

The Brothers of Jesus

Some people think that Jesus had brothers, other sons Mary had from Joseph after His birth. They refer to 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 her firstborn son". So there are others.

-Matthew 1,25: "He (Joseph) knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son, and named Him Jesus". They conclude that Joseph "knew" Mary afterwards.

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

Answer

In the oriental mentality, even today, cousins, children of the same village, children growing together are considered "brothers". Generally speaking, all the Arabs consider themselves "brothers". The Bible, emanating from an oriental background, uses often the word "brother" to indicate cousins or people from the same village. There are many biblical examples in the Old Testament:

-Genesis 13,8 and 14,16: Abram is indicated as Lot's brother, but he is his uncle.

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

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

-1 Chronicles 23,22: Kish and Eleazar are brothers. The sons of Kish are said to be the brothers of the daughters of Eleazar, yet they are their cousins, not their brothers as says the text.

John 19,25-27: Mary, Cleopas's wife (see Luke 24,18) cannot be the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother, but she is her cousin, considered as her sister according to the well-known oriental mentality. Indeed, there could have not have been two sisters named Mary in the same family.

"Woman this is your son...this is your mother" (John 19,26-27): John is not Mary's son, neither is she his physical mother. The relation here is spiritual.

If Mary had other sons, why was John to "take her into his home"? Mary would have gone with her other sons? Some people will answer: She went with John because "even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7,5).

Our answer: these "brothers" are Jesus' fellow countrymen, inhabitants of Nazareth, Jesus' birth town. These people did not believe in Him and Jesus even said about them: "In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country" (Luke 4,24). Therefore, the already mentioned James, Joset, Jude and Simon are not His physical brothers. Moreover, they believed in Him and even became His disciples (see James' and Jude's letters and Acts 1,14 and 12,17 / 1 Corinthians 9,5 and 15,6 / Galatians 1,19). His other "brothers" from Nazareth did not believe in him.

Mark 15,40: "Mary mother of James and Joset" is Cleopa's wife, who is said to be Mary's "sister" in John 19,25-27. She is the mother of James, Joset, Jude and Simon. She is considered "sister" of the Virgin Mary; therefore her sons are considered Jesus' "brothers" although they are cousins or even close friends.

Some people also say that Mark 15,40 speaks of Jesus' Mother. Had this been the case, Mark would have written: "Mary, **mother of Jesus**, James, Joset, Jude and Simon", Jesus being the firstborn.

The "brothers" of Jesus have never been called "Mary's sons".

James defines himself as "servant of the Lord Jesus Christ", not as His brother (James 1,1).

Jude says that he is "servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James", not of Jesus.

Some may still answer that Jesus had other brothers and that they are the ones considered as His brothers. Why, then, does not the Bible mention them and only talks about James, Joset, Jude and Simon who, as we have demonstrated, are His relatives?

Saying that Jesus is the "firstborn" does not mean He had other brothers. In the oriental mentality, even nowadays, the firstborn has a special importance. His parents are even called by his name: Father of Jesus, Mother of Jesus and no more by their own name: Joseph and Mary. Furthermore, parents offer the firstborn to God for his particular moral importance. (Luke 2,22-23). The firstborn boy is called "firstborn" whether he has other brothers and sisters or not.

The fact that Joseph had not known Mary "until" Jesus' birth does not mean that he knew her afterwards. The Bible does not say it and we are not allowed to conclude it. What Matthew simply means to say is that Jesus was born from Mary without a sexual relation with Joseph; he merely wants to underline the miraculous side of Jesus' birth. This is Matthew's only intention, he does not want to go further and we are not allowed to draw conclusions without biblical proofs.

As far as we are concerned, we have demonstrated that Jesus' "brothers" are His near relatives and His fellow countrymen. There are no verses in the Gospel indicating that Jesus had physical brothers.

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Jesus said and, indicating **his disciples** he added: "Here are my mother and my brothers" (Matthew 12,48-50). The true brothers of Jesus are in the whole world; these brothers are His disciples.

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

Conclusion

Mary remained virgin. She had no other sons but Jesus. Her physical virginity has a spiritual deep meaning, which refers to her complete union with God. Mary would have not sinned had she known Joseph sexually: she was his legal bride. But She could not give herself to a man,

because her heart belonged completely to God. She is the Bride of the Holy Spirit, the worthy and perfect accomplice of God's plan of salvation. Like any woman in love, She could not belong to anyone else but God.

Furthermore, by a special and unique grace, God has spared Mary from the original sin. He has kept her immaculate, since her conception. God's incarnation could not happen in a troubled soul. Mary has not been troubled by the original sin, the consequences of which disturb, indeed, all of us. Feeling herself untouched by the original sin, She joyfully exclaimed: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Luke 1,46-47).

Thus, only Mary has been preserved immaculate, to keep her soul in peace in order to receive the Word of God who, in Her, "became flesh". God could not incarnate Himself through a tarnished soul. This is the secret of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

Some people reason humanly thinking that Mary could not have remained virgin after Jesus' birth. But God, who created the body of Jesus in Mary's womb without touching her virginity, can conceive Jesus within Her by respecting her virginity! "For nothing is impossible to God" (Luke 1,37). Mary's virginity purifies the hearts of those who put their trust in Her and restores their spiritual virginity (Revelation 14,4).

"She is an **enclosed** garden, my sister, my promised bride, an **enclosed** garden, a **sealed** fountain" says the divine "Bridegroom" about His Spouse, the Messiah's Mother, in the Song of Songs 4,12.

N.B.: *Those who deny Mary's virginity claim the **free interpretation** of the Bible. They should be coherent with themselves and allow the others also their freedom to interpret. They should also meditate on Saint Peter's words: "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation ..."* (2 Peter 1,20).