

Biblical Q&A about the Blessed Virgin Mary

By John Salza

Was Mary free from all sin?

Yes. Both Scripture and reason teach us that Mary would not have been worthy to be the Mother of God if she had ever sinned. First, because the honor of the parents reflects onto the child (Prov 17:6), and if Mary was a sinner, she would have reflected this shame onto Jesus. Second, because Christ who is the Light can have no association with darkness, for Scripture reveals, “Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?” (2Cor 6:14-15). Third, because Scripture says that Christ who is “wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin” (Wis 1:4; 1Cor 1:24). Thus, Scripture says of Mary, “You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you” (Sg 4:7).

The angel Gabriel confirms Mary’s sinlessness at the Annunciation. When Gabriel came to Mary, he called her “full of grace” (Lk 1:28). The Greek word for “full of grace” (*kecharitomene*) means that Mary received a superabundant perfection of grace, which the Church calls the Immaculate Conception. We know that God granted others the privilege of being sanctified in their mothers’ wombs. For example, of the prophet Jeremiah, God says, “before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5). Of John the Baptist, Scripture says, “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Lk 1:15). If God chose to sanctify these men in the womb to become prophets of the Messiah, how much more would He free Mary from all sin from the moment of her conception to be the Mother of the Messiah? Thus, Job says, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one” (Job 14:4).

But doesn’t Scripture say “all have sinned”?

In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). However, this does not mean that Mary was a sinner. Why? For a number of reasons. First, “all have sinned” cannot include Jesus, so if Jesus is an exception then Mary can be as well. Second, in Romans 5:19, Paul says “many” (not all) were made sinners, which demonstrates that when Paul says “all,” he really means many. Third, the Greek word for “all” in Romans 3:23 is the same word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:22 when he says, “all have died.” But Scripture says Enoch and Elijah didn’t die but were translated into heaven, which means that when Paul says “all” he does not mean every single one.

Fourth, Paul cannot mean every single person born into the world has sinned because infants, the senile and the mentally handicapped cannot sin (or at least aren’t culpable for their sin). Fifth and finally, in Romans 3:23, Paul really means that all people are subject to Original Sin. The difference between us and Mary is that God chose to free Mary from Original Sin at the moment of her conception, while he frees us from Original Sin at the moment of our baptism. Mary’s redemption, like ours, is based entirely upon the merits

of Jesus Christ, which God applied in advance to Mary, just as He did with the Old Testament saints.

Was Mary Ever-Virgin?

Yes. The Church teaches that Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus Christ. Her virginity before Christ's birth is demonstrated by her question to the angel at the Annunciation: "How can this be since I have no relations with a man?" (Lk 1:35). Since Mary was already betrothed to Joseph at this time, her question makes no sense unless she had taken a vow of virginity. Also, it was not fitting for Christ to be conceived by natural relations because of His dignity as the Son of the heavenly Father. Finally, Scripture says Christ was "born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:13).

Mary was a virgin during Christ's birth because Isaiah says, "A virgin shall conceive *and shall bear a son*" (7:14). Just as the Word of God is conceived in the mind without corruption, it also proceeded from Mary's virginal body without corruption. Because Christ came to take away our corruption, it was most fitting that He would not corrupt His Mother's virginity. Mary was a virgin after Christ's birth because Scripture says, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut" (Ezek 44:2); and, "For she is a breath of the power of God...therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her" (Wis 7:25).

Did Mary have any pain during the birth of Jesus?

Because God increased the pain of childbirth as a punishment for the Original Sin (Gen 3:16), many anti-Catholics say that Mary had pain during the birth of Jesus to somehow accuse Mary of having sin. They point to Apocalypse 12:1 where the woman who gives birth to the Messiah "cried out in her pangs of birth." Does this prove Mary had pain? No, not at all. The birth pangs in the Apocalypse are symbolic for the birth of the Church and Mary's offspring being formed in Christ as the devil wages war on them. This symbolic use of birth pangs is common in Scripture.

For example, in Galatians 4:19, Paul says he will have birth pangs until Christ is formed in them. In fact, in Romans 8:22, Paul says that the entire creation is groaning in travail for Christ. In Jeremiah 13:21, the prophet says Israel has birth pangs, and Micah says the same thing about Jerusalem (4:9-10). Ephraim is also described as travailing in childbirth for his sins (Hos 13:12-13). Finally, the prophet Isaiah reveals that Mary would give birth before she was in labor and without any pain: "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?" (66:7-8).

Did Mary have other children beside Jesus?

Some anti-Catholics contend that Mary had other children because the Bible refers to people such as James and Joseph as Jesus' "brothers" (see Mk 6:3) This view is erroneous for a number of obvious reasons. First, it denigrates Christ's perfection, for if Christ is the perfect and only begotten of the Father, it is becoming that He should be the perfect and only begotten of His Mother. Second, while the Bible does describe people as Jesus' "brothers," it never says that these people are children of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is what anti-Catholics assume. Third, the people in Jesus' time spoke Hebrew and Aramaic and these languages have no word for "cousin." For example, in the book of Genesis, Lot is called Abraham's brother (Gen 13:8; 14:14,16) even though Lot was actually his cousin (Gen 11:26-27). Laban also calls Jacob his brother even though he was his nephew (Gen 29:15).

Thus, people in their native Hebrew or Aramaic tongue would refer to Jesus' cousins as His "brothers," and the Holy Spirit, who inspired the New Testament in the Greek language, recorded what the people actually said. So when Protestants see the Greek word *adelphoi* which means "brothers" to describe Jesus' relations, this does not mean that Jesus had biological brothers, only cousins. This is why in Scripture Jesus is always described as *the* son of Mary, not *a* son of Mary (Mk 6:3). Also, when Scripture describes Jesus as Mary's "first-born" son (Lk 2:7), this is a common Jewish expression of the mother's first child (Ex 13:2,12) who had to be sanctified under the Mosaic law (Ex 34:20). The term "first-born" does not denote a "second-born," because it has nothing to do with the mother having future children.

Did Mary have relations with Joseph after the birth of Jesus?

No, claiming that Mary had relations with Joseph is a grave error for a number of reasons. First, it is an insult to the Holy Spirit whose shrine was the virginal womb of Mary, which could not be desecrated by intercourse with man. Second, it is an insult to the holiness and gratitude of the Virgin Mary, who would have not been satisfied with having Jesus alone and who would have forfeited her virginity that God miraculously preserved. Third, it is an insult to Joseph who would have been guilty of sinful presumption for attempting to violate the one whom he knew conceived by the Holy Ghost. Even though they didn't have physical relations, Mary and Joseph had a valid marriage because the consummation of their love was in Jesus. They had no need for union of the flesh, for they already possessed the Divinity. They surrendered their rights to the flesh to enjoy the ecstasy of the spirit, which is the end of true marriage.

Nevertheless, anti-Catholics point to Matthew 1:24-25 where it says Joseph knew Mary "not until she had borne a son" to try to prove Mary had relations with Joseph after she bore Jesus. This is incorrect. In this case, the Greek phrase "not until" (*heos hou*) is an action that describes only the past, not the future. The phrase means "he knew her not up to the point that she bore a son." It has nothing to do with Joseph's relationship with Mary *after* she bore her Son. For example, when Jesus says He will be with us "until" the end of the world, "until" refers to the past only; it doesn't mean Jesus won't be with us

after the end of the world. In Luke 2:37, it says Anna was a widow until she was eighty-four. This does not mean Anna was not a widow after she was eighty-four. In 2 Samuel 6:23, it says Michal had no child to the day of her death. This doesn't mean Michal had a child after her death. Anyone who uses Matthew 1:24-25 to deny the virginity of Mary has completely misunderstood the text.

Is Mary the Ark of the New Covenant?

Yes. Mary is metaphorically described as the Ark of the Covenant because she bore the Word of God, not on stone tablets, but made flesh in her womb. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was for the Jews the holiest article of religious worship because it contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod that budded, and the manna from heaven. It was so holy that when Uzzah touched it to prevent it from tipping on a journey, God killed him (2Sam 6:7). God also killed some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they dared even to look into the Ark (1Sam 6:19). God would not let anything defiled come into contact with the Ark of His Word.

The Scriptures make a clear and direct connection between the Ark of the Old Covenant and Mary. For example, at the Annunciation, Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will overcome you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you" (Luke 1:35). The Greek word for overshadow (*episkiazo*) is the same word the sacred authors used to describe God's glory cloud overshadowing the Ark of the Old Covenant which we read in the books of Exodus, Kings and Job. Just like God's *shekinah* glory cloud overshadowed the Holy of Holies of the Old Covenant, Mary was overshadowed by the glory of the Holy Spirit and became the "Holy of Holies" of the New Covenant. Further, just as King David leaped for joy before the old Ark, John the Baptist leaped for joy before Mary at the Visitation (2Sam 6:16; Lk 1:41). Indeed, Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant - holy and without any stain of sin.

Was Mary assumed body and soul into Heaven?

Yes. While Jesus ascended into heaven on His own divine power, Mary was taken up into heaven by God, which the Catholic Church calls the Assumption. The Old Testament Scriptures allude to the Assumption: "Arise, O Lord, go to thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy might" (Ps 132:8). In this verse, both the Lord (Jesus) and His ark (Mary) go up to heaven in the same manner, body and soul. The Apostle John in the Apocalypse confirms this fact when he reveals, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple" (11:19). In the very next verse, John reveals who the "ark of his covenant" is: The "woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1).

Who is the "woman clothed with the sun"? John reveals that it is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, when he says that this woman "brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (v.5). Notice that Mary is seen with the moon under her "feet" and on her "head" is a crown of twelve stars. While John in the same letter reports that heaven is filled with disembodied souls (6:9), he sees Mary, *body and soul*. This

demonstrates that Mary was assumed into heaven. The Church does not say whether Mary died before her Assumption. One pious belief is that God gave her the choice to die, and Mary chose to experience death (the separation of the soul from the body) because that is what her Son endured in His death on the cross.

Is Mary the Queen of Heaven?

Yes. In the Old Covenant kingdom, the king's mother was called the "Queen Mother" (in Hebrew, *Gebirah*) who sat at the king's right hand (1Kg 2:19; Ps 45:9; Neh 2:6). The Queen Mother had a powerful position in Israel's royal monarchy. Because of her importance, the king would venerate the queen by bowing down to her and paying her homage (see 1Kg 2:19). The queen would also intercede on behalf of the king's subjects by presenting their requests to the king, and the king would not refuse her: "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me." And the king said to her, "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you" (1Kg 2:20).

Jesus Christ is the King of the New Covenant kingdom and Mary is the Queen Mother. Mary's "crown of twelve stars" represents her queenship in heaven over the "twelve tribes" which represent the people of God, the Church, the "New Israel" (see Gal 6:16). Jesus came not to abolish the spiritual principles of the Old Covenant, but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). Because Mary is the Queen Mother (*Gebirah*) of the kingdom, she sits at Jesus' right hand. Like the Queen Mother of the Old Testament kingdom, Mary intercedes before Jesus on behalf of the members of the New Testament kingdom. Further, like the old Davidic kings, Jesus the Son of David honors His Mother and does not refuse her requests. If we exalt Jesus as our King, then we must also exalt Mary as our Queen.

Is Mary the Mother of all Christians?

Yes. Because Jesus is the Son of Mary and we are members of Jesus' body (1Cor 12:27), we are also sons and daughters of Mary. Jesus made this very clear during His crucifixion when He said to Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" and then to the Apostle John, "Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:26-27). By making Mary our Mother and calling her "woman," Jesus was alluding to the book of Genesis when God first promised us the Savior: "I will put enmity between you and *the woman*, and between your seed and her seed" (3:15). Jesus is the "enmity" and Mary is the "woman." Just as Eve is the "mother of all living" on the natural level (3:20), Mary is the Mother of all the Living on the supernatural level, in the order of grace. Jesus Christ is the New Adam (1Cor 15:45) and Mary is the New Eve – the Mother of all Christians.

The Apostle John – to whom Christ revealed Mary's spiritual motherhood during the Passion – affirms this revelation in the Apocalypse. John first reveals Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant and the Queen of heaven (11:19; 12:1). After describing how Mary had brought forth the "male child" who would bring salvation to the world (vv.5,13), John writes that Satan "was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of *her offspring*, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to

Jesus” (v.17). Because those who bear testimony to Jesus are the *offspring* of Mary means that Mary is the Mother of all Christians.

Is Mary the Mediatrix of All Graces?

Yes. Because Mary is the supernatural Mother of all Christians, and grace is what gives supernatural life to all Christians, Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces. Just as a mother nourishes the body of her son by dispensing nutrition for natural life, Mary nourishes the Mystical Body of her Son by dispensing graces for supernatural life. Just as no man comes to the Father except through Christ (Jn 14:6), no man comes to Christ except through Mary. Just as Christ chose to come to us through Mary, He wills us to come to Him through Mary. As Queen Mother, Mary intercedes for us before the throne of Christ to dispense His graces to the members of His Body. We see this in Christ’s first miracle, where Mary interceded before Jesus on behalf of the wedding guests by saying, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Because Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces, Satan sought to destroy her even after she gave birth to the Messiah (Apoc 12:13-16).

Mary’s exalted role in no way takes away from Jesus Christ. Rather, it glorifies Christ even more. Scripture teaches that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1Tim 2:5-6). While Jesus the one Mediator has no need of human assistance, He desires our participation in His mediation by incorporating us into His Mystical Body through baptism. This is why we can pray and make sacrifices for other people, as Paul says, “I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church” (Col 1:24). Mary is not just a member of “his body, the church,” but also the very Mother of Christ and of the Church. Therefore, Mary’s participation in Christ’s mediation is uniquely maternal, unlike the role of any other member of the Body. Because Mary is our life-giving Mother in the order of grace, she is the Mediatrix of those graces – the supernatural life of Christians and of the Church.

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- The Biblical Basis for the Catholic Faith (OSV)
- The Biblical Basis for the Papacy (OSV)

- The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist (OSV)
- The Biblical Basis for Tradition (OSV)
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