

## **Why do Catholics believe Mary was a virgin throughout her entire life? Doesn't the Bible say Jesus was her "firstborn" and talk about Jesus' "brothers"?**

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

The term "first-born" has great significance in Jewish history, going back to the covenant God made with Moses after leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The Jewish feast of Passover recalls the night the Lord struck down the first-born of the Egyptians, but "passed over" the homes of the Jews who marked their doors with the "blood of the lamb." (Exodus 12:7). Because of this favor, "The Lord told Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.'" (Exodus 13:1-2). The Jewish meaning of "first-born", therefore, does not imply the existence of other children. St. Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." (Romans 8:29). St. Paul, who was a zealous Jew prior to his miraculous conversion, was well aware of the significance of the term "first-born" and used it to indicate Jesus as our brother, through whose merits we become adopted sons of God.

"And his mother and his brethren came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brethren are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brethren?' And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brethren! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.'" (Mark 3:31-35).

The Jews regarded cousins as brothers and sisters. In fact they did not have a separate word for "cousin" as we do. The brethren referred to here were Jesus' cousins, James and Judas of Alpheus, the brother of St. Joseph (see Matthew 13:55 and 27:56). Even Protestants will admit that there is no historical evidence that Mary had other children. Surely this information would have survived history, at least within the tradition of the Catholic Church, and yet no such evidence exists. If indeed Mary did have other children, why did Jesus choose to give her to John from the Cross instead of one of his "brothers"?

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25).

The Greek word translated until does not imply anything about what happened after the incident described. Another example of the use of this word is 1 Corinthians 15:25: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Obviously Jesus will still reign after he has subjected his enemies, so we cannot infer anything about Mary and Joseph's relationship from the passage in Matthew.

"For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25).

"The Church has always professed her belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. The most ancient texts, when referring to the conception of Jesus, call Mary simply 'virgin', inferring that they considered this quality a permanent fact with regard to her whole life. The early Christians expressed this conviction of faith in the Greek term *aeiparthenos*-'ever virgin'-created to describe Mary's person in a unique and effective manner, and to express in a single word the Church's belief in her perpetual virginity" (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, August 28, 1996).

(Exodus 12:7; Exodus 13:1-2; Numbers 3:11-13; Wisdom of Solomon 7:25; Ezekiel 44:2; Romans 8:29; Matthew 1:24-25 with 1 Corinthians 15:25; Mark 3:31-35 with Matthew 13:55 and 27:56; Luke 2:7)

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