

The Early Church Fathers on Mary's Perpetual Virginity

The Early Church did not question Mary's perpetual virginity. They believed that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and that after His birth Mary remained a virgin. They knew that Scripture referred to Jesus as "The" son of Mary and not "A" son of Mary (Mark 6:3). They also understood why Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to the Apostle John at the foot of the cross. Clearly, He had no siblings. If He had, that responsibility would have been passed on to one of them. So overwhelming was the evidence that even Martin Luther and John Calvin taught that Mary remained a virgin through the entire course of her life.

Origen

The Book [the Protoevangelium] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. (*Commentary on Matthew 2:17* [A.D. 248]).

Liturgy of James

Thou who art the only-begotten Son and Word of God, immortal; who didst submit for our salvation to become flesh of the holy Mother of God, and ever-virgin Mary (9 [A.D. 300]).

Peter of Alexandria

the only-begotten Son, and the Word co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and of the same substance with them, according to His divine nature, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, being in the end of the world born according to the flesh of our holy and glorious lady, Mother of God, and Ever-Virgin, and, of a truth, of Mary the Mother of God; and being seen upon earth, and having true and real converse as man with men, who were of the same substance with Him (Fragments 5:7 [A.D. 300-311]).

Hilary of Poitiers

If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons and not those taken from Joseph's former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" [John 19:26-27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate (*Commentary on Matthew 1:4* [A.D. 354]).

Athanasius

Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that He took true human flesh from the ever-virgin Mary (*Discourses against the Arians 2:70* [A.D. 360]).

Epiphanius

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and took flesh, that is, was born perfectly of the holy ever-virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (*The Man Well-Anchored 120* [A.D. 374]).

Didymus the Blind

It helps us to understand the terms "firstborn" and "only begotten" when the Evangelist tells that Mary remained a virgin "until she brought forth her firstborn son" [Matt. 1:25]; for neither did Mary, who is to be honored and praised above all others, marry anyone else, nor did she ever become the mother of anyone else, but even after childbirth she remained always and forever an immaculate virgin" (*The Trinity 3:4* [A.D. 386]).

Ambrose of Milan

Imitate her [Mary], holy mothers, who in her only dearly beloved Son set forth so great an example of maternal virtue; for neither have you sweeter children [than Jesus], nor did the virgin seek the consolation of being able to bear another son (Letters 63:111 [A.D. 388]).

Pope Siricius I

You had good reason to be horrified at the thought that another birth might issue from the same virginal womb from which Christ was born according to the Flesh. For 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 (*Letter to Bishop Anysius* [A.D. 392]).

Jerome

And I will explain how the holy Mary can be at once a mother and a virgin. A mother before she was wedded, she remained a virgin after bearing her son (Letter 48:21 [A.D. 394]).

Augustine

In being born of a virgin who chose to remain a virgin even before she knew who was to be born other, Christ wanted to approve virginity rather than to impose it. And he wanted virginity to be of free choice even in that woman in whom he took upon himself the form of a slave (*Holy Virginity* 4:4 [A.D. 401]).

Leporius

We confess, therefore, that our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Father before the ages, and in times most recent, made man of the Holy Spirit and the ever-virgin Mary (*Document of Amendment 3* [A.D. 426]).

Cyril of Alexandria

The Word himself, coming into the Blessed Virgin herself, assumed for himself his own temple from the substance of the Virgin and came forth from her a man in all that could be externally discerned, while interiorly He was true God. Therefore, he kept his Mother a virgin even after her childbearing (*Against Those Who Do Not Wish to Confess That the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God* 4 [A.D. 430]).

Peter Chrysologus

Where are they who think that the Virgin's conceiving and the Virgin's giving birth are just like those of other women? ... A Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and a Virgin she remains (*Sermons* 117 [post A.D. 432]).

Pope Leo I

Christ, however, was begotten in a new kind of nativity, conceived by a Virgin, born of a Virgin, without the concupiscence of paternal flesh, without injury to maternal integrity ... but by divine power it was brought about that a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and a Virgin she remained (Sermons 22:2 [ante A.D. 461]).

Sophronius of Jerusalem

At the same time, however, there were the sublime and preeminent indications of His divinity ... such as His being conceived without seed, the exultation of John in the womb the undespoiling birth, the immaculate virginity which was unblemished before the birth, during the birth and after the birth (*Synodal Letter* [A.D. 634]).