## Veneration of Mary

Among all the saints that the Church has venerated or continues to venerate, no other has held such a place of honor as the mother of our Lord, Mary. She is given such exalted titles as Θεότοκος (*theotokos*), i.е., the Mother of God, Παναγία (*panagia*), i.е., Most Holy, Ἀειπαρθένος (*aeiparthenos*), i.е., Ever-Virgin, and sometimes “Coredemptrix.” We will study the veneration of Mary and its development in the light of Holy Scripture.

### А. Mary as the “Mother of God”

The only title of those listed above that all Christian confessions accept is Mary as the mother of God. At first glance, such an appellation appears strange and inappropriate. Who can give birth to God? Yet, this question touches on a critical Christological point – the unified Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus is indeed one individual, that is, God and human in one united Person, then it logically follows that when Mary gave birth to Jesus, she gave birth to God, or more precisely, to the God-man Jesus Christ.

The claim that Mary gave birth only to a human would mean that Jesus is only a man in whom God dwelt. This was the teaching of Nestorius in the fifth century, who refused to call Mary the “mother of God,” but only the “mother of Christ.” Because of the damaging effect Nestorius’ teaching has on our understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ, his view was condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (431).

Scripture also confirms the appropriateness of this title for Mary. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed Mary as “the mother of my Lord” (Lk 1:43). In the same chapter, the angel Gabriel announced that Mary would give birth to the “Son of God” (Lk 1:32, 35), not just a mere man.

However, entitling Mary the “mother of God” in no way implies that she somehow gave origin to Christ’s divine nature. According to Scripture, the Son of God exists eternally, fully divine, and became incarnate in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. Mary contributed nothing to His Deity, only to His humanity. Yet, since our Lord is one divine-human Person, Mary truly gave birth to God, that is, the God-man Jesus Christ.

The term *Theotokos* (literally, “bearer of God”) appeared in the mid-third century in a letter by Dinonysius of Alexandria to Paul of Samosata. We see it again in a letter from a certain bishop named Alexander in the year 320: “Jesus Christ… bore a body in truth, not in semblance, which be derived from Mary the Mother of God.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It also appears in the works of Athanasius (*Orat. c. Arian.*, iii., 14, 29, 33), Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Letters*, 10.19), and Origen (*Commentary on Romans*).[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Cappadocian Fathers join in this opinion. In the words of Basil the Great, “The holy Mary, who gave birth to Him according to the flesh, was Mother of God” (*Letter, 360*). Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the “Holy Virgin, the Mother of God” (*Letters*, 17). Gregory Nazianzen voiced this imprecation: “If anyone does not believe that Holy Mary is the Mother of God, he is severed from the Godhead” (*Letter to Cledonius*).

However, in the fifth century, the use of this title became hotly disputed during the struggle with the Nestorian heresy. Nestorius, in turn, adopted his doctrine from his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia, who stated the following:

Mary is properly the Mother of Christ (Christotocos) but not the mother of God (Theotocos)…. Properly she bare a man, in whom the union with the Word was begun…. It is madness to say that God is born of the Virgin.… Not God, but the temple in which God dwelt, is born of Mary.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After the Third Ecumenical Council, the title “mother of God” became fully accepted and propagated. The Council declared,

If anyone will not confess that the Emmanuel is very God, and that therefore the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (Θεοτοκόσς), inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of God made flesh [as it is written, “The Word was made flesh”]: let him be anathema.[[4]](#footnote-4)

However, participants in this Council clarified that Mary is the mother of God “according to his human nature,” but not “according to his divine nature.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Reformers also recognized Mary as *Theotokos*, namely, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.[[6]](#footnote-6) Calvin wrote, “The name of the Son of God is given to him who is born of a Virgin, and the Virgin herself is called the mother of our Lord” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.14.4).[[7]](#footnote-7) Zwingli stated, “The Virgin should be called the Mother of God, *Theotokos.*”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Gnostics of the second Christian century invented the fable that the Son of God passed through Mary as a channel without receiving His humanity from her. The Mennonite Menno Simons adopted this view as well.[[9]](#footnote-9) This theory, though, contradicts the Word of God and undermines the doctrine of the Son’s true incarnation. Paul taught that Jesus was born “of a woman,” not “through a woman” (Gal 4:4). Paul affirms this truth to the Romans as well “concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3).

The post-apostolic Church continued in this teaching. Ignatius declared that Jesus “is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God” (*Ephesians*, 7). Tertullian confirms, “Since He is of the seed of David in consequence of Mary’s flesh, He is therefore of Mary’s flesh because of the seed of David.” (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 22). In the words of Irenaeus, “The same took flesh of the Virgin Mary, not merely in appearance, but actually” (*Against Heresies*, 5.1). Finally, Cyril of Jeruslaem asserts that Christ did not pass “through the Virgin as through a channel; but was of her made truly flesh” (*Catechetical Letters*, 4.9).

### B. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Often in church history, Mary was thought to have remained a virgin her entire life. Therefore, she was called the “Ever-Virgin Mary.” Without doubt, the Bible declares that Mary was a virgin until Jesus’ birth. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary that her conception would be without the participation of a man: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). The angel informed Joseph, “The Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:20). Matthew also testifies that Joseph “kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son” (Matt 1:25).

However, in time the understanding arose that Mary remained in virginity. Possibly, this misunderstanding began with the *Protoevangelium of Jacob* – a fabricated account of Mary’s childhood. We read there that Joseph was charged “to take into thy keeping the Virgin of the Lord” (9.6).[[10]](#footnote-10) The teaching itself is found in the works of Athanasius, who named Mary ἀειπάρθενος (*aieparthenos*), i.е., “Eternal Virgin.”[[11]](#footnote-11) John Chrysostom also writes on this theme, suggesting that Joseph “did not know the Virgin after she was so wonderfully made a Mother, was made worthy to give birth in an unheard of manner, and bring forth this unique Offspring.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Western Fathers taught the same. Augustine claimed in *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, “(Mary) is called (Joseph’s) wife because of her first troth of betrothal, although he had had no carnal knowledge of her, nor was destined to have” (1.12). Jerome dedicated an entire work to the theme *The Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary*. On the other hand, Irenaeus seems to deter from this conviction: “Before Joseph had come together with Mary, while she therefore remained in virginity, ‘she was found with child of the Holy Ghost’” (*Against Heresies*, 3.21.4).

The Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553 gave canonical confirmation to this view, where Mary is called the Eternal Virgin and anathemas are prescribed to those who reject this.[[13]](#footnote-13) One hundred years later, the Lateran Synod of 649 defined, “Mary was a Virgin before, during and after the Birth of Jesus Christ.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Interestingly, another adherent of this view was none other than the Reformer Martin Luther. He taught, “She was a virgin before the birth of Christ (*ante partum*) and remained one at the birth (*in partu*) and after the birth (*post partum*).”[[15]](#footnote-15) Zwingli joined him in this view.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Other Church Fathers added the conviction that Jesus’ birth had no effect on Mary’s virginal condition. John of Damascus explains, “For, as pleasure did not precede it, pain did not follow it…. He who was born preserved her virginity intact, only passing through her and keeping her closed” (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14). Augustine also claimed that she was “not tainted in the birth itself” (*On the Trinity*, 8.7). Clement of Alexandria testifies of this understanding as early as the second century:

But, as appears, many even down to our own time regard Mary, on account of the birth of her child, as having been in the puerperal state, although she was not. For some say that, after she brought forth, she was found, when examined, to be a virgin (*Stromata*, 7.16).

Those who reject the perpetual virginity of Mary refer to the following facts. The Bible reveals that Joseph and Mary had other children: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” (Mk 6:3). Other passages tell of the same (see Jn 7:3; 2:12; Matt 12:46; Lk 8:19; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 9:4-5).[[17]](#footnote-17) Therefore, we conclude that Mary bore children after Jesus.

We also appeal to Matthew 1:25: “(Joseph) kept her a virgin until (ἑως) she gave birth to a Son.” The use of the adverb ἑως (*heos*)*,* i.е., “until,” strongly implies that Mary did not remain a virgin after she bore the Lord.[[18]](#footnote-18) We also read in Luke 2:7: “She gave birth to her firstborn son.” The idea of a “firstborn” implies the birth of other children.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Supporters of the perpetual virginity of Mary object that these so-called “brothers and sisters” of Jesus are actually cousins of His.[[20]](#footnote-20) However, a different Greek term exists for “cousin,” – ἀνεψιός (*anepsios*), which is used in Colossians 4:10 in that sense. In addition, the New Testament never uses the Greek term ἀδελφός (*adelphos*), i.е., “brother,” to refer to cousins.[[21]](#footnote-21) Finally, Mark 6:3 is clearly talking about Jesus’ immediate family, that is, His natural brothers and sisters.

Others seek to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary by arguing that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were children of Joseph by a previous marriage.[[22]](#footnote-22) Yet, the Scriptures give no indication of that. Moreover, these “other” children remained with Mary as adults – after Joseph presumably died (see Mk 3:31; Jn 2:12). Also important to note is that if Joseph had another son before his marriage to Mary, that boy would have been heir to the throne of David instead of Jesus.[[23]](#footnote-23) Finally, James (whose actual name is “Jacob”) was called the “brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:19).

Defenders of this teaching also point out that when Jesus died, he did not entrusted his mother to one of his “siblings,” but to the apostle John.[[24]](#footnote-24) Yet, Geisler reminds us that at that time, Jesus’ brothers were still unbelievers (see Jn 7:5). This is why He entrusted Mary to the “disciple whom He loved.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

Another attempt to justify this teaching is to appeal to a symbolic interpretation of Ezekiel 44:2, where the “closed gate” in God’s temple represents the virginity of Mary: “Yahweh said to me, ‘This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for Yahweh, God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.’” We find no substantiation for this fanciful rendering of this verse.

It is also mistaken to claim that Jesus passed through Mary’s birth canal without leaving a trace. No clear evidence exists to support this. Verses that testify of Jesus’ birth do not hint at any miraculous birth process (see Lk 2:6-7; Matt 1:18, 25; Gal 4:4). This is merely another attempt by the Church Fathers to defend the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity.

### C. The Immaculate Conception and Sinlessness of Mary

In light of the Gospel narrative of Mary, she was plainly a godly and obedient servant of the Lord. Unlike Zechariah, who doubted the announcement of the angel about the supernatural birth of his son, Mary received the news about her virgin birth. Even though her pregnancy out of wedlock would likely cause her to be scandalized as an adulteress, she humbly responded to the angel Gabriel, “Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Finally, she uttered a prophetic word in praise of God, which we call the “Magnificat.” (Lk 1:46-56).

Unfortunately, in the course of church history (and even today), many Christian thinkers have exaggerated Mary’s virtues to the point of considering her sinless. Consequently, they attribute to her the title Παναγία (*panagia*), i.е., “Most Holy.”[[26]](#footnote-26) They base this claim not on Scriptural grounds, but on a logical implication. How can the sinless Son of God receive His humanity from a sinful source, or be conceived in a womb tainted by sin? It is presumed that the temple from which the Savior would emerge must be just as holy as He is. John of Damascus argued,

She became the home of every virtue, turning her mind away from every secular and carnal desire, and thus keeping her soul as well as her body virginal…. Thus, therefore, she strove after holiness, and was declared a holy and wonderful temple fit for the most high God (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14).

The Catholic Church continues to hold to Mary’s sinlessness: “By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.”[[27]](#footnote-27) From the Orthodox camp, Bulgakov asserts, “Orthodoxy does not attribute to the ‘Immaculate’ any personal sin – this would not correspond to the dignity of the Mother of God.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Ilarion adds,

The Orthodox Church has firmly established the idea of the exclusive holiness of the Mother of God – of her detachment from any sin. The Church calls the Mother of God “the Most Pure Cherubim and the Most Glorious Seraphim without equal.” In her holiness, she exceeds the angels beyond limit. They began to call her “Most Holy,” that is, “beyond holy,” to emphasize the excellence of her holiness over the holiness of any other saint.[[29]](#footnote-29)

At the same time, we note that this exalted view of Mary appeared later in church history. We first encounter it in the fourth and fifth centuries in the works of Augustine and Jerome. The latter wrote against the Pelagians, “Elizabeth and Zacharias… may teach us how far they are beneath the holiness of blessed Mary, the Lord’s Mother” (1.16). Speaking of the universal sinfulness of all humanity, Augustine makes an exclusion for Mary: “We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honour to the Lord (*On Nature and Grace*, 42). Gregory of Nyssa also speak of her as “stainless” (see *On Virginity*, 2.2).

On the other hand, at the beginning of the third century we encounter a different attitude toward this question.[[30]](#footnote-30) Origen taught, for example, that during Christ’s sufferings Mary was “scandalized” along with His disciples: “If she did not suffer scandal at the Lord's Passion, then Jesus did not die for her sins. But, if ‘all have sinned and lack God's glory, but are justified by his grace and redeemed,’ then Mary too was scandalized at that time” (*Homilies on Luke,* 17.6). Basil the Great equated the “scandalization” of Mary with Simeon’s prediction that “a sword will pierce even your own soul” (Lk 2:34-35): “Simeon therefore prophesies about Mary herself, that when standing by the cross, and beholding what is being done… she shall feel about her soul a mighty tempest” (*Letters*, 260.9, *to Otimus*).

Tertullian writes in the same spirit. After rebuking the brothers of the Lord for their unbelief, he says of Mary: “Whilst there is at the same time a want of evidence of His mother’s adherence to Him, although the Marthas and the other Marys were in constant attendance on Him” (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 7). The most remarkable testimony comes from the pen of John Chrysostom, who comments on the instance when Mary and Jesus’ brothers summoned him during His sermon (Matt 12:46-49):

…that which she had essayed to do, was of superfluous vanity; in that she wanted to show the people that she hath power and authority over her Son…. For if she is nothing profited by being His mother, were it not for that quality in her, hardly will any one else be saved by his kindred (*Homily on Matthew*, 44.1).

In light of the following biblical testimony, Evangelical theology cannot accept the doctrine of Mary’s sinlessness. First, the Bible nowhere confirms this theory. Second, as just noted, there were times when Mary expressed doubt in her son. Mary was likely among “His own people,” who “went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses’” (Mk 3:21, compare verse 31). Third, the Bible uncompromisingly claims, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), including Mary.[[31]](#footnote-31) Everyone needs forgiveness of sins – no one is justified by works (Gal 3:16).

It is curious to note how Mary is described in Luke chapters 1-2. In this narrative, Luke calls nearly all the persons he mentions “righteous”: Zechariah (1:6), Elizabeth (1:6), and Simeon (2:25). But Mary is not so praised. This does not mean that she was not righteous like the others, but it is possible that the Holy Spirit purposely refrains from ascribing righteousness to Mary in light of the future exaggerated status she would be given. The same observation holds for the experience of being “filled with the Spirit,” which applies to Zechariah (1:67), Elizabeth (1:41), and Simeon (2:27), but not Mary, although she also pronounced a prophetic word in praise of God (1:46-56).

This teaching saw further development in the Western Church. It reached the point that Catholic theologians began to reason that like Jesus Christ, Mary was also conceived without original sin – the so-called “immaculate conception of Mary.” Some Catholics themselves, though, struggled with such a doctrine. This idea arose only in the twelfth century, when an English monk named Edmer suggested it. John Duns Scotus defended his position, but it was challenged by Thomas Aquinas, Peter Lombard, and Bonaventure. Moreover, debates raged between the Franciscans (in favor) and the Dominicans (against). Only in 1854, Pope Pius IX officially confirmed Mary’s immaculate conception and obligated all Catholics to embrace it.[[32]](#footnote-32) His Papal Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, reads as follows:

We declare, pronounce and define that the most blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the saviour of mankind, and that this doctrine was revealed by God and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The same arguments we advanced above in refutation of Mary’s sinlessness apply to her immaculate conception as well. Additionally, we note the late appearance of this doctrine and its opposition by several eminent Catholic theologians. Although supporters of this teaching appeal to Luke 1:28, where Mary is called “Favored,” the Greek term κεχαριτωμένη (*kecharitomene*) merely means “recipient of favor,”[[34]](#footnote-34) and in that context does not indicate that Mary was preserved from original sin, but that she received special favor from God to become the mother of the Savior.[[35]](#footnote-35)

### D. The Ascension of Mary

The circumstances surrounding Mary’s death are also debated among Christian denominations. Since the Bible does not record anything about this event, any position is based on speculation.

The Eastern Orthodox feel that Mary died, but then was raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. They yearly celebrate the feast of Dormition of the Mother of God. Ilarion clarifies that although Orthodoxy never dogmatized this teaching, “nevertheless, faith in this event is an irreplaceable part of the Tradition of the Orthodox Church.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Bulgakov summarizes the Orthodox position as follows,

Having tasted a natural human death in her Dormition, she suffered no decay, but, according the Church teaching, was raised on the third day by her Son and dwells in a glorified body at His right hand in heaven as the Queen of Heaven.[[37]](#footnote-37)

According to legend, the Twelve Apostles buried Mary in Jerusalem in Thomas’ absence. When Thomas arrived, they opened the grave to show him the body of Mary, “they discovered in it only her grave clothes and became convinced thereby in the amazing physical ascension of the Most Holy Virgin into heaven. In the evening of the same day, when the apostles gathered in the house to strengthen themselves with food, the very Mother of God appeared and said, ‘Rejoice, I am with you every day.’”[[38]](#footnote-38).

In addition, Bulgakov advanced a theory of the glorified state of Mary, which the Orthodox hierarchy dispute and some consider heretical.[[39]](#footnote-39) In line with his concept of “sophiology,” Bulgakov claims that in virtue of Mary’s position as “the Mother of all human beings,” there exists a connection between her glorified body and the bodies of all people. Therefore, in her “the entire human race has already had a foretaste of resurrection.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

Finally, since Mary “as Mother, has essentially the same body as her Son,” there is a connection between her glorified body and the glorified body of Christ. Therefore, it is assumed that partakers in the Eucharist receive not only the Body of Christ, but also enter into “a natural fellowship with the Mother of God, ingesting together the body and blood of Christ and the flesh of the Mother of God.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Unlike the Orthodox Faith, Catholics believe that since Mary did not inherit original sin (see above), she was not subject to death. Some (called “immortalists”) defend the position that she did not die at all, but was assumed into heaven. Others (called “mortalists”), that she voluntarily died, but only temporarily, and then was raised from the dead and caught up to heaven.[[42]](#footnote-42) In 1950, Pope Pius XII officially dogmatized the immortalists’ position in his papal bull *Munificentissimus Deus*:

By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.[[43]](#footnote-43)

To support this theory, its adherents appeal to Revelation 12:1, which speaks of “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” This is interpreted to refer to the ascended and glorified Mary. However, the context following does not correspond to Mary, but more characterizes Israel.[[44]](#footnote-44) On her head is “a crown of twelve stars,” which symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel. Furthermore, “The woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (v. 6), which will happen to Israel during the Great Tribulation. Finally, it is written that the Son (Christ) was taken to heaven, not the woman (v. 5).

Moreover, advocates of Mary’s ascension appeal to her sinlessness, claiming that she is not subject to death. However, we challenge the dogma of her sinlessness. Finally, some argue that the organic, physical tie between mother and Son requires that she must be a partaker of His resurrection and glorification.[[45]](#footnote-45) Yet, this is merely an exaggerated assumption. Mary will indeed be raised and glorified, but at the end of time along with other believers in Jesus, whom He has redeemed by His blood.

Also in refutation, we state that such a teaching was foreign to the Early Church. If first appeared in the apocryphal literature of the fourth century. In the West, Gregory of Tours promoted this idea in the sixth century, and in the East – John of Damascus in the eighth century.[[46]](#footnote-46)

### E. Veneration of Mary

Some Christian confessions venerate Mary as a matter of course. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.”[[47]](#footnote-47) The Orthodox Metropolitan Ilarion states,

The veneration of the Mother of God occupies an exceptional place in the Orthodox worship service. Feast days in honor of the Mother of God accompany the believer throughout the entire church year. Every worship or prayer service… contains prayers devoted to the Mother of God.[[48]](#footnote-48)

However, this type of devotion to Mary did not result from a careful study of God’s Word or Christian theology, but rather from the liturgical practice of the Early Church. Pelikan comments on this:

Many of these mariological ideas were to be developed much more fully as theological concepts, and eventually also as ecclesiastical dogmas, in later centuries. But before they were confessed by the church or even taught by the theologians, they had already been believed and celebrated by the liturgy and devotion of the people.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The widespread veneration of Mary began in the third century. It is thought that this movement received a boost from a group of women in Thrace and Arabia, the “Collyridians,” who worshiped Mary as a goddess. Epiphanius of Salamis writes in refutation of them in his work *Against Heresies*: “Mary should be honored, but the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost should be adored. Nobody should adore Mary” (78.7).[[50]](#footnote-50) The Mary-movement also gained momentum when the Third Ecumenical Council confirmed her status as the Mother of God.[[51]](#footnote-51)

This movement experienced marked growth in the fifth century.[[52]](#footnote-52) In the Catholic Church, several organizations and monastic orders were devoted to Mary. To this day, devotees make pilgrimages to Lourdes and Fatima, places where Mary allegedly appeared (see below). In the tenth century, a daily prayer rhythm was established for invocations to Mary. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the practice of saying the “rosary” came into vogue. Praying the rosary involves 150 repetitions of the prayer “Hail Mary”:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

The Orthodox world also reads or sings special prayers or hymns to Mary. In addition, in the standard Russian Synodal Translation of the Bible, pronouns referring to Mary are capitalized. Mary is celebrated in the church calendar by multiple feast days. Many icons depict her as well. Miracles are sometimes attributed to her icons.[[53]](#footnote-53) The Orthodox theologian Bulgakov boldly claims, “Those who do not venerate Mary do not know Jesus. Faith in Jesus that does not include veneration of the Mother of God is another faith, another Christianity.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

In seeking biblical sanction for Mary’s veneration, Ilarion admits: “The New Testament does not give clear indications that during Jesus’ life or in the first years after His death and resurrection, the Mother of Jesus enjoyed special veneration in the community of the Savior’s disciples.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Nevertheless, defenders of devotion to Mary cite the following biblical passages: Gabriel greeted Mary, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord {is} with you” (Lk 1:28), Elizabeth adds, “Blessed {are} you among women” (Lk 1:42), and Mary said of herself, “For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed” (Lk 1:48).

However, we must consider that all these passages are located in the context of the incarnation of the Son of God. Mary was indeed “favored” and “blessed” to be including in this momentous act of God. Yet, this does not justify an excessive devotion to her. Also significant is that Jesus Himself declared that the greatest one born of women before His birth was not Mary, but John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).

Others see in the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments, a symbol of Mary, who “contained in herself” the Son of God. However, we have no basis for accepting this symbolism. Scripture nowhere confirms this interpretation.

Other factors also count against an exaggerated devotion to Mary. We cite the case when Jesus had the opportunity to publically confirm His mother’s special status when a woman cried out, “’Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’ But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it’” (Lk 11:27-28). Similarly, when Jesus was told, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You,” He answered, “’Who are My mother and My brothers?’ Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother’” (Mk 3:32-35). Commenting on these passages, Augustine concurs,

Therefore Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ.... Thus also her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh (*On Holy Virginity*, 3).

Orthodox teachers defend the position that veneration of Mary enhances the worship of her Son, Jesus Christ.[[56]](#footnote-56) Bulgakov claims, “The Church never separates the Son from the Mother, the One who made incarnate from the One incarnated. Those who worship the humanity of Christ worship Him by virtue of His Mother, from whom He received it.”[[57]](#footnote-57) We see no need, however, in setting up this association between mother and Son. Why not worship Jesus directly?

In order to prevent veneration of Mary from becoming worship, a distinction is made between the type of honor appropriate for Mary and the saints, and that which is due only to God. Different terms are used to preserve this distinction: λατερία (*lateria*) is for God, δουλεία (*douleia*) is for the saints, and – ὐπερδουλεία(*huperdouleia*) is for Mary. The term προσκυνήσις (*proskunesis*) can also be used for the honor given to Mary and the saints.

However, this distinction does not correspond to the biblical usage of these terms.[[58]](#footnote-58) Moreover, the word δουλεία (*douleia*) in its verbal form also refers to God’s service (Matt 4:10; Acts 20:19; Rom 12:11; Col 3:24). The word προσκυνήσις (*proskunesis*) in its verbal form is used for the worship of the Lord (e.g. Matt 4:10; Jn 4:22; Rev 14:7).[[59]](#footnote-59) Notably, the angel refused to receive προσκυνήσις (*proskunesis*) from the apostle John (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9), but rather said, τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον (“worship God”). Additionally, Peter refused to receive προσκυνήσις (*proskunesis*) from Cornelius (Acts 10:25-26). Bilobram rightly states, “Clearly, Peter would reject veneration of an icon with his image. This logically follows, since veneration of the icon is directed to its object, that is, to Peter himself.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

Furthermore, it is not enough to merely distinguish the worship of God and the veneration of saints by the use of special terms. In the minds of most worshipers, such a distinction is unsubstantial. Railes echoes this thought: “The intense praise and veneration of Mary in word and practice raises the question whether a clear distinction exists in the minds of simple congregation members.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Some of the appellations made to Mary will convince us of this point. John of Damascus writes that she “alone is in truth worthy of honour above all creation” (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3.12), and, “She became truly the Lady of all created things in becoming the Mother of the Creator” (Ibid., 4:14). In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we read, “The Mother of Jesus, in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

Moreover, the Christian historian of the second and third centuries, Julius Africanus, attributed to Mary the following: “Thy glory is great; for thou art exalted above all women of renown, and thou art shown to be more queenly than all queens” (*Events in Persia*). In the apocryphal book *The Epistle of Ignatius to St. John*, we read, “She is full of all graces and all virtues… in Mary the mother of Jesus an angelic purity of nature… most sacred marvel.” In Bulgakov’s work *Orthodoxy*, we read, “…in Her is fulfilled the goal of the world’s creation. She is its vindication, goal, and meaning. She is, in this sense, the Glory of the world.” In addition, “Without a doubt, the Mother of God is glorified by the Church as the ‘purest Cherubim and most glorious Seraphim without compare.’”[[63]](#footnote-63)

Finally, in his *Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna*, bishop and martyr Methodius asserts that Mary “amongst all created things, both visible and invisible, shinest forth as the most honourable” (9). He extols her: “Thou art the beginning of our feast; thou art its middle and end; the pearl of great price that belongest unto the kingdom; the fat of every victim, the living altar of the bread of life. Hail, thou treasure of the love of God. Hail, thou fount of the Son’s love for man. Hail, thou overshadowing mount of the Holy Ghost” (14). Can this be anything other than worship?

### F. Veneration of Anna

Not only is Mary the object of veneration and special devotion, but her mother, Anna, is as well. Her story, and that of her husband, Joachim, is related in the book *Protoevangelium of James*, written in the mid-second century.

The veracity of this history is considered dubious for several reasons. First, several church leaders subjected it to criticism, namely Jerome, Pope Damasus I, Pope Innocent I, and Pope Gelasius I.[[64]](#footnote-64) Second, many elements of this story were plainly borrowed from biblical narratives of other individuals.

For example, like the history of Elkanah and Hanna in 1 Samuel, Joachim and Anna tried for many years to produce a child, but were able to do so only after divine intervention. Second, in order to secure this miracle, Joachin, like Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, fasted for forty days in the wilderness. Third, in imitation of the narrative of Samson, an angel announced the coming birth of Mary first to the wife, then to the husband. Additionally, when Mary was three years old, her parents took her to the temple to reside there, just as Samuel had done. Finally, just as in Elijah’s story, an angel fed Mary.

In spite of having such a weak historical foundation, churches began to venerate Anna – from the sixth century in the East, and from the twelfth century in the West. Justinian I dedicated a church to her in Constantinople in the sixth century. The Saint Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople supposedly treasures relics of Anna. Eastern Orthodoxy considers Joachim and Anna to be “godparents” in a literal sense. The Dormition of Anna is celebrated as well as the Feast of the Birth of the Most Holy Mother of God and Holy Anna’s Conception of the Mother of God.[[65]](#footnote-65)

### G. Mary as Mediator

Along with the exalted traits and titles ascribed to Mary, some also claim that that she serves as a mediator between God and people. Orthodox and Catholics understand this claim differently, but Evangelical theology categorically rejects it.

**1. The Basis for Her Mediatorial Role**

**а. Mary’s Obedience**

Early Church Fathers draw a comparison between Mary and Eve. Mary is considered the “New Eve.” Through Eve’s disobedience, sin entered the world (with Adam’s cooperation). Through Mary’s willingness to become the mother of God’s Son, salvation is now available to the world.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Irenaeus makes this comparison, “And thus also it was that the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith” (*Against Heresies*, 3.22.4). Tertullian operates off the same principle: “As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed the angel. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing, the other by believing effaced” (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 17).

This teaching continues to hold sway in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths. Metropolitan Ilarion, for example, teaches, “As Christ became the new Adam, in the same way Mary became the new Eve in order to heal Eve’s disobedience and open the way of salvation for humanity.”[[67]](#footnote-67) The Second Vatican Council confirmed, “As destruction of the old humanity occurred through the disobedience of a virgin, so the redemption of the world occurred through the obedience of a virgin” (*Doctrines of the Second Vatican Council*, p. 87–90).[[68]](#footnote-68)

Along with Orthodox thinkers, Catholics ascribe the salvation of humanity to Mary’s obedience in a direct sense, which paves the way for understanding her as a mediator. The Catechism of the Catholic Church declares, “By pronouncing her ‘fiat’ at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Similarly, Ilarion states, “Without the cooperation of the Mother of God, without her voluntary agreement to participate in the work of the salvation of humanity, this salvation could not be accomplished.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

It is true that without the incarnation of the Son of God, salvation would have been unattainable. Still, this does not mean that Mary continues to participate in our salvation *at the present time*. Her act of obedience is a past event, not a present one. Along with this, if Joseph had not fled to Egypt with his wife and his infant Child, Jesus (at least theoretically) would have perished by the hand of Herod, and God’s salvation plan would again have been thwarted. Yet, no one regards Joseph as a mediator of our salvation.

**b. Mary as the “Mother of the Church”**

Mary is not only the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, but is also regarded as the mother of all who believe in Him. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we read, “The Church is awaited by the one she venerates as Mother of her Lord and as her own mother.”[[71]](#footnote-71) The Orthodox Study Bible claims, “When (Jesus) said to John… ‘Here is your mother,’… (He) was stating figuratively Mary’s role as mother of all faithful disciples – of the entire Church.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Consequently, she is the one “to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

As noted above, this thesis is based on the incident in the life of our Lord, when on the cross he announced to John, “Behold, your mother!” (Jn 19:27). The verse is interpreted to teach that John, as a representative of all believers, was placed under Mary’s tutelage, and with him all believers. However, this verse’s context teaches the opposite. John did not come under Mary’s care, but she became dependent on him: “From that hour the disciple took her into his own {household}.” Geisler also notes that only a small number of Church Fathers held to this interpretation, beginning mostly from the eighth century.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Ambrose proposed a different theological basis for this teaching. He suggested that since Mary gave birth to Christ according to the flesh, she also gave birth to those who positionally are located “in Him.”[[75]](#footnote-75) Here, though, Ambrose confuses the physical connection with the spiritual connection. Jesus was “located” in Mary only physically, while Christians are located in Him spiritually. The physical birth of the Savior is in no way linked with the believer’s position in Him. The Scripture says that “from Him (i.e., from the Father, not from Mary) you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30).

**c. Mary’s Accessibility**

Another reason why people appeal to Mary as mediator is that she is thought to be more approachable to the simple believer than the Lord Jesus is. Bulgakov writes in this regard:

We experience simultaneously both the immediate nearness of fellowship with Christ and fear and trepidation before the Divine greatness of our Judge and Lord. It is natural and necessary for us to hide from this greatness, to dissolve its trepidation for us by running under the protection of the Most Pure Lady and the saints, both angels and men, for they belong to our race, with them we can speak in the language of human weakness, and at the same time of love, feeling ourselves spiritually shoulder to shoulder with them before the terrible throne of the Lord.[[76]](#footnote-76)

However, supporters of this view fail to appreciate that the Eternal and Almighty Son of God abandoned His glorious position with the Father for our sake. He became human and personally entered our experience. How can He make Himself more accessible to us than this? No saint ever went to such an extreme to connect with others.

Lane correctly assesses the situation when he writes, “Popular piety felt the need for someone in heaven who could really understand and sympathize with human frailty and weakness. It is because the full humanity of Jesus Christ has often been neglected that many of the excessive doctrines about Mary have arisen.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Yet, the biblical testimony is: “We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as {we are, yet} without sin” (Heb 4:15).

Jungman suggests another reason why Mary devotion became so popular. In the Middle Ages, the Church tended to undervalue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Instead, “People looked around for new sources of help, and that secondary mediators were now brought to the for more assertively: Mary, the angels, the saints, and relics.”[[78]](#footnote-78) The author of Hebrew, however, assures us: “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

**d. The Question of Deification**

Some advance the view that the saints (especially Mary) have progressed farther on the path to deification than the average Christian. Some would even suggest that Mary attained deification before she conceived Jesus. Therefore, it is thought that Mary knows how to pray effectively for the struggling Christian. The question of deification is discussed and refuted in chapter 7 of volume 4.

**e. Her Participation in the Humanity of Christ**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we discover the assertion that in virtue of her physical association with Jesus, to whom she gave human nature, Mary is connected with Him in the work of redemption as well:

Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. “This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

However, adherents of this view ignore the clear biblical witness that the willingness to do His will connects one with Christ, not the physical link. We recall that when Mary and her other children called Jesus out, He replied, “Who are My mother and My brothers?... Whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Mk 3:33-35).

**f. Jesus’ Openness to Mary**

Making another attempt to ground Mary’s mediatorial role with biblical teaching, defenders of Mary veneration cite the marriage feast of Canaan, where Mary requested Jesus to provide wine (Jn 2:3). This is assumed to be a model for the relationship between Mary and Jesus – whatever she asks, He will do for her. In the collection of mystical works of the Eastern Fathers, the *Philokalia*, we read about this relationship:

Blessed Queen of the universe, you know that we sinners have no intimacy with the God whom you have borne. But, putting our trust in you, through your mediation we your servants prostrate ourselves before the Lord: for you can freely approach Him since He is your son and our God (3:129-130).[[80]](#footnote-80)

However, God is ready and eager to answer the prayer of all believers, if they are ready to fulfill the necessary requirements for receiving answers to prayer, such as prayer in accordance with His will (1 Jn 5:14), with faith (Mk 11:23-24), in the name of Jesus (Jn 16:23), etc. The Lord urged His disciples to come to the Father and personally receive from Him:

In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full (Jn 16:23-24).

**g. Mary’s Ongoing Intercession**

The final claim of Mary’s mediatorial role concerns the ongoing intercession of Mary and the saints. We touched on this topic in chapter 13 concerning the saints, where a fuller discussion is provided. We will, nonetheless, repeat some important factors here.

The present intercessory ministry of Mary is simply considered to be the continuation of her prayer life.[[81]](#footnote-81) Metropolitan Kallistos expresses it thusly, “In God and in His Church there is no division between the living and the departed… Therefore just as Orthodox Christians here on earth pray for one another and ask for one another’s prayers, so they pray for the faithful departed and ask the faithful departed to pray for them.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Bulgakov confirms, “(The Orthodox Church) views Her as the Mother of God and Intercessor before the Son for all humanity, which endlessly appeals to Her for this representation.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

In refutation of these claims, we argue that God has not revealed to us the condition or activities of departed believers or to what degree they are aware of events on earth. The fact that believers pray for one another while living (which is specifically encouraged in Scripture) does not necessarily imply that this order of things continues after death. If communion with departed saints is indeed useful, one would expect that the apostles would have endorsed this practice.

Furthermore, we must address the passage in Hebrews 12:1, where we read, “We have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.” This is not to be interpreted that saints of old are watching us. Taking into consideration chapter 11 of Hebrews, we conclude that the heroes of faith listed in that chapter are witnesses of God’s faithfulness in *their lives*. Their history and testimony inspires us to continue our race.

Since the activity of departed believers in unknown to us, we have no biblical warrant for appealing to them in prayer. The Bible, in fact, forbids fellowship with the dead: “Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death” (Lev 20:27, also see Lev 19:31; Deut 18:11; Isa 8:19).[[84]](#footnote-84) Communication with the dead falls into the realm of the occult.

**2. The Nature of Mary’s Mediation**

Catholics and Orthodox diverge in their respective understandings of how exactly Mary aids believers. In Orthodoxy, her aid merely consists of prayer and intercession for them. The Orthodox reject the Catholic view that Mary occupies a position between humans and God. Ilarion explains the Orthodox position:

The Orthodox Church prays to the Mother of God with the words, “Most Holy Mother of God, save us.” This points out the role of the Mother of God in the work of salvation and redemption (when praying to the saints, it is more proper to say “pray to God for us”). However, the Orthodox do not consider the title “Coredemptrix,” used in the Catholic Church, to be appropriate. Such a title diminishes the uniqueness of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice and can create the false impression that the roles of Christ and the Mother of God were equal.[[85]](#footnote-85)

However, as we argued earlier, the Bible lends no support to the doctrine of Mary or the saints’ intercession. Additionally, Scripture forbids us to appeal to the departed to receive aid, whoever they might be.

Nevertheless, Catholics do not hesitate to regard Mary as a mediator. According to the Catholic understanding, Mary not only prays for the Church, but without her mediatorial intercession, believers can receive nothing from the Lord. We qualify, however, that not all Catholic theologians accept this as dogma.[[86]](#footnote-86). Yet, we can name among its supporters Pope Leo XIII, who stated:

Nothing is bestowed on us except through Mary, as God himself wills. Therefore as no one can draw near to the supreme Father except through the Son, so also one can scarcely draw near to the Son except through his mother.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Furthermore, Pope Pius Х considered her the “primary minister in the distribution of the divine graces.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Bernard of Clairvaux said, “God wished that we have nothing, except by the hands of Mary.”[[89]](#footnote-89) In his book *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Ott voices a similar view: “According to God’s positive ordinance, the redemptive grace of Christ is conferred on nobody without the actual intercessory co-operation of Mary.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

Due to this conviction, many Catholics have supported the notion of officially designating Mary as “Coredemptrix,” yet this has not yet occurred. Nevertheless, from the fifteenth century this title has been in common use.[[91]](#footnote-91) The Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledges this as well: “The Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

In an attempt to justify this claim, appeal is made to the teachings of Aquinas, who wrote:

Therefore Christ alone is the perfect mediator between God and man, inasmuch as He reconciled mankind with God by His death…. But there is nothing to prevent others in a certain way *(secundum quid)* from being called mediators between God and man, in so far as they, by preparing or serving…, co-operate in uniting men to God (*Summa Theologiae*, 3.26.1).

Nevertheless, we must distinguish here “ministry” from “mediation.” Some individuals may assist others in finding the Lord, and their ministry might be considered *helpful*, but it is not *mandatory*. The role of a mediator is mandatory for some transaction to take place. Therefore, we ascribe mediation only to the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive work, who is the sole mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim 2:5). Catholics, however, seek to establish a “double mediation”: between God and humans through Jesus Christ, and between Christ and believers through Mary.

### H. Appearances of Mary

The Roman Catholic Church claims several dozen appearances of Mary in the course of church history. The most significant of these are reported from Fatima in Spain (1917), Lourds in France (1858), Guadalajara, Mexico (1531), and Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina (1981). All these apparitions, except for one in Knock, Ireland, were to children.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Eastern Orthodoxy relates two appearance of Mary. It is claimed that in the tenth century, she appeared to Andrew the Fool and his disciple Epiphanius in the Blachernae church of Constantinople.[[94]](#footnote-94) The second apparent sighting was reported in the third century, when Mary and the Apostle John supposedly appeared to Gregory Thaumaturgus (the Miracle Worker). Gregory of Nyssa relates this in his biography of Gregory Thaumaturgus.

These claims are suspect, though, since nowhere in Scripture does God send a departed spirit back to communicate with the living. This task is given to angels instead. The only exception might be when Samuel, after his death, predicted Saul’s defeat (1 Sam 28:15-19). However, this occurred after Saul had sought direction from the Lord in an unlawful manner – through a medium. We could also mention the appearance of Elijah and Moses during Christ’s Transfiguration. Yet here, they did not communicate anything to the disciples.

Since we know that Satan can disguise himself as “an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14), we caution about regarding alleged appearances of Mary as legitimate. These claims simply lead to greater exaggerations and glorifications of Mary beyond the bounds of Scripture.

### I. Conclusions

As we have said before, the New Testament assigns no active role to Mary in the lives of Christians today. Except for acknowledging her virginity when Jesus was conceived and her willingness to do God’s will, the early Fathers did not devote any other special honor to her. The idea of glorifying Mary was introduced gradually to the point where she is now believed by many to be a perpetual virgin, sinless, ascended to the role of intercessor and mediator for all humanity, i.e., “Coredemptrix.”

Plainly, this is an attempt by the enemy of our faith to crowd out the Son of God from His central and exclusive place as Savior of the world and divert faith away from Him. Mary is wrongfully given many of the features unique only to the Savior: an immaculate conception, a sinless life, resurrection from the dead on the third day, the empty tomb, an appearance to the disciples, participation in the Eucharist, an object of prayer and veneration, and an intercessory and mediatorial role. Yet, this glorified picture of Mary does not correspond to Scripture and perverts the true picture of an individual especially blessed and chosen by God to bear and give birth to His Son from heaven.

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3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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8. An Exposition of the Faith, LCC XXIV, p. 256; from Oden, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lane T. A concise history of Christian thought. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.messianiclearning.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cross F. L., Livingstone E. A., еds. The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Иларион (Алфеев). Православие. – http://www.hilarion.ru/materials/books. – V. 1. – P. 451. Author’s translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Second Council of Constantinople: The Capitula of the Council // Schaff P., Wace H. The Seven Ecumenical Councils / Trans. H. R. Percival. – New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900. – V. 14. – P. 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Geisler N. L., MacKenzie R. E. Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: agreements and differences. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995. – P. 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., p. 301-302. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Opera III (Oden, p. 159). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Райэлз К. Три великие Церкви / Пер. С. А. Резниченко. – P. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. John of Damascus refers us to Matthew 28:20, where Jesus promised His disciples: “I am with you always, even *to the end of the age*.” We know that Christ will be with us *after the end of the age* as well. Similarly, Joseph could have kept Mary a virgin both before and after Jesus’ birth (see *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14). However, we must also consider that in the context of Matthew 28, Jesus wanted to assure His disciples that He would be with them during their times of trial, which would take place *in this age*. Therefore, He spoke only of His presence with them “to the end of the age.” It is clear that He will be with us in eternity (see Jn 14:3), therefore, Jesus did not need to speak of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Basil the Great (*Commentary on Colossians 1:15*) and John of Damascus (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14) respond that “firstborn” does not necessarily force the conclusion that other children follow. However, it is strongly implied. The term πρωτότοκος (*prototokos*), i.е., “firstborn,” is so used in Colossians 1:15, 18, Revelation 1:5, and Romans 8:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Augustine so taught (see Иларион, Православие, v. 1, p. 451). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Geisler, p. 302-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. So taught: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius of Salamis, Hilary, and Ambrose. This is also noted in *Protoevangelium of James* (Иларион, v. 1. – p. 451). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Geisler, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Иларион, Православие, v. 1, p. 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Geisler, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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31. Also see Ecc 7:20; Ps 52:4; 1 Kin 8:46 (Райэлз, p. 177). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
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33. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ineffabilis\_Deus [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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35. Geisler, p. 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Иларион, Православие, v. 1, p. 456. Author’s translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Булгаков, Православие, electronic resource. Author’s translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Успение Пресвятой Владычицы нашей Богородицы и Приснодевы Марии из http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/908276.html. Author’s translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei\_Bulgakov. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
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45. Noted in Geisler, p. 312, 316; Cross. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lane, p. 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
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