

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

Some think that Jesus had biological brothers, or other sons of Mary from Joseph after His birth. They lean on the following texts to conclude that the Mother of Jesus did not remain Virgin:

Mark 6,3 (Matthew 12,46): "The brothers of Jesus: James, Joset, Jude and Simon..."

Luke 2,7: "She gave birth to a son, her firstborn". So, there are others.

Matthew 1,25: "though he (*Joseph*) had not had intercourse with her, she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus." They conclude that he "knew" her afterwards

John 7,5: "Even His brothers did not believe in Him".

Responses

1. In the oriental mentality, up till today; cousins, children of the same village, and children who grow up together call each other "brothers". Generally, Arab countries are "brothers". The Bible, which emanates from the Orient, often employs the word "brother" to designate cousins or children of the same village. We have several biblical examples in the Old Testament:

Genesis 13,8 / 14,16: Abraham is said to be Lot's brother, and yet he is his uncle

Deuteronomy 15,2-3: "Any creditor holding a personal pledge obtained from his brother (*a Jew like you*) shall release it. . . a foreigner (*a non-Jew*) you may exploit."

(*Leviticus 19,17: "You will not harbor hatred for your brother (a Jew) . . ."*)

Kish and Eleazar are brothers. The sons of Kish married the daughters of Eleazar. But the text says:

1 Chronicles 23,22: "Eleazar died leaving no sons, but only daughters; **their brothers**, the sons of Kish, married these."

The sons of Kish are the cousins, and not the brothers of Eleazar's daughters.

2. John 19,25-27: In these verses, Clopas' wife is called Mary; she is also presented as "the sister of the mother of Jesus", whose name is also Mary. But, there cannot be two sisters who call themselves Mary in the same family.

Mary, Clopas' wife is therefore a cousin, a close relative, or even a childhood friend of Mary mother of Jesus. This is why she is considered her sister according to the oriental habits already seen.

If Mary had other sons, why is it that John "takes her into his home", and not into her other sons'? A response to this is: "Not even His brothers had faith in Him" (John 7,5).

We respond even more by saying: The episode of John 7,5 occurs in Galilee, Jesus' homeland. These brothers, who did not believe in him, are his Galilean compatriots, the inhabitants of Nazareth, his village, who did not believe in him and to whom Jesus says: "I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country." (Luke 4,24). They are thus not his "brothers" James, Jose, Simon and Jude, already mentioned, who believed in him and who even became his apostles (see the letters of James and Jude and also: Acts 1,14 / 12,17 / 1 Corinthians 9,5 / 15,6 / Galatians 1,19).

3. Mark 15,40: This "Mary mother of James and Joset" is Mary, Cleopas' wife, called the Virgin's "sister" in John 19,25-27. It is she who is the mother of James, Joset, Jude and Simon. Here, as "sister" of the Virgin Mary, her children are said to be "brothers" of Jesus; in reality they are his cousins. A response to this is that here, it is about the Mother of Jesus. Now, if Mark spoke of

the Virgin Mary, he would have said: "Mary, mother of Jesus, of James, of José and Simon", Jesus being the firstborn.

4. The "brothers" of Jesus were never called "Mary's sons":

- James defines himself as "servant of the Lord Jesus Christ", not as His brother (James 1,1).
- Jude, in his letter, says of himself as the "servant of Jesus and brother of James", not brother of Jesus.

Some people respond to this that Jesus had other brothers, and that these were his so-called brothers. Why then, does the Bible not mention them and only names James, Joset, Jude and Simon? Haven't we demonstrated that these are His relatives?

5. By saying that Jesus is the "firstborn", does not indicate that he had brothers. In the oriental mentality, up till today, the firstborn has special importance, with their parents named after them (*Father of Jesus and Mother of Jesus for example, instead of Joseph and Mary*). Moreover, it is the firstborn the parents offer to God, due to their particular and moral importance. (Luke 2,22-23). He was called "firstborn", whether he had brothers, sisters, or not.

6. The fact that Joseph had not known Mary "until" Jesus' birth, does not at all mean that he got to know her after. The Bible does not mention this and does not direct us to this conclusion. All Matthew simply wants to say, is that Jesus is born of Mary without a matrimonial intervention from Joseph's part. He wants to bring out the fact of the miraculous aspect of Jesus' birth. This is the evangelist's unique intention; he desires not to go on further and does not allow us to draw conclusions without presenting any scriptural proof.

As for us, we have demonstrated that Jesus' "brothers" are His near relations and compatriots. There are no evangelical verses which prove that Jesus had any biological brothers.

7. "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Jesus says, and pointing to **his disciples** he adds: "Here are my mother and my brothers" (Matthew 12,48-50). The true brothers of Jesus are found throughout the world; these are His disciples.

Appearing to Mary Magdalene and to Mary of Cleopa after His resurrection, Jesus tells them: "Go and tell **my brothers**..." (Matthew 28,10) "... and Mary Magdalene went and told **the disciples** that she has seen the Lord..." (John 20,17-18). She knew Jesus had no other brothers, but his disciples. All Jesus' disciples are His brothers as "He gave them the power to become children of God" (John 1,12), His Father by divine nature and their Father by adoption (John 20,17). Their faith in Jesus renders them sons of God and brothers of Jesus (John 1,12). Read Hebrews 2,11-13.

Conclusion

Having no other children but Jesus, Mary remained virgin. Her virginity has a profound spiritual sense, and relates to her total union with God. Mary would not have sinned by knowing Joseph sexually: he was her legal spouse. But she could not give herself to a man, her heart having been held by God: she is the bride of the Holy Spirit, the worthy, perfect accomplice of God in his plan of salvation on earth.

By a special and unique grace, God spared Mary from original sin. He has guarded her immaculate soul, ever since her conception. Mary was not troubled by the after-effects of original sin, which disturbs us all. Feeling saved from original sin, Mary says joyfully: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Savior" (Luke 1,46-47).

Mary alone was preserved immaculate so that her soul is tranquil in order to receive the Word who, in her "became flesh". God could not incarnate Himself in a troubled soul. Here is the secret of her Immaculate Conception. Some reason in human terms: they think that Mary could not remain virgin after Jesus' birth. Yet, He who created the whole universe and was able to

create the body of Jesus in Mary's womb, without touching her virginity, could still make Jesus born by respecting her virginity because "nothing is impossible to God" (Luke 1,37). Through her virginity, Mary renders virgin, all the hearts who confide in Her.

"She is a garden **enclosed**, my sister, my promised bride; a garden **enclosed**, a **sealed fountain**", the divine "Bridegroom" prophetically states on the Messiah's Mother (Song of Songs 4,12).

NB.: *Those who deny Mary's virginity are for the **free interpretation** of the Bible. They should be coherent with themselves and also allow others this freedom of interpretation... and reflect, however, on what St. Peter says in his second letter" (2 Peter 1,20).*

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