, thus to think and teach with us, that the peace of the churches may be preserved and the bond of unanimity and love between the priests of God may remain unbroken”⁽¹⁾ .

Afterwards a local council was held at Alexandria, and a synodical letter was sent to Nestorius, clarifying the same doctrines mentioned in St. Cyril’s letters, and concluding with “The Twelve Articles or Anathemas”.

⁽¹⁾ Denzinger - Banwart: Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum, ed. 24-25 by Umberg, Barcelona, 1948, p. 111a

The first anathema is: “If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God in truth and the Holy Virgin on this ground is the Theotokos, having brought forth after the flesh the Word of God, who became flesh - let him be an anathema”.

In June 22, 431 the Third Ecumenical Council was held at Ephesus, over which St. Cyril presided. Nestorius was deposed and excommunicated, St. Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius was read, his twelve anathemas were confirmed, the Christological doctrine of Nestorius condemned and the title “Theotokos” solemnly recognized.

St. Mary’s Motherhood & the Incarnation

Fr. John Damascene summed up our belief in the “Theotokos” by saying, “This name contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation”⁽¹⁾.

St. Gregory Nazianzus declared the necessity of giving St. Mary her right of motherhood, as a result of our belief in the divine Incarnation:

“If anyone does not accept Holy Mary as Theotokos, he is cut off from deity”.

If anyone should say that Christ passed through the Virgin as through a channel, and was not fashioned in a way that is divine as well as human.... he is equally godless.

If anyone should say that he was fashioned and only afterwards did God dwell in him, he also is condemned.

⁽¹⁾ De fide Orthodoxa, lib 3, 12. PG 94:1029

If anyone should speak of the Son of God the Father as different from the son of Mary, and not the same person, so shall he forfeit his share in adoption”⁽¹⁾

Through the Incarnation, St. Mary did not give her Son His divine personality and nature, but, as St. Cyril clarifies, this in no way diminishes the rightfulness of her title. Other mothers, too, do not confer souls and personalities on their sons, yet they are no less truly mothers, not only of the flesh, but really of the human person, created by God, that subsists in this flesh. So, St. Mary is the Mother of Jesus who is God.⁽²⁾

Someone perhaps asks:

Why, instead of descending from heaven without a human body, or at least with a heavenly body formed by the hand of God, did the Word of God choose to be born of a mother? (Gal. 4:4)

1. By taking flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God became not a merely man but a member of human race, a descendant of Adam, of the seed of Abraham and of the royal line of David. Through His true sonship to St. Mary, He integrated Himself with the humblest realities of our human existence....⁽³⁾

Through St. Mary’s motherhood our blood ran in His veins to be shed by Him for the remission of our sins.

⁽¹⁾ Epistola 101. PG 37:117-180. Palmer, p. 9.

⁽²⁾ Rene Laurentin: Queen of Heaven, 1961, p. 94

⁽³⁾ McNamara: Mother of the Redeemer, p. 71

2. Through the Virgin's motherhood of God, the Redeemer united in Himself the two parties to be reconciled: God and man. He, as the Perfect High Priest and Mediator, willed to save us from within; not as a stranger, but as a Brother.

3. St. Augustine states that if the Son of God refused to be incarnated in the womb of the Virgin, women would despair as if they are defiled creatures. His sonship to St. Mary restored that sex and declared the goodness of all creatures.

Her Motherhood & The Word of God

St. Augustine states:

“Mary conceived in her mind before she conceived in her body”.⁽¹⁾

Indeed St. Mary is blessed for she was chosen as the Mother of the Word of God, but before she bore Him physically she had borne Him spiritually through her faith. She was a typical hearer of the Word; listening to it; obeying it, keeping and pondering it in her heart.

In the words of St. Augustine⁽²⁾, “Mary's motherhood would have been of no profit to her if she had not joyfully borne Christ in her heart”.

The Soul's maternity:

St. Mary, as the mother of God, represents the Church, whose members spiritually bear God in their hearts. The holy

⁽¹⁾ Sermon 215:4

⁽²⁾ De Scare Virginitate 3. PL 40:398

Fathers of the Church look to the spiritual life of the Christian after baptism as the growth of Christ Himself within their motherly hearts⁽¹⁾ .

* Just as an infant is formed in the womb, so it seems to me that the Word of God is in the heart of a soul, which has received the grace of baptism, and thereafter perceives within itself the word of faith ever more glorious and more plain.

* It would be wrong to proclaim the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Holy Virgin without admitting also His Incarnation in the Church.... Everyone of us must, therefore, recognize His coming in the flesh by the pure Virgin; but at the same time we must recognize His coming in the spirit of each one of us.

Origen⁽²⁾

* "That which happened to the stainless Mary, when the fullness of the Godhead which was in Christ shone out through her, is also fulfilled in every soul that leads, as a rule, a virgin life. No longer, indeed, does the Master come with bodily presence: "we know Christ no longer according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:6) - but spiritually He dwells in us and brings His Father with Him, as the Gospel somewhere tells.

⁽¹⁾ Hugo Rahner: *Our Lady and the Church*, p. 72

⁽²⁾ Hom. on Exod. 10:4, *De Sargiusga* 8:2

- * This birth comes from God. And it is fulfilled every-time the immortality of the spirit is conceived in the living substance of a man’s heart: for then he is giving birth to wisdom, to justice, to holiness and to utter purity. Thus every Christian can become the mother of Him who is essentially all these things. For our Lord Himself says: Whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, is my mother (Mk 3:35, Mt. 12:50).
St. Gregory of Nyssa⁽¹⁾.
- * (Every Christian) conceives God in his heart.
St. Augustine⁽²⁾.
- * Like the blessed Mary, who was of such purity that she deserved to be the Mother of God, you too can be a mother of the Lord.
St. Jerome⁽³⁾
- * When the soul then begins to turn to Christ, she is addressed as “Mary”; that is, she receives the name of the woman who bore Christ in her womb; for she has become a soul who, in a spiritual sense, gives birth to Christ.
- * Watch that you do the will of the Father, so that you may be the Mother of Christ.
St. Ambrose⁽⁴⁾

(1) De Virginitate 2, 13. PG 46:324, 380

(2) Sermon 181:4

(3) Epist. to Eustochium 22:8

(4) De Virginitate 4:20, PL 16:271; Com. on Luke 10:25. PL 15:1810

* He is above all the Mother of Christ, who preaches the truth; for he gives birth to our Lord, who brings Him into the hearts of his hearers.
And he is the Mother of Christ, who through his words inspires a love of our Lord in the spirit of his neighbour.
Pope Gregory (the Great)⁽¹⁾

Hear this, o shepherds of the Churches,
O shepherds of God;
All through time the angel comes down and
announces to you that today and every day the
Redeemer is born,
that is Christ the Lord!

Origen⁽²⁾

* The Church is in labour and travail, until Christ is formed and born within us, so that everyone of the saints, in so far as he shares in Christ, is Christ born again.

Methodius⁽³⁾

(1) Hom 3 on the Gospels

(2) Hom on Luke 12

(3) Symposion 8:8

3

OUR NEW EVE

*Hail to Mary,
the Mother of all the living,
we ask you to intercede on our
behalf.*

Theotokia of Tuesday.

New Eve:

The Church calls St. Mary, “the mother of all the living”, “mother of the New Life” and “the Second Eve”.

Eve lost the meaning due to her name:- “mother of every living” (Gen. 3:20), - for by her disobedience to God she obtained only death for her children instead of life, and became the mother of the dead. Her daughter, St. Mary, took her place; for by her faith, obedience and humility she became, through the Holy Spirit, the mother of “Life”. She offered to Adam’s children the “Tree of life” to eat, and thereby live forever.

Through the mystery of the divine Incarnation St. Mary became “the mother of the Head of the mystical body and also the Mother of its members, as St. Augustine says”.⁽¹⁾ She received universal motherhood to all the believers.

⁽¹⁾ De Sancta Virginitate 6. PL 40:399

The holy Fathers consider St. Mary's holy womb as the bridal chamber, the meeting place where the heavenly Bridegroom is united mystically with the Bride, i.e. the whole Church. There we accept Christ, her Son, as our Bridegroom and the Firstborn Brother; and we accept St. Mary, His mother, as our own mother.

- * The Word is joined to flesh;
the Word is wedded to flesh,
and the bridal chamber of this exalted marriage
is your womb.

Let me repeat, the bridal chamber of this exalted marriage between the Word and the flesh is your womb, whence "He, the Bridegroom, goes forth from His bridal chamber".

St. Augustine ⁽¹⁾

- * God the Father arranged the nuptials for God, His Son, when, in the womb of the Virgin, He united Him to humanity, when He willed that He who is God before all the ages should, at the end of the ages, become Man...

He united the Holy Church to Him, through the mystery of the Incarnation.

Now, the bridal chamber of this Bridegroom was the womb of the Virgin Mother. That is why the Psalmist says, "He has set His tabernacle in the sun: and He is as a Bridegroom coming out of His bridal chamber"

⁽¹⁾ On the birthday of John the Baptist 5 PL 38:1319

(Ps. 18:6). And it was as a Bridegroom is in fact that He came forth from His bridal chamber, because to unite the Church to Himself, the Incarnate God went forth from the inviolate womb of the Virgin.

Pope Gregory (the Great)⁽¹⁾

This relation between the New Eve and all believers is declared officially by the Second Adam on the Cross, when He says to the New Eve, “Woman, behold your son!”, and to His believers “John, behold your mother!”

Through the Cross we received our New Eve from God. In this effect Tertullian says:

“God knew that it is not good for man to be alone, and He knew how good it would be for him to have a woman with him, first Mary and then the Church”.⁽²⁾

We received St. Mary as our New Eve, to say with Adam to our God: “New Eve, the woman whom you gave me to be my helpmate, gave me to eat from the Tree of Life, i.e., the Cross of her Son!”

Origen sees that every perfect Christian can, like St. John, receive from the Crucified Son, St. Mary as his own mother. He explains the words “Behold, Your Son!”, “Whoever is perfect, no longer lives only himself, but Christ also lives in him. Since Christ lives in him, it is said to Mary of him: “Behold, Your Son, Christ!”⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Hom. on the Gospels 2:38:3 PL 76:1283

⁽²⁾ Adv. Marcion 2:4 PL 2:289

⁽³⁾ Origen: In Evengelium Joannis, 1, Praefatio 6 PG 14:32

Eve - St. Mary Parallel:

It is possible that the remote origins of the “Eve - St. Mary parallel” may be traced far back to Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, in Asia Minor, at the turn of the first century⁽¹⁾.

At the second century, St. Justine the Martyr (c. 165) draw attention to this Eve - St. Mary parallel in his dialogue with Trypho, as he says:

“(The Son of God) became man through the Virgin, that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had originated....”.

For Eve, an undefiled virgin, conceived the word of the serpent and brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary, filled with faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the Most High would overshadow her, and that therefore the Holy One born would be the Son of God....., that she replied: Let it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1.35).⁽²⁾

It is clear that St. Justine’s thought - in the above-mentioned parallel - is focused not on St. Mary, but on the Saviour, her Son.

⁽¹⁾ The passage in question occurs in a fragment of Victorinus of Pettau (De Fabrica mundi, ng C.S.E.L. 49:8) as he states that “the angel Gabriel brought the good tidings to Mary on the day (6th day) whereon the serpent seduced Eve”. Carol: Mariology, vol. 2, p. 88, 89

⁽²⁾ Dial. 100. PG 6:709-712, 959. 1176

St. Irenaeus (c. 172), the father of Mariology, had developed the above-mentioned passage, that the Eve - St. Mary analogy combined, for the first time, with a theology:⁽¹⁾

“Just as Eve, while wife of Adam, was still a virgin.... and became by her disobedience the cause of death of herself and of the whole human race; so Mary too, espoused yet a virgin, became by her obedience the cause of salvation of both herself and the whole human race....

The knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosened by Mary’s obedience. For what the Virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened through faith...”⁽²⁾

According to St. Irenaeus, St. Mary has a distinctive function in God’s plan towards our salvation. For she offered her free consent to God, i.e., her obedience, issued through her faith.... He also calls her “Eve’s Advocate”:

“Whereas Eve had disobeyed God, Mary was persuaded to obey God, that the Virgin Mary might become the Advocate of the Virgin Eve.....”

Similarly, Tertullian, writes in his book “The Flesh of Christ”:

“For into Eve, as yet a virgin, the word of the devil had crept, to erect an edifice of death.

⁽¹⁾ Carol: Mariology, vol. 2, p. 89

⁽²⁾ Adv. Haer 3:31:1, 5:19:1

Thus, through a virgin, the Word of God was introduced to set up a structure of life.

What had been lost by one sex, was by the same sex restored and saved.

Eve had believed the serpent;

Mary believed Gabriel.

That which one destroyed by unbelief the other set straight, by believing....

God, therefore, sent down into the Virgin's womb His Word, our good Brother, to blot out the memory of evil....."⁽¹⁾

The Alexandrian Teacher, Origen alludes to St. Mary as restoring the womankind the honour it had lost through Eve's sin; in this way woman "finds salvation in childbearing"⁽²⁾ (1 Tim. 2:15). He also says:

"The joy trumpeted by Gabriel to Mary destroyed the sentence of sorrow levelled by God against Eve"⁽³⁾

"Just as sin began with the woman and then reached the man, so too the good tidings had their beginning with the women (Mary and Elizabeth)."⁽⁴⁾

(1) De Carne Christi 17:5

(2) Lucan Hom. 7

(3) Ibid 6

(4) Ibid. 8

In the fourth century, Zeno of Verona, mentioned this parallel but in a new sense, “Because the devil had wounded and corrupted Eve, creeping in by persuasion through her ear, Christ’s entering Mary’s ear, eliminates all vices from the heart. He cures the wound of the woman when He is born by the Virgin”⁽¹⁾.

St. Ephram, who said: “This harp of the Holy Spirit never sings sweeter songs than when it has set its strings to sing the praises of Mary”⁽²⁾, developed the Eve - St. Mary Parallel, saying:

“In her virginity Eve clothed herself with leaves of ignominy.

Your mother has clothed herself in virginity with the garment of glory, which is sufficient for all.

A piece of clothing (i.e., the body) she has given to Him who clothes all....

With the eye Eve perceived the beauty of the tree, and the advice of the slay one was fashioned in her mind....

With the ear Mary perceived the Invisible One, who came in the voice.

⁽¹⁾ Tralctatus 1:13:10

⁽²⁾ Acta apostolicae sedis. commentarium of ficiale, Rome 1920, 12, p. 467

She conceived in her womb the Power that came to her body”.⁽¹⁾

He also says:

“Let Eve, our first mother, now hear and come to me. Let her lift up her head that was bent low under the garden’s shame.

Let her uncover her face and give thanks to you, because you have taken away her confusion. Let her bear the voice of perfect peace, because her daughter has paid her debt”.⁽²⁾

“The serpent and Eve dug a grave and thrust the guilty Adam into hell, but Gabriel came and spoke with Mary, and thereupon was laid open the mystery whereby all the dead are raised again”.⁽³⁾

“God’s Eden is Mary;
in her there is no serpent that harms....,
no Eve that kills,
but from her springs the Tree of Life that restores the
exiles of Eden”.⁽⁴⁾

The insight of those Fathers is repeated in the writing of SS. Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Epiphanius of Salamis and others, from which I quote the following passages:

(1) On Nativity 35 : 17

(2) Hymns on Blessed Mary, 19:19, 20. T. J. Lamy: Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones, Mechlin, vol. 2, p. 621-625. T. Livius: The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries, London 1893. p. 430f. Palmer. p. 10

(3) On the Annunciation of the Mother of God, hymn 3:20. Palmer 21

(4) On the Annunciation...., hymn 3 : 30

- * Eve is called Mother of the human race, but Mary,
Mother of Salvation.
St. Ambrose⁽¹⁾

 - * After the Virgin conceived and had born her Son for
us... the curse was dissolved: death through Eve, life
through Mary!
St. Jerome⁽²⁾

 - * Mary was included in Eve, but it was only when Mary
came that we knew who Eve was!
St. Augustine⁽³⁾

 - * Eve looks to Mary, and her very name, “mother of all
the living” is a mysterious presage of the future, for
“Life” itself was born of Mary, whence she became
more fully “the mother of all the living”.
- Nor can we apply the passage: “I will put enmities
between you and the woman” (Gen. 3:15) as to Eve
alone; it received its true fulfilment when that Holy and
Unique One came, born of Mary without human seed...
- St. Epiphanius of Salamis*⁽⁴⁾
- * The woman found her advocate in a woman.
St. Gregory of Nyssa⁽⁵⁾

(1) Epist. 63.33. PL 16:1250

(2) Epist. 22:21. PL 22:408

(3) Sermon 102

(4) Panarion 3:2:78. PG 42:728

(5) On Cant. Cant., Hom 13. PG 44:1052

4

FULL OF GRACE

Mystery of Rejoice:

On the Annunciation the angel Gabriel greeted St. Mary with the words:

“Hail
full of grace,
the Lord is within you,
blessed are you among women”.

It was not an ordinary greeting, i.e., “Good Day”, nor did it mean “peace” or “shalom”, but had the full meaning of “rejoice”. For the Greek word for Hail is “χαίρει”, and the verb form of it “χαίρω” is found eighty times in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. About half are translated “rejoice”, and the other half are used to refer to the joy of God’s people at some striking act done by God for their salvation .⁽¹⁾

In the Old Testament, some prophets addressed the same greeting to the “Daughter of Zion”, asking her to rejoice greatly and shout aloud, proclaiming the Messianic deliverance.

“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion!.....
Rejoice (charie), exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!.....

⁽¹⁾ McHaugh, p. 39

The Lord your God is in your midst.

Zephaniah 3:14.17

Rejoice (charie) heart and soul,
daughter of Zion!....
for you, I come and I will dwell (shakan) in the
midst of you.....

Zechariah 9:9f.

Now, the angel invites the true daughter of Zion, St. Mary, to inner., heartfelt joy, because of the dwelling (shakan) of the Messiah, her Savior and God, within her, and because of her motherhood of God's Son.

This mystery of rejoicing which St. Mary received at the moment of the divine Incarnation, is declared clearly throughout the whole Coptic liturgies, hymns and arts; a matter which we will discuss in the last chapter.

St. Mary's holiness:

The idea of St. Mary's holiness is related to our conception of her motherhood to God, her perpetual virginity, her personal friendship to believers, and her status as a symbol of the Holy Church.

1. We already see St. Mary's motherhood to God as the fruit of marriage between God's free grace and man's faithful

submission and obedience to God. God, miraculously intervenes to realize the divine Incarnation as a free gift offered from Him to men. (Luke 1: 28-35).

By free divine grace, St. Mary gains preparatory perfection in spirit and body to enable her to receive Him. The divine grace sanctified St. Mary, so that she could become the True holy of holies in whom God dwells and the second heaven, the Mother of “Life, Light and the Holy One”.

The Virgin, on man’s behalf, submitted to God’s message and His act. (Luke 1:38).

At the moment of Incarnation St. Mary received a unique perfection, by the actual Presence of God’s Son, the Author of Grace.

* Truly, she alone is said to be full of grace, who alone obtained the grace which no one else had gained; that of being filled with Author of grace.

St. Ambrose⁽¹⁾

* Hail, full of grace!
For grace is bestowed on individuals by portions,
but on Mary it was bestowed in all its plenitude!

Fr. Peter Chrysologus

* Mary carried Fire in her hands,
and embraced Flame with her arms.
To the Flame she gave her breasts to suck,
to the Nourisher of all she gave of her milk.

⁽¹⁾ Expositio avengelii secundum Lucan, lib. 3:9. PL 15:1556

Who can possibly tell of her?!

St. Ephram the Syrian⁽¹⁾

- * Clothed with divine grace as with a garment,
her soul filled with a divine wisdom,
in heart she was wedded to God;
she received God in her womb...

Theodosius of Ancra⁽²⁾

This idea - the correlation between St. Mary's holiness and her maternity to God - is clarified in the Coptic hymns, which give her many names, to express the Theotokos' holiness:

“Hail to the new heaven,
from which the Sun of Righteousness shines,
the Lord of all mankind!”

On the Christmas Liturgy⁽³⁾

“Hail to Mary,
the beautiful dove,
who brought forth God, the Word!

On the Holy week⁽⁴⁾

- * You became more higher than heaven,
and more honourable than earth and all the creatures
thereon,
for you became the mother of the Creator!”

(1) Hymns on Blessed Mary 18:27. Palmer, p. 17

(2) On the Holy Nativity of Christ 11 PG 77:1427

(3) Spasmos (kiss), Is sung after the prayer of Reconciliation

(4) The conclusion of the Prayers at night.

* No other being became the Mother of God; and
Although you are an inhabitant of the Earth, you
became the mother of the Creator!

(Baralax) of the hymn of Blessing

2. Her perpetual virginity also is correlated with her holiness, as it appears in the Alexandrian treatises on Virginity.

“She was a virgin”, says St. Ambrose, “not only in body but also in spirit, whose pure mind was never spoiled by any deceit”.⁽¹⁾

3. The orthodox believer feels the holiness of St. Mary not only as a doctrine which he has learned from the books, but as a fruit of personal friendship with St. Mary in his daily life. The Coptic believer feels that she is his own mother, the holy Queen in heaven, who asks for his salvation. She is the holy mother who longs for the holiness of her sons.

4. Lastly, St. Mary is holy as far as she, as the “Daughter of Zion”, full of grace, symbolizes the Holy Church. She also symbolizes the Bride of Christ, His mystical body and the spiritual institution founded by the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ De Virg. 2:7

⁽²⁾ Max Thurian: Mary, Mother of all Christians, 1964. ch. 2

St. Mary & Actual Sins:

Some Fathers do not believe her to be without faults, such as St. Irenaeus, Origen, St. John Chrysostom.... but these opinions do not represent the widespread mariological tradition in the Early Church.

The Church members believe that St. Mary's holiness is unique, and that it surpasses heavenly creatures:- even the Cherubim and the Seraphim....

She passed all her life in holiness, as the True Ark of the Covenant, which was made of incorruptible wood laid in by gold inside and outside.⁽¹⁾

The following are some quotations from the writings of the Fathers to this effect.

* I do not propose to have a single question raised on the subject of sin in regard to the Holy Virgin Mary, out of respect for the Lord.

St. Augustine⁽²⁾

* How could I paint the picture of this marvellous, beautiful one, with ordinary colour..... too exalted and too glorious is the image of her beauty.....
She was wise and filled with the love of God ...

⁽¹⁾ Theotokia of Sunday

⁽²⁾ Palmer, p. 33; Carol: Mariology, vol. 1, p. 17

She was never defiled by bad desires, had remained from childhood steadfastly just and has always walked along the right way without fault or stumbling...

St. Jacob of Sarug⁽¹⁾ (451-521)

- * The Word of the Father came forth from His Bosom, and in another He put on a body.
From one Bosom He came forth to another.
These pure *bosoms* were filled with Him.
Blessed is He who dwells in us.

St. Ephram the Syrian⁽²⁾

St. Mary & The Original Sin:

The Orthodox Church, whose love towards St. Mary is deeprooted, considers her more holy than all the heavenly creatures, whilst a natural member of the human race. We do not however, set her apart from the human race by assuming that she was born without original sin, as if she was born not of human seed.

This reality is declared in the following Theotokia:⁽³⁾

“How deep is God’s abundance and wisdom,
that the womb under judgement
brought forth children by incurring pain;
she became a fountain of immortality,
bringing forth Emmanuel without human seed,
so that He might destroy corruption of our nature”.

⁽¹⁾ Ode on the Blessed Virgin Mary, lines 60, 138, 143

⁽²⁾ Lamy 2:743; Livius 435

⁽³⁾ For Thursday

Thus, the Church makes a distinction between St. Mary's life before and after the moment of divine Incarnation.

In another Theotokia we say: ⁽¹⁾

“The Holy Spirit filled you completely,
filled every part in your soul and body,
O Mary, the mother of God”.

St. Mary, herself declared her joy to God, her Saviour... for indeed she was in need of salvation.

To this effect St. Ambrose says: ⁽²⁾

“When the Lord wanted to redeem the world, He began His work with Mary, that she, through whom salvation was prepared for all, should be the first to draw the fruit of salvation from the Son”.

St. Augustine also says: ⁽³⁾

“Mary sprang from Adam, and died in consequence of sin; Adam died in consequence of sin; and the flesh of the Lord, sprang from Mary, and died to destroy sin”.

⁽¹⁾ For Saturday

⁽²⁾ Exp. in Luc 2:17

⁽³⁾ W. J. Burghardt: The Testimony of the Patristic Age concerning Mary's death. Maryland 1957, p.11

Lastly this Orthodox Concept preserved our Church from any exaggeration or confusion between Christ and His Mother. No Orthodox theologian calls St. Mary “Coredemptrix”, and no worship is offered to her, but only veneration and praise....

In other words, in the Orthodox Church there is an accurate line that divides Christ from St. Mary, His Mother.

The Concept of Intercession

In our Orthodox Church, we cannot accept any mediator between God and people, except Jesus Christ, the sole High Priest of the heavens, and the Sacrifice by whose blood we receive the reconciliation and remission of sins. There is no other name under heaven by whom we can be saved except that of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12).

Perhaps one may ask: if that is the case why is it in the Church rites that believers ask for the intercession of St. Mary and the prayers of the Saints? Are there any evangelical texts that prove the Saints' intercession?

Truly, the Gospel in its spirit and texts, aims at bringing man to the experience of divine life, that is, divine love. This means that the person puts aside his own-self, so that by the Holy Spirit he offers his whole life for the salvation of his fellow brethren. In other words the evangelical life is but an intermediary life, during which the believer does his best, through his deeds and prayers, to see that everybody is glorified in the bosom of God.

This is precisely the concept of "intercession". As the soul moves closer to God, in a deeper union with Jesus Christ it becomes more attached to others, and hence prays for them, asks for their salvation.

That is what St. Macarius meant when he said that no man can obtain salvation outside his relationship with others. “We all pray for one another. Parents exhort their children, are solicitous for their salvation and pray for them. We are as St. Paul once said, ‘God’s co-adjutors’. Each of us is an intermediary, a mediator of grace for others”.⁽¹⁾

Looking to our Lord Jesus Christ we can establish the positive response that He has given to the intercession of people and their petitions for others. For instance, He healed the paralytic for the sake of those who brought him. (Mat. 9:2). He also healed the centurion’s servant because of the petition of his master (Mat. 8:5) and the daughter of the Canaanite woman’s madness in response to the cries of her mother. God, the lover of man, gives generously, longs to see us like Him, love the others and ask for them more than for ourselves.

On the other side, which follows directly from the above, it is evident that the evangelical love is always associated with a true humbleness. This implies that in our mind, we feel we are not worthy to pray for others, but rather we ask them to pray for us.

For instance St. Paul, knowing that he was called by God Himself for the ministry of the word through visions and revelations, still asked for the prayers of his people, so that the Lord may grant him the ability to preach.

We then wonder, was the apostle inferior, not to ask God directly to give him what he wanted? Certainly not, but he felt the need to share love and humility with other people.

⁽¹⁾ Karl Rahner: *Mary, Mother of The Lord*, P. 96

Once again we may wonder, if human intercession between the Communion of the Saints does actually exist on earth, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then surely it is even more valid for those who enter Paradise, that they do not cease in praying for their brethren!! If, while on earth, tied down under the burden of flesh, they ask more for the others than for themselves, then how intense would their prayers be for those who are still living, when they are close to the author of Love Himself!

In brief, the intercession of Saints in our Orthodox concept confirms the effectiveness of the saving deeds of God in the life of every believer, and substantially rejects any ideas of worshipping Saints. It declares the unity of the Church, as members of one body, all members suffering if one is hurt, and pleased at the honour of others. (1 Cor. 12:26, 27).

The Mystery of Her Intercession:

From the above, we see that if we give importance to the principle of intercession in general, then how much more effective would be the prayers of the Mother of God for the salvation of Her children and brethren!!

We have seen Her receive the motherhood of the Incarnate Son of God and become Mother of His flesh, i.e. His Church. This motherhood is not merely an honourable title but a responsibility for unceasing work. That is what Simean The Elder has prophesized about the Virgin saying “and a sword will pierce your own soul too”. (Luke 2:35).

The motherhood of Virgin Mary, which was started initially upon the free grace of God, who chose Her among all mankind, was verified by Her faith in the word and promises of God.... That has made Her a superior member of the body of Christ who responds to the need of the other members, seeking the salvation of everybody.

Limits of Her Intercession:

In the story of the wedding of Cana of Galilee, we can realize the limits of the intercession of the Mother and Virgin Mary. For she asked her Son: “they have no wine!!”. Of course the Lord was aware of that, and surely he does not need to be reminded of the needs of his children or be told about it.... But our Lord Jesus, who is full of love, is pleased to see the mutual feelings of love in his mother and his children.

Her request was only made once, but he answered “woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet”. The Lord’s reply signifies the intercession of the Virgin Mary:

First: It shows clearly the trust of his mother in Him, for she did not repeat her request, but with every assurance and confidence she said to the people “Do whatever He tells you”. She was positive that her Son would answer her request for His children.

Second: Through her conversation with the people of the wedding we can visualize her role in intercession. Certainly it is not giving worship to her personality, but to her ability to direct our hearts, to secretly carry out the commandment of her Son to “Do whatever He tells you”.

Let us ask for Her prayers and intercessions that we may be able to fulfil the commandment of Her Son. Thus through Her motherhood to the Lord, we can be saved by the grace of the Blood of Her Begotten Son.

6

ST. MARY

THE MODEL OF VIRGINS

The Fathers of Alexandria represent two Mariological trends: the theological and the ascetical. Every time the waves of martyrdom were calmed, ascetism was favoured by the Egyptians in its place, the men usually preferring to live in the desert, while girls lived in the houses of virgins in the cities. It was natural that St. Mary should be presented to those girls as the great example after which to form themselves. She was depicted by the virgins as the “Virgin of virgins” and their patroness.

In the second century, the Great Origen says, “It would be unseemly to have to attribute to someone other than the virgin the first-fruits of Christian virginity”.⁽¹⁾

St. Alexander of Alexandria, in an address reproduced by his successor St. Athanasius, tells the virgins: “You have, as an example, the conduct of Mary, who is the type and image of the life that is proper to heaven (i.e. virginity)”.⁽²⁾

St. Athanasius in his “letter to virgins” preserved in Coptic, represents St. Mary as the model of virgins, describing her life not as it appears in the Holy Bible, but as the model of a virgin’s life as he says:

“Mary was a pure virgin, with a harmonious disposition.

She loved good works...

⁽¹⁾ Origen: In Mat. Com. 10:17 PG 13:878a

⁽²⁾ Hilda Graef: Mary, A History of Doct. and Devotion, London 1963. p. 50

She did not want to be seen by men; but she asked God to examine her...

She remained continually at home, living a retired life and imitating a honey-bee...

She generously distributed to the poor what was left over from the work of her hands....

She prayed solitarily to God, for two things: not to let a bad thought take root in her heart, and to grow neither bold nor hard of heart.....

Her speech was calm and her voice was low...

She wanted to make progress everyday; and she did so.

When she rose in the morning, she endeavoured to make her works more new than those she had already done....

She was not afraid of death, but rather was sad, and sighed everyday that she had not yet crossed the threshold of heaven".⁽¹⁾

St. Ambrose, referring to St. Athanasius' letter to virgins, gives a beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary as a model of

(1) Letter to Virgins 89-91

the virgins⁽¹⁾, in his work “De Virginibus”.⁽²⁾ He praised St. Mary for her humility, her silence or moderation in speech, her retirement, her virginal solicitude to keep an unsullied reputation, her modesty, her assiduity in reading the Scripture, her respect for others, her industry and, in a special way, for her faith and devotion.

He rightly concluded his treatise, “Have, then, before your eyes, as an image, the virgin life of Mary, from whom as from a mirror shines forth the brightness of chastity and the form of virtue”.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus in his oration delivered at Constantinople in 379 A.D. relates how St. Justina, the martyr and virgin, facing death with the magician Cyprian, whom she had converted, invoked, as protector of her virginity, Christ, her Bridegroom, and prayed to Virgin Mary as a “virgin in a danger”. She looked to her as a patroness of virgins.⁽³⁾

(1) C. W. Newmann: *The Virgin Mary in the works of St. Ambrose*, Switzerland 1962, P.38. Lefort: *Athanase, Ambroise et Chenoute*, “*Sur La Virginite*” in *Museon*. Vol. 48, 1935, p. 55-13

(2) Book 2

(3) *Oratione 24:19 PG 35:1180c*

7 ST. MARY & THE CHURCH

The “Theotokia of Thursday” states:

“She offered God the Creator, the Word of the Father, the paste of the human race.

He was incarnated of her, without alteration.
She brought Him forth as a Child,
and He was called Emmanuel”.

At the moment of the Annunciation St. Mary used her own free will to submit, and through her, God realized His divine plan of unity with us, giving Himself to be one with us. According to the words of St. Augustine, the holy womb of St. Mary became the bridal chamber of an exalted marriage between the Word and the Flesh. There He united the Church, His body, to Himself, and thus the Church realized her mystical existence to the full.

Now we can understand the words spoken by St. Ephram the Syrian: “Mary was the mother earth that brought forth the Church”.

Moreover, as a result of this hypostatic union between the Word's divinity and humanity, St. Mary received another kind of spiritual unity between God and herself; a union of the redeemed person with the Redeemer, which all the Church is summoned to receive.

St. Mary received this grace of unity with God, as a representative, in a way, of the Universal Church; and as the first member of the church, she is its ideal and superior member. For this reason she received the highest grace.

St. Mary, A Type of the Church:

The principal hymn recited daily at the Marian Month (of Keyahk) before the Feast of Christmas, consists of a lot of selected verses from the Book of Psalms, praising the Church as being the holy dwelling place of the Incarnate God. It is not without meaning that the Church is praised all the Marian month, for what St. Mary received it was on behalf of the whole Church.

St. Ephram the Syrian attributes to the Church what is St. Mary's own, saying:

“Blessed are you, O Church.

For of you Isaiah in his prophetic song of joy says:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son.

O hidden mystery of the Church”!(¹)

The Alexandrian Pope, St. Cyril links St. Mary with the Church as he says:

“Let us praise with songs of joy Mary the ever-virgin,
who herself is clearly the holy Church,
together with the Son and most chaste Spouse !
To God be praise for ever!”(²)

(¹) Hymns on Nativity 5:5.

(²) Sermon 4, addressed at the Council of Ephesus. PG 77:996

St. Ambrose asserts that she is “a type of the Church”,⁽¹⁾ and St. Augustine states that “Mary is a part of the Church, a holy member, an excellent member, the most eminent member, whilst still a member of the whole body”.⁽²⁾

In fact, the whole dimension of St. Mary’s life can be seen as a beautiful icon of the Universal Church. Here are some examples:

1. At the Annunciation, St. Mary’s joy and hymn singing were - according to St. Irenaeus⁽³⁾ - prophet actions which she practised in the name of the Church. St. Jacob of Sarug (446) offers the same idea in other words: “The wise Virgin was the mouth of the Church, and she heard the explanation for the creation of the whole world”.

2. Mary’s visitation to her kinswoman Elizabeth is a symbol of the Church missionaries throughout the whole world. For the Church, like St. Mary, the Daughter of Zion, a poor Virgin, a handmaid of the Lord, full of grace and spiritually bearing the Word of God, must be consumed with the desire to communicate to her relatives, the human race, proclaiming God’s salvation. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace.... who says to Zion: Your God reigns” (Isa. 52:7) .

(1) In Lucan 2:7 PL 15:1555

(2) Sermon 25 De Verbis Evangelli Mat. PL 46:938

(3) Ad. Haer 3:10:2, 3 PG 873f

St. Ambrose refers to this missionary visitation, saying, that she sings the Magnificat, hastening through the hill-country of Judea, and is thus a symbol of the Church striding through the hills of centuries.⁽¹⁾

3. St. Mary's identification with the Church - according to St. Ambrose - is completed under the Cross:

“You will be a son of thunder, if you are a son of the Church.

May Christ also say to you from the wood of the Cross:
Behold your mother!

May He also say to the Church:

Behold Your Son; for then you will begin to be a son of the church, when you see Christ victorious on the Cross”.

The Analogy between St. Mary & The Church:

1. St. Mary and the Church are both mother and virgin at the same time, each one conceived by the Holy Spirit without human seed, giving birth to the unblemished Son. St. Mary is the mother of the Divine Word, whom she generated according to His humanity, and the Church is the mother of her members, whom she generates through baptism to participate in Christ's life.

In this effect, St. Augustine says: “As Mary gave birth to Him who is your Head, so the Church gives birth to you. For the Church also is both mother and virgin: mother in the womb of

⁽¹⁾ De Instit. Virginis 14:87

our love, virgin in her inviolate faith. She is mother of many nations who yet are one body, just as Virgin Mary is the mother of Many, but also of the One”.⁽¹⁾

St. Mary is literally and spiritually a virgin, while the Church can be called a virgin in that it has never adulterated the faith, but has always remained true to Christ’s teaching.

2. The Church has the same title as St. Mary, i.e. “New Eve”. For St. Mary gave birth to the “Incarnate Son” who bestows life on the believers, while the Church is the mother of those believers who receive “Life” through unity with their Head, the Incarnate God.

3. Similar to St. Mary, the Church is “the handmaid of the Lord”. For she should be as a humble handmaid, denying all the efforts, which result from man’s power, and thus becoming a sign of the pure grace of God, who seeks us out in the humility of our human condition in order to lead us to the glory of His Kingdom.⁽²⁾

4. Both St. Mary and the Church are called “holy one”.

St. Hippolytus interprets the blessing offered by Moses:- “Through God’s blessing his land shall remain his own and be blessed with the dew of heaven” (Deut. 33:13) - as a prophecy of St. Mary’s holiness; for she is the blessed land who received the Word of God coming down like heavenly dew. He also states that this prophecy refers to the Church’s holiness, saying: “It can also be said of the Church, for she is blessed by the Lord as a

⁽¹⁾ Sermon 25 : 8

⁽²⁾ Max Thurian P.59

holy land and as a paradise of bliss. The dew is the Lord, the Saviour Himself.⁽¹⁾

5. The mediation of St. Mary is a typical church function. For - the triumphant and militant members of the Church - have to imitate St. Mary, praying unceasingly, for the renewal of the whole world in Jesus Christ.

⁽¹⁾ Blessings of Moses 15.

ST. MARY

IN

THE COPTIC⁽¹⁾ RITE

It is too difficult to give an account of the prominent place of St. Mary in the Coptic Church in this short treatise. For St. Mary is commemorated and invoked in every daily hymn and liturgy, and even in every canonical hour, day and night. Various Marian feasts are celebrated yearly and monthly, and there are also Lord's feasts in which we honour her with the Lord (such as the feasts celebrating Annunciation, Christmas, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, the First Miracle Jesus made in Cana of Galilee etc....). Her icons have special characteristics and a certain order in the Coptic Church building⁽²⁾ . The richness and beauty of the antiphones, and the tones of the Coptic Marian hymns, are truly amazing, especially those of the Marian month (Keyahk), before Christmas.

1. St. Mary in the Daily hymns

The Coptic Church gives special attention to hymning as an expression of the heavenly nature which she gained through her unity with the Risen Christ. From the first centuries she has

⁽¹⁾ Coptic Church is the Church of Egypt, or the Church of Alexandria.

⁽²⁾ See our book: The Church, House of God, Melbourne 1977.

inspired hymns for every day of the week, offered as a loving sacrifice by the believers and as a method for raising their hearts to heaven, preparing them all the week to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy. These simple and lovely hymns were used also to teach the people the Orthodox beliefs and to protect them from heresies. The daily assemble of the local Church to sing hymns preserves the unity of the Church.

Every daily hymn consists of: the Lord's Prayer, Prayer of Thanksgiving, Psalms, passages from the Holy Scriptures, Four "howces" (means "hymns") and ("Lobsh" means "explanation"), Theotokia of the day (hymn giving praise to St. Mary the Theotokos) etc.

Characteristics of the Theotokias:

1. Through the Theotokias the people repeat the name "Mary" as a sign of the close friendship with her and their deep desire to call her by name.

This name "Mary" was borne by only one person in the Old Testament, the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exod. 5:20f; Num. 12:1-5.....)

There are different explanation for the etymology of the name "Mary"⁽¹⁾ :

⁽¹⁾ Carol: Mariology, vol. 1, p. 411 f

A. As the names “Moses” and “Aaron” are purely Egyptian, it is possible that their sister received an Egyptian name “Meri-Yam”, which consists of two words:

“Meri” is the perfect passive participle of the Egyptian verb “Mr” (to love), i.e., it means “beloved”.

“Yam”, was used for the Hebrew Divine Name “Yahwah”.

Then “Meriam” means “the Beloved of God”⁽¹⁾

B. The ancient rabbis saw in Mary’s name a symbol of Israel’s bitter servitude in Egypt. Mary means “bitterness” (Hebrew Merur). They state that her name was born of the Egyptians’ hard treatment of the Jews.⁽²⁾

C Some early Christian writers see that the Hebrew word “Maryam” consists of two words:

“Mar” means “bitter”,

“Yam” means “Sea”.

It means “bitter of sea” or “Myrrh of Sea”.

D. Others see that it is the feminine gender of the Aramic word “Mar” (Master), i.e., it means “Lady”.

2. The Theotokias use an enormous number of titles for St.Mary, taken from her various offices and privileges, such as:

(1) F. Zorell: Was bedeutet den Name Maria?
in Zeitschen - fur Kathol. Theol., 30 (1906) p. 356-360.

(2) J. Levy: Neuhebraisches und chaldaisches worterbuch uber die Talmudin und Midrashim (Leipzig, 1876-1889) S.U. Merur.

“Second dome, holy of holies, golden vessel of manna,
golden lamp-stand, golden censer.

My lady, holy, undefiled, true virgin, beautiful dove, holy
flower, precious stone,

Theotokos, mother of Emmanuel, mother of the Refuge,
mother of the Holy One, mother of the Master, mother of the
Beloved, mother of Jesus Christ, mother of God’s Son, rejoiced
of Eve, joy of the generations, boast of Jude, preaching of
Moses, friend of Solomon, daughter of Joachim”.⁽¹⁾

“Burning bush seen by Moses, uncultivated field that has
produced the Fruit of Life, treasure which Joseph bought and
found with a Pearl hidden in it, she who gave suck to the Feeder
of every body, Rational mount (of Sinai), and mount which
Daniel saw,

perfect, chaste,
rejoiced of angels,
mother of Christ, mother of all living”.⁽²⁾

“Second heaven, eastern gate, Jerusalem - the city of our
Lord, rational paradise,

pure bride of the Pure Bridegroom,
incorruptible, unblamed, chosen vessel,
handmaid,
factory of the inseparable unity
(between His divinity and His humanity”.⁽³⁾

(1) Theotokia of Sunday

(2) Theotokia of Tuesday

(3) Theotokia of Wednesday

“Glory of all the virgins, new heaven, the
Woman of the Book of Revelation 12”.⁽¹⁾
“Mediatrex”.⁽²⁾

3. The Theotokias are very rich with the types and symbols of St. Mary, mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, together with simple and deep theological explanations from the point of view of St. Mary’s offices, privileges and relation to the Holy Trinity, to the heavenly hosts, to the believers and to the whole human race.

4. Through these hymns, the church clarifies the mystery of Incarnation, the mystery of our salvation and many aspects of the Christological theology:

“God, the Word, became Man without separations!
He is one of two:
The holy and incorruptible divinity, who is one with
the Father;
and the pure human being, not of human seed, equal
to us...”

Theotokia of Sunday.

He is still God,
came to us and became Son of Man !
He is the True God, Who
came and redeemed us !

Theotokia of Thursday.

(1) Theotokia of Thursday

(2) Theotokia of Friday

5. There is no need to state that these Theotokias have an eschatological aspect, for it is the expression of the Coptic Church for her life. They explain the Old Testament rites and actions as symbols and types of the mystery of Incarnation in view of the heavenly kingdom. As an example, the conclusions of the Theotokias of Wednesday to Saturday (Batis)⁽¹⁾ is:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who bears the sins of the world,
may You consider us of your sheep who will be at your
Right Hand !

That on your fearful second advent, we will not hear
the terrible voice:

“I do not know you!”

But will be worthy of bearing the full, joyful voice of
your mercy, saying aloud:

Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take, for
your heritage, eternal life, for ever. The martyrs will
come with their sufferings, and the righteous with their
virtues.

The Son of God will come in His glory and
His Father’s glory,
and reward each one according to his deeds....”

6. These Theotokias are in fact liturgical hymns, preparing us spiritually to participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy and receive the Communion, the True Manna, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, Son of St. Mary.

7. Their title “Theotokia” declares that the principal and theological foundation of the Coptic devotion to St. Mary in

⁽¹⁾ Certain tone for these days

these hymns is “her motherhood to God (θεοτοκος)” beside other theological bases, i.e., her perpetual virginity and her close friendship with her relatives the whole human race.

8. In all our genuine Marian texts and hymns the Church makes a clear distinction between Jesus Christ to whom worshipping is due, and St. Mary to whom veneration is due.

According to the words of St. Epiphanius of Salamis, in Cyprus, “Let Mary be honoured, but let the Lord be worshipped!”⁽¹⁾

St. Ambrose gives a warning in this respect: “Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit, too, must be adored when we adore Him, who is incarnated of the Holy Spirit. But let no one apply this to Mary, for she was the temple of God, not the God of the temple. And therefore He alone is be adored, who worked in the temple”.⁽²⁾

9. These Theotokias provoke us to repent:
“Your mercies, O my God, are innumerable....
May You, my Lord, not remember the sins I have
committed, nor count my transgressions!
For You chose the publican, saved the adulteress and
remembered the thief who was at Your Right Hand.
May You teach me, a sinner, repentance....”
Conclusion of Theotokia (Adam)⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Adv. Haer 79:9

⁽²⁾ De Spiritu Sancto 3:79f

⁽³⁾ Certain tone for the days: Sunday, Monday and Tuesday

2. St. Mary in the Keyahk's hymns

As we celebrate Christmas on 29th of Keyahk, the whole month (before Christmas) is devoted to hymning many Marian hymns, added to the daily hymns, as a preparation for Christmas.

In this month - which we can call the Marian Month -the believers in Egypt assemble in evening of every Saturday and remain in the church giving hymns until the end of the Eucharistic Liturgy of Sunday.

The Characteristics of the Keyahk's hymns:

Beside those characteristics of the “Theotokias” which we have already mentioned, these Keyahk's hymns have the following characteristics:

- 1.** If we eliminate the hymns which were introduced lately by someone who had no theological knowledge, the keyahkal hymn is truly a heavenly symphony, praises not only St. Mary as the mother of God, but also the whole Church as being the holy dwelling place of the Incarnate God. In other words, through the incarnation of God's Son in the holy womb of St. Mary we see Him dwelling in our souls by the sanctification of His Holy Spirit.
- 2.** These hymns have a social trend, every member is praising God, not individually but through all God's saints, through His membership of the One Church. “I praise you in the midst of the great community (Church)” (Ps. 22:22).

For this reason many hymns are devoted to praise some saints also, as if they assemble with us to give hymns to the Incarnate God, the Saviour of the human race.

3. Types and Symbols of St. Mary in the Coptic Hymns

1. The Tabernacle:

The Theotokia of Sunday calls St. Mary “the second dome, the holy of holies at the Tabernacle etc.”

At the Annunciation, angel Gabriel said, “the power of the Most High shall overshadow (episkiazein) you” (Luke 1:35). The same verb “episkiazein” (in Hebrew “shakan” means “dwelling”), was used for the Tabernacle, where God was dwelling among His people, and at the moment of Christ’s transfiguration, where the Lord was present among two of His prophets and three of His disciples, a cloud covering them in shadow.

According to the book of Exodus (40:35) Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle because the Lord abode (shakan) in it and the glory of the Lord filled it. Thus, St. Mary is the True Tabernacle, where God Himself dwelt among His people.

If Moses was unable to enter it because of God’s glory, who can enter the mystery of St. Mary who bore God Himself in her holy womb?!

“Who can declare: how honourable is the dome
(tabernacle) of Moses, who made it at Mount of Sinai?!
O Mary, the Virgin,
You are assimilated to the tabernacle!
You are the true dome,
wherein God dwells!”

Theotokia of Sunday.

2. The Ark of the Covenant:

St. Mary is assimilated to the Ark of the Covenant, made of incorruptible wood, inlaid with gold inside and out...

“And You, Mary, also put on the glory of divinity inside and out”.

Theotokia of Sunday.

The Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God, remained three months at the house of Obed-edom before David brought it to his house (2 Sam. 6); and St. Mary, who bore the Lord Himself, remained also three months at the town of Judea.

The bearing of the Ark simulated the joy of the people and caused David to make joyous leaps, dancing before the Lord (2 Sam. 6, 1 Chron. 15:29); and the arrival of St. Mary simulated the joy of Elizabeth and caused the baby, John the Baptist, to leap within his mother’s womb. The verb “leap” (skirtan) used in (St. Luke 1:41, 44) is the same used for David’s joy before the Ark, and it is used in the Holy Scripture to indicate the leaps of

joy which accompany the coming of the Lord (Ps. 114:4, 6; Wisdom 9:9; Mal. 4:2) and for heavenly joy (Luke 6:23).

St. Mary, the True Ark of God, became the cause of the rejoicing for all creatures:

“Hail, the Theotokos, the rejoiced of Angels!”

Theotokia of Tuesday.

“They offered honour to you,
O city of God,
for you became the dwelling place of those who are
rejoicing!”

Theotokia of Wednesday.

3. The Cover of the Ark:

The cover of the Ark was called in Hebrew “Sekina” which means “dwelling place”, for it represents God’s seat of mercy, overshadowed by two Cherubim. God appeared between the Cherubim in blue (symbol of heaven), and from there He used to speak to Moses.

St. Mary is this cover, a type of the Church, where God sits on His Throne of mercy among His people, and it is filled with His heavenly creatures:

“Two icons of Cherubim, made of gold,
overshadow the cover continuously, with their wings.

They overshadow the holy of holies, in the second dome!
Thousands and ten thousands (of angels) overshadow
you also,
O Mary!
They praise their Creator,
who dwelt in your womb,
who took our likeness...”

Theotokia of Sunday

4. The Vessel of Manna:

“You are the pure golden vessel of Hidden Manna,
wherein is the Bread of Life,
which came down from heaven and granted Life
to the whole world.....
He came out from the Father,
and you have born Him immaculately,
He gave us His precious Body and Blood,
that we may live for ever!”

Theotokia of Sunday

In the Old Testament God fed His people with Manna, but then He also gave us the Rational Manna, he who descended from heaven into the Virgin’s womb. The Lord Himself says, “Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the Bread which comes from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live forever: and the Bread that I will give is my Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”. (John 6:49-51).

It is noteworthy that St. Mary was not merely a vessel but the Hidden Manna received from her body...

5. The Golden Lamp-stand:

“You are the pure golden lamp-stand, that bears the ever-lightened Lamp.

He is the unapproachable Light of the world....,
who was incarnated of you without adulteration.....
All heavenly choirs cannot be compared with you,
O golden lamp-stand...
He who dwelt in your womb O Mary the Virgin, gives
light to every body in the world!
He is the Sun of Righteousness,
whom you bore,
and Who healed our sins....”

Theotokia of Sunday

St. Mary became superior to all heavenly creatures because of the True Light she bore. He shines, and no creature can behold His essence!

6. The Burning Bush:

“The bush which Moses saw in the wilderness,
was flaming,
but its branches were not consumed;
it is a type of Mary the spotless Virgin.
For the Word of God came and He was incarnated
of her.
The Fire of His Divinity did not consume her womb,

and she was virgin even after her childbirth.

Theotokia of Thursday

The bush was not only unconsumed, but also grew green and blossomed beautifully (Exod.3:1-3). In the Armenian rite we find the same idea:

“You, who was inflamed by the Sun like the bush, but was not consumed, gave to men the Bread of Life, and interceded for us that Christ might blot out our sins”.

For Benediction.

St. Ephram also says, “She bore Christ in her virginal womb as the bush on Mount of Horeb bore God in its flame.”

Pope Theodosius of Alexandria mentions the words of Christ addressed to His Father concerning His mother at the moment of her death, saying:

“Receive from me, O my Gracious Father,
the bush which received the Fire of Divinity and was
not consumed.

I offer You, O my Father, a royal gift today, even the
soul of my Virgin Mother.”⁽¹⁾

7. Aaron’s Rod:

“You are truly more superior than Aaron’s rod,
You are full of grace”
What is the rod, but “Mary”!?

⁽¹⁾ The Falling Asleep of Mary 6:18

The rod is a symbol of her virginity.
She conceived and brought forth the Son of the Most
High - the Word Himself - without human seed”.

Theotokia of Sunday

The lifeless rod blossomed forth (Num. 17:8) as a symbol
of St. Mary who brought forth “Life”.

8. Jacob’s Ladder:

“You are the ladder seen by Jacob,
which is fixed on earth.
It rose very high to heaven,
and the angels were descending on it !”

Theotokia of Tuesday

9. The Rational Mount:

“The living Word of God came down on the Mount of
Sinai, to give the Law.....

He also came down within you, O rational mount!....”

“He is the Stone which was cut from the Mount seen
by Daniel.
No human hand touched Him.
The Word of the Father came down and was incarnated
of the Virgin without human seed, to save us.....”

Theotokia of Tuesday

Other Types and Symbols:

The daily hymns mention other types and symbols of St. Mary, such as: Aaron's censer, Ezekiel's gate, Noe's Ark, God's city, light cloud on which God sits (Isa 19: 1), New Jerusalem etc....

4. St. Mary in The Coptic Liturgies

Marian texts and hymns have a prominent place in our liturgies. Their theological meanings and tones are well ordered to fit various occasions.

We give examples for the place of the Marian texts in some Coptic liturgies:-

1. The Eucharistic Liturgy:

A. Before the offertory, the following Marian hymn is sung:

“Hail, Mary the Queen,
she looks like an unseedy vine, which is uncultivated,
though the Bunch of Life was found in it!....

The Son of God, the truly Almighty,
came down and was incarnated of the Virgin....

You found favour, O Bride,
many persons honoured you,
for the Word of the Father was incarnated of you!

You are the high tower,
wherein the Pearl was found....”

Truly this hymn is very suitable, for the church is prepared for the offertory and the priest has to choose the “Lamb” i.e., the heavenly King, while he is standing by the royal door, i.e., the door of heaven. St. Mary, in this hymn, is called the Queen, to remind us that the heavenly King, her Son, gave His life up on our behalf, that we might become one with the Queen sitting on the Right Hand of the King.

She is also called the Bride, to remind us that the Eucharistic Liturgy, represents the mystery of union between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the Church. It represents mystery of the spiritual matrimony between the Crucified Christ and our souls!

She is also called the “high tower”, for she could enter heaven by the merit of her Son’s blood, waiting for us there!

Lastly this hymn is the hymn of the mystery of Incarnation realized in the holy womb of St. Mary, the mystery which leads us to receive the holy Body and Blood of the Lord!

B. At the incensation, the people sing the following hymn:

“This is the censer of pure gold,
containing the ambergris,
that was entrusted to the hands of Aaron the Priest,
to offer incense over the altar”.

On fasting days they say:

“The Virgin is the gold censer;
our Saviour is its ambergris;
She bore Him, who saved us and forgave our sins” -

And on the period of Great Lent:-

“You are the pure gold censer,
containing the Blessed Coal Fire!”

These hymns state that incensing is a symbol of the mystery of Incarnation, for the Incarnate God offered Himself as a sweet fragrant sacrifice, acceptable by the Father, for our sake.

According to the Ethiopian rite, at the incensation of St. Mary's Icon, the priest says:

“You are the gold censer, which bore the live Coal
Fire...
Blessed be He.... who was incarnated of you.
Who offered Himself to His Father for incense and
acceptable offering”.

And on going outside the Iconostasis (Icon-stand), the priest also says:

The censer is Mary;
the incense is He who was in her womb,
which is fragrant, the incense is He whom she bore,
He came and saved us,
the fragrant ointment,
Jesus Christ.....”.

- C. At the incensation of St. Mary's Icon, the Coptic priest says the following three texts:

“Rejoice⁽¹⁾, O beautiful dove,
which has borne God, the Word, for us.
We give you salutation with Angel Gabriel saying:
Rejoice (Hail), You are full of grace,
the Lord is with you”.
“Hail (rejoice), O Virgin, the true queen,
Hail, the Glory of our race.
You have borne Emmanuel, for us”.
“May we ask you to remember us, O faithful mediatrix,
with our Lord Jesus Christ,
that He may blot out our sins”.

- D. Before reading a chapter from the “Acts” it is said:
“Rejoice (Hail), O Mary, the beautiful dove,
that bore God, the Word, for us!”

This hymn of St. Mary as a beautiful dove is sung before reading a chapter of the Acts of the Church. St. Mary is a prototype of the stainless Church, who received the holiness of God through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God!

It is noteworthy that all Marian hymns sung through the readings (the Liturgy of the Word) concentrate on the Divine Incarnation, as if we have not only heard the Word of God but also receive the Word as a Person, dwelling within our souls.

⁽¹⁾ The Coptic word (XEPE) derived of the Greek word, is translated Hail or Rejoice. (See the book of the Holy Liturgy In Arabic and Coptic. Cairo 1959, edited by Fr. Atallah Arsanius El-Moharagy, p. 74).

E. After the prayer of Reconciliation, usually we sing the following hymn:

“Rejoice, O Mary, the handmaid and Mother,
for the angels sing hymns to Him, who is on your lap,
the Cherubim becomingly worship Him,
and the Seraphim too without intermission.

No favour we plead save your supplications and
intercessions unto our Lord Jesus Christ, O mistress of
us all and mother of God....”

Now, through the reconciliation which Jesus Christ has made, St. Mary as an archetype of the Church, rejoices!

We ask her to pray and intercede for us, through the reconciliation Jesus has made!

F. After the consecration of the Holy Elements, all the Church becomes united in Jesus Christ, and we commemorate the saints, that we may be assisted by their prayers.⁽¹⁾ It is naturally that we remind her before all other saints:

“In the first place, she is the ever-virgin the Mother of God and the all-glorified, pure St. Mary, who gave birth to God, the true Word”.⁽²⁾

G. Through receiving Holy Communion a hymn called (PIWIK, Pioiek means “the bread”) is sung:

⁽¹⁾ See Fr. T. Malaty: Christ in the Eucharist, Alexandria 1973. p. 488-493 93

⁽²⁾ Coptic Liturgy: translated by Fr. T. Malaty & N. Fanous, Melbourne 1976 p. 41

“The Bread of Life who came down from heaven,
gives life to the world.
You, O Mary, conceived the Rational Manna,
who came down from the Father,
You immaculately bore Him;
Who gave us His precious Body and Blood,
that we may live forever.”

2. The Sacrament of Matrimony:

Through the service of holy matrimony, the priest, deacons and people are thinking on the eternal wedding-feast of Christ and the Church.

For example, at the first part of the ceremony (called: the Agreement of Dual Possession) all the people, after hearing the Gospel concerning the Incarnation of God the Word, their Bridegroom, (John 1:1-17) sing in the “Palm-Sunday” tone, the following response, as if they are receiving the Bridegroom within their inner Jerusalem:

“Rejoice, O bride-chamber diversely adorned of the True Bridegroom who has united Himself with humanity!”

St. Mary as the prototype of the Church, the heavenly Bride, is praised by various hymns.

A. Immediately after reciting the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the deacons sing “This is the censer...”⁽¹⁾, and at the “Order of the Holy Crowning” they sing: “The Virgin is the gold censer”.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Page 91

⁽²⁾ Ibid.95

B. Throughout the three prayers of marriage the deacons sing the following responses:

“The gate of sunshine is Mary the Virgin,
the pure bride-chamber of the pure Bridegroom”.
“All the kings of the earth walk in your light,
and the nations in your splendour,
O, Mary, the Mother of God.
Solomon calls you in the Song of Songs:
My sister and my beloved, my true City, Jerusalem!”
“You are more bright than the sun,
You are the east,
which the right looks towards, with joy and exultation!”

It is wonderful while the priests asks God thrice to grant the bridal couple a chaste bridal-chamber, and blessed life through their unity, the deacons and the people proclaim their rejoicing for the holy bride-chamber, the Virgin’s womb, where the Bridegroom unites Himself with our humanity. Thus St. Mary becomes the “East” where the Sun of Righteousness shines upon the whole world, and all the kings (believers) come joyfully to this mystery.

C. At the end of the service, the deacons sing the following ode:

“Rejoice, enlightening bride,
the mother of the Giver of Light.
Rejoice. You who received the Word,
who dwelt in your womb.
Rejoice, you who are more glorious than Cherubim.
Rejoice, you who bore the Saviour of our souls.
Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

Thus, the Coptic matrimonial ceremony, from its beginning until the end, attracts our attention to St. Mary as the enlightening bride, in order that we also be prepared to be Christ's eternal bride!

3. The office of the Holy Baptism:

Before receiving the grace of Baptism the candidate or the Godfather and (or) the Godmother have to declare, before the bishop or the priest, the Virginal birth of Christ as an essential part of the Christian Creed.

4. The Sacrament of Healing the Sick:

Through this liturgy the priest repeats his request to St. Mary that she may pray and intercede for the forgiveness of our sins, calling her "the Mother of Salvation". The Church asks her triumphant members to pray for those who are still struggling, that God may heal their spirits, souls and bodies.

".... Through the intercession of the Virgin, the Mother of Salvation;

she whom we praise saying:

Blessed are you among women,

and blessed is the Fruit of your womb...."

"Through the intercessions of the mother of God, and the supplications of the angels, and the blood of the martyrs, and the prayers of the saints...."

"O holy Virgin the Theotokos, without human seed, intercede for the salvation of our souls".

5. The Liturgy of “Washing the baby”:

The Coptic Church, as a mother, looks after her children even before baptizing. On the eighth day of the birthday the priest, deacons and the family of the baby partake of a certain ceremony, called “Washing the baby”. They give thanks to the Lord for the gift of the baby and ask Him to prepare the baby for the spiritual rebirth.

On this occasion the Church reminds the family of the Only - Begotten Son who was born of St. Mary.

“Who is not incarnate, but has been incarnated;
Who is the Word become Man.
He Who has no beginning now begins...
Subjecting Himself to temporality, though Himself
timeless.

Mary, our mistress, the mother of God, Mary, the mother of our Saviour, intercede that He may forgive us our sins....”.

The response.

I think you can easily conceive the place of St. Mary in all the liturgies of the Coptic Church which I have not discussed.

5. St. Mary in the Festival Ceremonies

Through the incarnation of God’s Son of the Virgin Mary, the gates of heaven are opened to us, and all our days become feasts. For this reason suitable Marian hymns are sung in

every feast, reminding us that through the Virgin's Son, Jesus Christ, we receive the Lord's joy in our life.

We here refer to some Marian texts and hymns used on certain feasts.

1. The Christmas:

We have already mentioned that from the first of Keyahk until Christmas (29th of Keyahk) the church has a special Marian program to attract our thoughts towards the virginal birth of Christ.

Besides the ordinary Marian texts, other Marian texts and Christological texts having a Marian attitude are admitted to the Eucharistic Liturgy of the feast, such as:

“Today, the True Light shines upon us,
out of Mary the Virgin and chaste bride!”
“According to the prophets' sayings,
Mary has brought forth our Saviour, the Gracious
Lover of men, in Bethlehem....

Doxology of Christmas

“He bowed down from the heaven of heavens
and came down to the Virgin's womb.
He became man like us, but without the sin....

Doxology of Christmas

Come, all of you,
that we may worship our Lord Jesus Christ,

whom the Virgin has brought forth,
her virginity remaining unbroken....

Doxology of Christmas

“The Virgin brings forth the Supreme One,
and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One.
The angels together with the shepherds glorify Him,
and the Wisemen guided by the star were journeying
to Him.
For God, who exists before all ages, became a Child
for our sake!”

After the Reading of “Acts”

“Rejoice (Hail), New Heaven,
for the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord of the whole
world, shines out of you!

Spasmos⁽¹⁾ (Adam)

“The Begotten-Son of the Father,
before all the ages, was born of the Queen,
and her virginity remained unbroken!”

Spasmos (Batis)

2. The Annunciation:

“Rejoice (Hail), Mother of God,
the exultation of the angels!
Rejoice, the Chaste One,
the preaching of the prophets!
Rejoice, full of grace,

⁽¹⁾ "Spasmos" means "kissing", for it is sung while the people are kissing each other, after Prayer of Reconciliation.

the Lord be with you.
Rejoice, those who receive the joy
of the world from the angel!"

Spasmos (Adam).

3. The Marian Feasts:

One of the various beautiful Marian hymns, usually sung on the feasts of St. Mary, is "The Ten Chords":

"David moved the first chord of his lyre, saying aloud:
at your right hand stands the queen, O King (Ps. 45:9).

He moved also the second chord of his lyre, saying aloud:

Listen, daughter, look and pay careful attention:
forget your people and your father's house (Ps, 45:10).

He moves the third chord of his lyre, saying aloud:

All the glory of the King's daughter is within,
her robe is gold woven (Ps. 45:13).

He moved the fourth chord . . . saying:

With her virgin companions enter before the King,
in her train (Ps. 45:14).

He moved the fifth chord . . . saying:

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city
of our God, on His holy mountain (Ps. 48.1).

He moved the sixth chord . . . saying:

The wings of a dove covered with silver,
its pinions with yellow gold (Ps. 68:13).

He moved the seventh chord . . . saying:

The Mountain of God is a rich mountain (Ps. 68:15).

He moved the eighth chord . . . saying:

On the holy mountain He founded the city;
the Lord loves the gates of Zion (Ps. 87:1, 2).

He moved the ninth chord . . . saying:
Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God (Ps. 87:3).

He moved the tenth chord . . . saying:
The Lord has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.
Intercede for us with the Lord . . . ”

Another Marian hymn, used on the veneration of St. Mary or any other feast is:

“Rejoice, O Mother of God, the Virgin and advocate for the world before the Saviour, our God.

Rejoice, O Mother of God, the Virgin and Mother of Emmanuel.

You are unmarried, at the order of the angels.
Rejoice, O our advocate before the Father, our God, we glorify you” .

4. The Great Lent:

Among the various hymns of the Great Lent, which concentrate on repentance and fasting as a preparation for celebrating the Easter, is a Marian hymn specially for this period, called “Meghalo” (Great). In fact it is a hymn offered to Christ, the Son of the Virgin, sung before the “Trisagion”, as if the church decided to declare that virginal birth of Christ and His resurrection coincided.

The hymn is:

“Holy God, the Great Archpriest for ever.
Holy Almighty, who is of the Order of Melchizedek.
the Perfect One.

Holy the Immortal who is incarnated of the Holy Spirit
and St. Mary the Virgin, with great mystery;
have mercy upon us....”

This hymn is completed with another main hymn, called
“Apenshois” (O our Lord), in which we say:

O incense which in her womb;
O incense which she brings forth,
May You forgive us our sins!

We give hymns together with the angels, saying aloud:
Worthy (Aksios),
Worthy
You are worthy (of honour) O Mary, the Virgin!

5. The Holy Week (Paschal Week):

Through this week all the candles (lamps), before the saints'; icons are extinguished and no incensing may take place before the icons; and even the commemoration of the saints is dismissed at the Eucharistic Liturgy of Maundy Thursday. for we have to pay all our attention to the events of this Great week that precede Easter.

Nevertheless St. Mary's hymns find a place in this week because of the correlation between the Incarnation of the Virgin and the mystery of the Cross.

Every night before reading the explanation of the gospels, we say:-

“Hail (Rejoice), Mary the beautiful dove,
who born forth God the Word, for us.”

On Good Friday, before singing the Trisagion, a beautiful hymn called “O Monoghenis” (“Only - Begotten Son”) is sung.

Through it the Church reminds us that the Crucified One, who appears in weakness, is the same One who is born of the Virgin. God emptied Himself to become a man on our behalf (Phil. 2:7).

“O Only-Begotten Son, the Word of God,
the Immortal and Eternal,
who accepted everything for our salvation!
You are incarnated without alteration!
You are the Crucified Christ and God!
By death, He trampled upon death:
He is One of the Holy Trinity;
who is glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit!”

6. The Easter:

The Holy Fathers assimilated St. Mary's womb to the Lord's Tomb; for as the Lord was born of St. Mary while her virginity remained unbroken, so He also rose again while the

seals of the tomb were unbroken. The divine office of Easter according to the Byzantine rite states, “O Christ, who did not break the Virgin’s gate by your birth, You rose from the dead, having kept intact the seals, and You have opened unto us the gates of Paradise”.

According to the Coptic rite, on Easter the following Marian text is used:

“May you be enlightened,
may you be enlightened,
O Mary the Virgin”

Spasmos (Adam) 3

St. Mary who stored up in her heart the marvellous events concerning her Son (Luke 2:19) had been enlightened by the brightness of the Risen Lord, and she conceived in a more perfect way, His mystery.

6. St. Mary in the Canonical Hours

In every canonical hour we venerate St. Mary and ask her prayers and intercession for our spiritual progress.

1. In the prayer of the matins, before the creed, we say:

“Hail Mary!
we beseech you, holy one, full of glory, ever-virgin,
Mother of God, Mother of Christ,
may you lift up our prayers to your beloved Son,
that He may pardon us our sins.

Hail, holy Virgin, who brought forth the True Light,
Christ our Lord,
may you ask the Lord on our behalf,
to show pity on our souls and blot out our sins.

O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, holy and faithful
advocate of the human race, intercede for us with
Christ whom you mothered, that He may grant us
forgiveness of sins.

Hail, Virgin, true Queen!
Hail, the honour of our race, who gave birth
to Emmanuel.

We ask you to remember us, O faithful advocate with
our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may forgive us our sins”.

2. Often, before reciting the Creed we start with its
introductory:

“We glorify you, O Mother of the True Light,
we venerate you, O holy virgin, Mother of God,
for you gave birth to the Redeemer of the world, for us.
Glory be to our Master and King”

3. In every canonical hour, after reading the Gospel, we
recite some short prayers to God, suitable to the occasions we
are reminded of at these hours, concluding with a supplication to
St. Mary, asking her on our behalf.

A. AT MATINS⁽¹⁾

You are the honourable mother of the Light. Everywhere under the sun, they offer you glorification, the ‘Theotokos’ (Mother of God), the second heaven. For you are the bright and unchangeable blossom, the Mother, and the ever-virgin, as the Father chose you, the Holy Spirit overshadowed you and the Son deigned to be incarnated from you.

May you ask Him to redeem the world He had created, and deliver it from tribulations.

Let us sing to Him a new hymn and bless Him,
now and ever and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

B. THE TIERCE

“You are the true vine bearing the Grape of Life, O Mother of God.

In union with the Apostles, we beseech you, O full of grace, to ask for our salvation.

Blessed be the Lord our God!
Blessed be the Lord every day!
May He prepare our way before us as He is God of our salvation”.

C. THE SEXT

Because of the multitude of our sins, we are ashamed before God, nor do we have any excuse.

⁽¹⁾ Coptic Orthodox Church: Morning Prayer & Compline, March 1976
(trans. by Fr. Malaty & N. Fanous).

We ask your intercession with Him, whom you have brought forth, O Mother of God, the Virgin.

For your intercessions are abundant and acceptable to our Saviour.

May you not refuse to intercede with your Son for the sinners.

For He is merciful and capable of our salvation, just as He suffered to redeem us....

D. AT NONE

“When the mother saw the Lamb, the Shepherd, and the World’s Redeemer hanging upon the Cross, she said through her tears:

The world rejoices because it has received salvation, but my heart (bowels) is burnt at witnessing the crucifixion you are suffering for all mankind, O my Son and God”.

E. AT COMPLINE⁽¹⁾

O pure virgin, slip the shadow of your incentive aid upon your servant. Cast away from me evil thoughts and raise my sick soul to pray in vigilance, because it has long lain in deep sleep. You are a capable, merciful and helpful mother; the mother of the Spring of life, my King and God, Jesus Christ, my hope.”

⁽¹⁾ Ibid

7. St. Mary in the Ethiopian Liturgies

The Ethiopian Church, the daughter of the Coptic Church received the faith from Alexandria, and with it a great love for St. Mary.

King Zara Yaqob (1431-1468) commanded that every Church in Ethiopia should have an altar dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, and her feasts should be celebrated like Sundays under pain of excommunication.

In fact, the Ethiopian hymnology to St. Mary is very rich and numerous, and I hope that I can write about it in a special book, if God permits.

They celebrate her assumption monthly in a Great Marian feast.

We can conceive their love towards her from their custom of speaking of all heretics as “Enemies of St. Mary”.



St. Mary, the Ark of Testimony, where the Manna (Christ) was
present

(found in a Seidic Coptic Manuscript of the Senxarium)

see Church, House of God P. 332 - 335.

8. Feasts of St. Mary in the Coptic Church

1. The Annunciation to her parents: (7th of Messra)

This festival commemorates the creation of St. Mary, the living Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of the Most High and the second heaven.

2. Her Nativity (1st of Pashans)

The Copts usually celebrate the feasts of the saints to commemorate their falling asleep, their martyrdom or their departure to paradise; but they are anxious to honour St. Mary on the day of her birth as a day of joy.

3. Her Presentation in the Temple (3rd of Keyahk)

According to the Church tradition, St. Mary was consecrated to God by the vow of her mother, who exclaimed that she would bring her firstborn son or daughter to the Lord and he or she would minister to Him all his or her days of life.

4. Her Falling Asleep (death) (21st of Touba)

5. The Assumption, or the Appearance of her body into heaven (16th of Messra, 22nd of August)

The greatest Marian feast is preceded by a fast for a fortnight.

**6. *Dedication of the Church to Her Name
at Philliponis & at Atrib (Egypt) (21st of Ba-ouna)***

7. *Her Apparition in Zeitoun (Cairo) (2nd of April)*

This Apparition is unique in the history of Marian apparitions⁽¹⁾. It started on 2nd of April 1968 and has been repeated often every day for hours at a time, and for many months. These apparitions occurred on the domes of St. Mary's Church, seen by several hundred thousands of people of all ages and ranks, Christians and Moslems. People were crowded every night around the Church praying and giving hymns, to see the brilliant figure of St. Mary stand before one of the Church domes, sometimes kneeling before the Cross and at another time holding the Child Jesus. Birds like doves often accompanied the Apparitions. Many persons repented and innumerable miracles happened because of the Apparitions.

Statement by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch (Pope):

Ever since the evening of Tuesday, April 2, 1968 (Baramhat 24, 1684), the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, has been appearing in the Coptic Orthodox Church named after her in Shareh Tomanbey, Zeitoun, Cairo.

The vision, which is still appearing, has been seen on various nights and in different forms. Sometimes the Virgin is

⁽¹⁾ Jerome Palmer. *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*. 1969, p.1

seen in full form, but on other occasions only the upper half appears, surrounded by a glorious halo of shining light.

The vision is sometimes seen through the openings of the dome of the church and sometimes outside the dome. The vision moves and walks across the dome and bows before the cross on the dome, which becomes clothed in a glorious light. She turns to the onlookers and blesses them with her hand and with the movement of her holy head.

The vision has often appeared in the form of a bright nimbus, or in the form of a light preceded by forms of heavenly objects such as quick-moving doves.

The vision has remained for long periods, occasionally as long as two and a quarter hours, as at dawn on Tuesday, April 30, 1968 (Baramuda 22, 1684), when the vision appeared in full shining form from 2:45 am. till 5 am.

The vision has been seen by many thousands of people of different religions and sects. Some foreigners, some priests and men of learning, or from professions and from many other groups. They have affirmed with full awareness that they have seen her and have agreed unanimously in their descriptions of each vision and the time of its occurrence, so much so that the unanimity has rendered the appearance in this place of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, a vision unique in its nature and needs no statement or affirmation.

Two important factors have accompanied the apparition. The first has been the revival of faith in God, in the other world, in the saints, and in the dawning of the knowledge among many

who had stayed away, and many have repented and changed their lives.

Secondly the vision has led to many miraculous hearings, evidenced scientifically and by unanimous affirmation.

The Patriarchate gathered information about all that is stated above through individuals and committees of priests who investigated the truth and who saw the vision themselves and affirmed this in reports handed to His Beatitude Pope Kyrillos VI.

In making this statement the Patriarchate declares with every faith, with deep joy, and with overflowing thanks to the heavenly grace, that the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, has appeared clearly and steadily on many different nights. The vision has lasted varying periods of time, sometimes lasting over two hours uninterruptedly. The appearances began on Tuesday, April 2, 1968, and are still continuing in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in Shareh Tomanbey in Zeitoun along the Mataria route in Cairo, the route which, it is historically acknowledged, the Holy Family traversed during their stay in Egypt.

May God make this a sign of peace for the world, for our dear land, and our blessed people.

Saturday, May 4, 1968
Baramuda 6, 1684

The Coptic Patriarchate
Cairo

The Egyptian Government's Report

The Director of the General Information and Complaints Department submitted to the Minister, Mr. Hafez Ghanem, a documental report asserting emphatically the appearances of the Blessed Virgin at the Coptic Orthodox Church at Zeitoun.

“The investigations have proved twenty-seven appearances (to that date) of the Blessed Virgin in various luminous forms. At certain times mysterious doves either preceded, accompanied or followed the apparitions . . .”⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Ibid. p. 41. 42.



*Design representing the apparition of the virgin St Mary
on the domes of the Zeitoun church, April 2, 1968 A.D.*

9. St. Mary's Assumption

Her Falling Asleep

St. Mary as a daughter of Adam died as a victim of his sin. St. Augustine states:

“Mary, sprung from Adam, died on consequence of sin;
Adam died in consequence of sin,
and the, flesh of the Lord, sprung from Mary, died to
destroy sin”.⁽¹⁾

According to the Coptic (Boheric) discourse of Theodosius, Pope of Alexandria (c. 567), “On the Falling Asleep of Mary”, she checks the grief of the Apostles with the question⁽²⁾: “Is it not written that all flesh must taste death? I also must return to the earth, as all the inhabitants of earth”.⁽³⁾

The Coptic (Boheric) text gives another reason for her death that is an argument for the reality of the Incarnation. According to this text Christ said to His Mother “I would prefer that you would not taste death, but to translate you up to the heavens like Enoch and Elias. But even these also must at last taste death. But if this happened to you, wicked men would think that you are a power which came down from heaven, and that this dispensation took place in appearance alone . . .”

⁽¹⁾ In Joannis evangelium 8, 9.

⁽²⁾ W. J. Burghardt Testimony of the Patriotic Age concerning Mary's Death. 1957, p. 15.

⁽³⁾ On the Falling Asleep of Mary 5.

Her Falling - Asleep Story

After the death of her Son, Jesus Christ St. Mary lived under the care of St. John according to her Son's commandment. She witnessed the "New life in Jesus Christ" and helped the Disciples and Apostles by her love and prayers.

When she was about 60 years old on the 20th of Tobi, St. Mary, the Disciples and the Virgins of the Mount of Olives⁽¹⁾ were all gathered and the Lord Jesus appeared and greeted them.⁽²⁾ He told them that he would return back the next day and receive his mother's soul.

On the 21st of Tobi the Lord returned in the chariot of the Cherubim, accompanied with thousands of angels and David the sweet Singer. The assembled men and women wept, and St. Mary also wept, but the Lord consoled them. He kissed her and blessed them and bade St. Peter to look upon the altar for heavenly garments, which the Father had sent to shroud St. Mary in.⁽³⁾ She turned to the east and prayed in a heavenly language and then lay down, still facing eastward.⁽⁴⁾ The virgins stood about St. Mary singing, and Jesus sat by her. David the Singer rejoiced and said "Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints".

⁽¹⁾ Discourse of Theodosius (Coptic - Boheric)

⁽²⁾ Assumption of Vergin Mary, Coptic - Boheric text, attributed to Evodius as an eyewitness of the death and assumption of St. Mary

⁽³⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴⁾ Assumption of Vergin Mary, Coptic - Sahidic text

At the ninth hour⁽¹⁾ the Lord received her soul, shrouded her body in the heavenly garments and they were fastened thereto. He bade the Apostles to take up the body; Peter bearing the head and John the feet, and carry her to a new tomb in the field of Jehoshaphat....

At the Field of Jehoshaphat

The Coptic text says⁽²⁾ “When we came to the field of Jehoshaphat, the Jews heard the singing and came out intending to burn the body”. The Apostles set down the bier and fled.⁽³⁾ Darkness came on the Jews and they were blinded and smitten by their own fire. They cried out for mercy and were healed and many were converted.

Ruben and the Bier

Our Sinaxarium relates that a Jewish man, called Ruben⁽⁴⁾, tried to upset the bier, but his hands withered to the elbow, He began to weep, asking the Apostles to pray for him that he might be saved and become a Christian. They knelt and prayed, and his hands were loosened and he was healed. He was baptized at once, and began to preach.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Text No. 2 (p. 118).

(3) Text No. 1

(4) The Assumption - Narrative by Joseph of Artmethea

Her Assumption⁽¹⁾

This feast commemorates the entrance of St. Mary's body into heaven, as she preceded us and sat at the right hand of her Bridegroom and Son. It bears a powerful witness to the eschatological truth of our faith, i.e. "the world to come".

- ❖ In accord with what has been written, 'You are beautiful' (*Cant. 2:13*), and your virginal body is wholly saintly, wholly chaste, wholly the dwelling place of God; with the result that thereafter it is wholly free from dissolution into dust... It was impossible that the vessel which had received God, the temple of the Only-Begotten Son, should be held fast by death....

Fr. Germanus of Constantinople⁽²⁾

- ❖ Today the celestial spirits bring to heaven the Abode of the Holy Spirit, making her enter into the heavenly Jerusalem, to the immaculate Tabernacle, to us inaccessible, close to the Holy Trinity.
- ❖ Today the heavenly spirits have carried to heaven the holy body of the Virgin Theotokos, placing it among the angels to share in the unspeakable delights...
- ❖ Having lived in this body all-holy life, you are brought by the divine will to the Kingdom of your Son, our God; pray for us . . .

Armenian Liturgical Hymns on the assumption

⁽¹⁾ Weekly Bulletin 107-109

⁽²⁾ On Falling Asleep of the Theotokos. PG 98:345

- ❖ I salute the Assumption of the body which the human heart can never conceive . . .
- ❖ O Mary, your body was like a pearl,
and death itself was shamed when with wonder it saw
you ascending resplendent through the clouds
to heaven . . .
- ❖ O Mary,
dove of Euphrates
shelter me under your wings in the day of judgment,
when the earth will give back those whom she
had taking into her keeping!

Ethiopian Feast of Assumption

Her Assumption's Story⁽¹⁾ :

The Lord did not permit that the body in which He Himself had dwelt and from which He had formed His own humanity become a prey to corruption and dissolution.

St. Mary as a human being her body died; but ascended to heaven.

“The assumption according to the narrative of Joseph the Arimathea” states⁽²⁾ that Thomas the Apostle was absent in India when St. Mary felt asleep and passed away. On his return he asked about her and was told what happened.

⁽¹⁾ Weekly Bulletin, No. 66

⁽²⁾ See also Coptic Sinexerium

St. Thomas pretended not to believe until he sees the body in the grave. At the grave he told the Disciples that the body is not in the tomb. As they rolled the stone there was no body, they did not know how to explain it, being vanquished by St. Thomas' words. Then St. Thomas told them how he saw her body assuming to heaven, and St. Mary gave him her girdle, and show it to them.

They all rejoiced and asked the Lord to see her again.

In the seventh month after her death (i.e., on 15th of Mesra)⁽¹⁾, the Disciples reassembled at the tomb and spent the night watching and singing hymns.⁽²⁾

At dawn on the 16th of Mesra there were great thundering and a choir of angels were heard. The Lord Jesus came on the Cherubim with the soul of the Virgin Mary seated in His Bosom and greeted them.⁽³⁾

Other stories state that till the 16th of Mesra her body was not ascended. The Lord came with the soul of His mother and asked the body to accompany Him. He took her into the chariot. The angels went before them, and a voice called "Peace to you, my brethren".⁽⁴⁾

(1) After 206 days from her death (according to the Discourse of Theodosius).

(2) Behoric Text, Discourse of Theodosius

(3) Discourse of Theodosius

(4) Revillout: Petro. Orient. Apocphee Copies 1, fr. 16, p. 174

The Orthodox Concept

Book 4

ST. MARY
in the Orthodox Concept

ST. GEORGE COPTIC CHURCH

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty