

Morth Mariam Bathluth Yoldath Aloho (St Mary Virgin Mother of God); Blessed:

I would indite concisely about St. Mary. I construe nothing else can be more a blessing than writing about the one who was “highly favored one” and whom the angel saluted, “Blessed are you among women,” Luke 1:28. Angel being God’s messenger, I have no reason to cogitate the authenticity of this salutation. Yes, the angel was indubitably conveying God’s words. Elizabeth is the first human being, filled with Holy Sprit, to address her “blessed.” The truth is; Holy Spirit Himself was speaking through the mouth of Elizabeth. Mary filled with Holy Spirit rightly affirms, “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed,” Lk 1:48. Holy Spirit manifested in Mary, Elizabeth and John the Baptist in the womb at the same time. So any dutiful Christian ought to uphold the truth of the ‘Word of God’ and call Mary ‘blessed.’ Early Christian fathers exalted and honored her name just next to none but Jesus Christ. St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Jerusalem and Alexandria and St. Saverius of Antioch are just a few venerable early fathers to mention. Even some of the early Protestants leaders upheld this fact. Unfortunately, some ultra modern liberal factions consider it unnecessary and teach deviant bible versions to confuse the faithful.

The holy Church from the early time of its inception held that St Mary is unquestionably, Ever-Virgin, Most chaste, Undeified, Mother of God. We suitably adore her with enumerable adjectives and yet it is not enough when considering her unparalleled part in the Redemptive plan; Mother of the Son of God, Mother of Savior, Mother of our Lord, Mother of Christ, Most beloved daughter of God the Father, Bride of the Holy Spirit, Temple of God, Blooming flower of the Holy Trinity, Flower worthy of Heavenly hosts' adoration, Virgin of virgins, Most humble and strong virgin, Suffering mother, merciful, wonderful, miraculous, helping, full of grace, full of wisdom, blessed of all women, glorious, Mirror of righteousness, Shining star, Medicine for the sick, Comfort of the sorrowing, Fortress of the sinners, Joy of the afflicted, Heavenly Queen, Queen of Martyrs, Queen of the angels, Queen of our fathers, Queen of Prophets, Queen of Apostles, Queen of virgins, who saved women from of shame and destruction, Palace of the heavenly King, Origin of life, Blessed field, Crown of the Church, Cloud that carried the Lord of hosts, Righteous sheep who bore the shepherd, Second heaven, Bright lighthouse, Treasure house of all fragrance, Spiritual Mediator of redemption, Blessed branch of vine, First Christian, My only hope and the list goes on. Bar Hebrews says that ‘not one imploration directed towards Mother of God will go unanswered;’ the ancient book of prayer in the name of Mathai Sleeho is another proof of her valid intercession for the afflicted and that is the great confidence we have.

Symbolism in the Old Testament:

Old Testament is replete with resplendent imageries of the Redeemer and of the Mother. Old Testament is the shadow of things to come, that is, Christ is the substance, Col 2:17. St. Mary is the substance of the shadows namely, “Second Eve, Tree that bore male sheep, Noah’s Ark, Mount Sinai, Jacob's ladder, Mount Sinai, Burning bush which did not consume, Ex. 3: 2, etc. Golden vessel of Manna, Aaron's rod which budded, Rock from which originated fountain of life, Wool of Gideon, Type of the fiery chariot of heaven, Living chariot of heavenly King, Heavenly throne which Isaiah saw, Salt that purified the fountain, Tower of David, Golden temple, Tabernacle of God, Door of Heaven, Solomon's towel, Garden that bore Tree of life, Heavenly incense.” ‘The shut gate’ of Ezekiel’s vision depicted in Ezek 44: 2, Garden enclosed, ‘Spring shut and sealed fountain,’ Song of Songs 4: 12.

Birth of St Mary:

Tradition has that Yuyakim or Yunakir and Hanna was God fearing and devoted couple but they had no children. Social contempt made them very sad. The couple vowed that if Hanna bore a child they would dedicate the child to the service of the Lord. Such practice was very ancient and popular among

Jews. Hanna conceived and delivered a female child and named the child, Mary. According to the vow they dedicated Mary to the Lord's service in the temple, entrusting her to the care of high priest.

September 8 is observed as the birthday of St. Mary. 8 days' lent is rigorously observed especially by women from the first to eighth day of September. The lent comes to a close by commemorating her birthday. This is not a canonical but laity sponsored lent. Its date of origin is unknown. Variant traditions are claimed. (1) In the 6th century, Caliph of Baghdad captured the town called Hira near Bazra, which was predominantly a Christian population. The Caliph hated Christians. He was a known womanizer and cruel. He summoned all the beautiful Christian women of Hira. The whole town of Hira fell in agony for, the chastity and modesty of the womenfolk was at stake. They sought refuge in the Intercession of St. Mary. Bishop of the town declared three days prayer and fasting. On the 3rd day, a golden beam of light illuminated the whole church. On the same day the caliph fell down headlong from the stairs, broke his neck and died. Faithful of Hira were thus miraculously saved from the tyrant. The three days gradually was changed to eight days. (2) Most certainly certain pious women started it before eighteenth century somewhere in Europe out of extreme piety to the blessed Mother of God and they were relieved of the affliction prayed for, according to another tradition. (3) Another story special to Kerala only goes thus: Tipu Sultan invaded Kerala. He reached Alwaye in 1789. The infamous Tipu and his Muslim soldiers let loose atrocities on Christian women. The dismayed hapless women resorted to fasting and prayer on the other bank of the river for 8 days and sought intercession of St. Mary. Governor General Lord Mornington attacked Sreerangapatnam, Tipu's Head Quarters. Tipu was forced to retreat in defense of his head quarters but he could not; on the way back he fell from his horse and succumbed to injuries sustained from the fall and died. The poor faithful women were miraculously saved from the brutality of Tipu. Proven efficacy of her mediation alone is its advertisement. Numerous miracles including healing of the sick, abandonment of evil life style, exorcism, granting of personal wishes, etc are widely reported from every quarter, irrespective of gender, race or color or national differences. Millions worldwide testify favors received through blessed mother's intercession. Famous Manarkadu, Velankanni, "Miracle Chapathi," for which I am a living witness, during early seventy's are a few examples of relief received from sickness through St Mary's intercession.

Mary is familiar name for Bible readers. Seven different women bear the name, 'Mary' in the New Testament.

- 1, St. Mary, Mother of Jesus.
- 2, Mary, Mother of James and Joses, Mat 27:5, Mk 15:40, Lk 24:10.
- 3, Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus cast out 7 demons, Mk 16:9, Lk 8:2.
- 4, Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha Lk 10: 39-42, John 12:3-4.
- 5, Mary, Wife of Clopas, Jn 19:25.
- 6, Mary, Mother of John Mark, AA 12: 12.
- 7, Mary who greeted Paul at Rome, Rom 16:6.

Multiplicity of names, absence of clear identification to discern relationship between each of them and translation errors have contributed lot of confusion and gave room for many erroneous interpretations concerning blessed Mary, Mother of God.

Bible does not give enough details about St. Mary such as her birth, her parents, her life before conception of Jesus, her life with Joseph, death of Joseph, her life after the departing of Jesus, especially her death, and etc. It is really difficult to construct a biography only based on Biblical references, and that is the haven for heretics and schismatic. But this aspect need not alarm the faithful, because Scriptures do not give full personal details of even Jesus Christ; the theme of the Holy Bible is not biographies of heroes although details of certain heroes might aid to construct biographies.

Numerous traditions have emerged on these matters. Many of them are contradictory and some are even of vicious origin. While Roman Catholics heavily rely on such traditions and exalt her equal to God, Protestants fully repudiate the whole traditions as absurd because they are not found in the Holy Bible.

Orthodox Church, as ever, follows a medium course namely; we have neither added nor deleted anything from the genuine apostolic teaching.

Thus we acknowledge her status as a created being. She was not born different. She, like any other human being, inherited at birth and shared in the fallen nature of Adam. She grew up like any other girl of her age yet, in full of humility and devotion she found favor with God.

First of all saints:

We confer her first position before all apostles and saints but not equal to God for creation shall never equal the creator. We adore, venerate and honor her as first among saints but we do not worship her. Worship belongs to God alone. All our prayers end with, “We raise praise and thanksgiving to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit forever and ever.” But St Mary was the first ever Christian, both physically and spiritually, who literally bore Christ in her womb giving her earthly flesh and blood to the Redeemer, while a Christian bears Christ spiritually. It was her unqualified submission, unmatched devotion to the ultimate will of God and active participation in the Redemptive Plan that merited to her the first position before all saints. For this reason, we commemorate her day of departing (Soonoyo) more importantly than her birth. We have only three birthday celebrations, (1) of Christ, (2) St John, the Baptist, because he was filled with Holy Spirit while in his mother’s womb and (3) St Mary, in whom Holy Spirit dwelt. We celebrate departing day of saints because they have glorified the name of God by their worthy life. “Do not praise anyone; for one, becomes worthy of honor at the end of his life (how he ends his life),” Sirach 11:26. Feast St Mary is thus “Feast of Soonoyo” on August 15th.

Feasts in honor of St Mary:

We have several other feasts in honor of St. Mary. (1), Annunciation observed yearly twice, on the fourth Sunday of Church calendar and on March 25 by date. Church admonishes to conduct Holy Eucharist on March 25 without fail. Even if Soonoyo happens to be on Good Friday we are obligated to first celebrate the “Feast of Annunciation” and then conduct Good Friday services; thus evidently Church bids great importance to the Day of Annunciation.

2, Blessing of Seeds on January 15.

3, Blessing of harvest on May 15.

4, Blessing of Vine and Soonoyo or departing on August 15.

5, Her Entry into temple on November 21.

6, Day of Veneration on December 26.

St Mary betrothed Joseph

Mary grew up in the temple until maturity. Custom did not permit to further keep her in the temple lest the temple’s sanctity would be defiled and required that she be married and sent out. The priests were conscious about her safety for; Mary was extraordinarily devoted and pious. The temple authorities summoned the Elders, as the custom demanded. Bridegroom was to be chosen by casting lot. Custom required that one had to accept the choice of casting lot as divine decision, Prov 16: 33 and the lot fell to Joseph. According to certain traditions the High priest set a test that was: “Mary shall be given in marriage to one whose staff budded like that of Aaron. All aspirants placed their staff as the High priest commanded and he prayed over it to reveal the will of God. When the prayer ended the staff of Joseph was found budded and blossomed. Joseph, a carpenter by profession, was an old man married and having children. Polygamy was not forbidden on those days. Indeed, it was divine decision because as the very name connotes, Joseph was a most matured and righteous man available on those days who would have least thought of putting Mary to shame or risk.

Joseph took Mary with him but they did not come together, Mat 1:18. Meaning of the word ‘wife’ is greatly different at present. On those days, from the time of betrothal, whether or not they married or consummated the marriage, people called and treated them as husband and wife. Nowadays we, the Syrian Orthodox conduct betrothal and marriage ceremonies together on the same day due to certain practical reasons. But on those days and in the early centuries of Christianity these ceremonies were conducted

separately. There was considerable time gap between the two. The bride and the bridegroom were not allowed intimate contact during this period. Pre-marital sex was, and still is, a sin. Severe consequences such as public inquest, death by stoning, etc awaited the law-breakers. Incidentally, it is not easy for today's young generation that derives comfort and enjoyment in frequent dating, living together and direct action without commitments whatsoever to fully comprehend what was then the order of the day. At present, living together, having kids, with or without marriage, divorce and separation have been relegated to the level of 'use and throw' commodity. Thus these matters are irrelevant these days.

Joseph, to his utter dismay, found that Mary was pregnant with child before they came together. Luke affirms that Joseph was not the father of Jesus but people thought so, Luke 3:23. It was God's own plan to hide the exact identity of Jesus in order to fulfill plan of redemption; namely during infancy a caretaker was necessary to protect the mother and the infant and when grown up to save him from social ridicule. Joseph was in between the devil and the deep sea. Mary would be put to public ridicule and death if he published the matter and if he did not disown her, he had to bear burden of caring and infidel wife and someone else's child. Joseph went to bed overburdened with serious thoughts and decision to secretly abandon her. Angel Gabriel appeared in dream and explained the whole episode and encouraged him to keep Mary. Joseph's ordeal came to an unexpected happy ending. Joseph woke up from the sleep as a new man fully transformed and convinced of the supernatural conception, kept and protected Mary. Such divine provision was absolutely necessary to conceal actual identity for safety and survival of both the mother and child in order to successfully carry out the mysterious plan of redemption. Joseph is a model of true Christian namely, a thoroughly changed life and thoughts. It has become a fashionable word to say, "I believe in Jesus, I confess Jesus as my Lord and personal Savior, I am born again," and so on but never change the way of life. This is a dichotomy and great travesty of our times. "Believing and confessing" the name of the Lord also put heavy responsibility to obey his commandments; to observe and practice each and every biblical statute and be blameless and righteous in conduct that pleases God and also fellowmen. "If we truly think of Christ as our source of holiness, we shall refrain from anything wicked or impure in thought or act and thus show ourselves to be worthy bearers of his name. For the quality of holiness is shown not by what we say but by what we do in life," says St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Joseph knew not Mary until the birth of Christ? (wlo hakhmoh a'dhamo dheeletheh labro bukhro.)

(1) The word 'know' is very significant. Syriac equivalent is, "Hakmo" means very intimate knowledge of a person. This word is also employed to mean sexual intercourse because it involves highest level of intimacy precedes connubial relationship. We know for sure Joseph was extremely confused, perturbed and perplexed when he decided to abandon Mary in secret and went to bed. That night God revealed (some people inadvertently calls it "Annunciation to Joseph". The correct terminology is "Revelation to Joseph") him a great knowledge that no other man knew, that Mary conceived supernaturally and was bearing the Redeemer, Son of God. Though Joseph was convinced of the revelation and took the responsibility of an earthly father, he did not have much idea as to how things would turn out. God afforded him an opportunity to witness the marvelous things at the birth of Jesus. The nature itself cooperated with the act of Incarnation, which the author of "Silent night," has so picturesquely elucidated. Joseph had never before seen such serene calmness all around. The delivery was quick and painless. Angels of heaven came down to nurse the newborn. Heavenly hosts informed the shepherds about the divine birth. Heavenly host sang glory to God. A special star appeared and guided the wise men from afar. They worshipped the newborn prophetically declaring that the newborn is Prophet, King and Priest. Simeon the old man took the baby in his hands and said the newborn is the "Glory of Israel and light of gentiles." He was waiting to see the salvation of the Lord, he implored the newborn, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for, my eyes have seen your salvation," Luke 2:29-30. Joseph witnessed all these supernatural happenings at the birth and he was enthralled beyond comprehension because he never imagined such celestial happenings would occur at the time of Mary's delivery. So these supernatural events opened his eyes to look at Mary with awe and wonder; not just as an ordinary human being but at another angle, as the

Mother of his Savior. True it is, he understood her divinity/chastity/holiness only after she gave birth to infant Jesus. It was not an intimacy involving sex but more than that, Joseph most intimately convinced himself that Mary was a mother-divine. So here, the word 'know' is not an apple of discord. The travesty these days is that people are too crazy to interpret the bible to suit their own hidden agenda. For example: David mourns the death of Jonathan, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant has thou been to me, your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman," 2Sam 1:26. How it would sound when some devil-possessed interpret to justify their own dereliction that this verse refers to David's homosexual relationship? So is the situation when the ill-conceived Protestants say Joseph had connubial relations with Mary.

(2) Prefixes, "Till, Until," Mat, 1: 25

The English prefix "***until***" is the culprit. Protestants and denomination founders do not refute the virgin birth, not out of conviction but that they will lose existence otherwise, that is, they agree that Mary remained virgin until delivering Jesus. Unfortunately however, they interpret that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had sexual relationship and Mary delivered many children after, quoting certain verses from the polluted bible versions. This pathetic interpretation emerges from a society obsessed with sex, without which they cannot imagine anything beyond.

Certain new theories unknown to early church apostolic/fathers later surfaced that denied her 'ever-virgin' status. Based on Mat, 1: 25 that says, Joseph "did not know her *till* she had brought her *firstborn* Son." prefixes, (till, until, unto) do not purport what happened after. Similar citations are quite plenty in the Bible. Some examples are: (1) "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no Child *unto* the day of her death," or (Michal did not bear children until death), II Sam 6: 23. Does it infer that Michal had children after she died? (2) "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, *till* he has set judgment in the Earth," Is 42: 4. Does it infer that He (God) will be discouraged after the judgment? (3) "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, *until* I make thine enemies thy footstool," Ps 110: 1. Does it mean that He will not sit at the right hand after? So be it assured that this sentence does in no way deduce that Joseph connubially knew (Hakhmo) Mary after.

(2) "Firstborn" Heb 1:6

Next conflict is about the word '*firstborn,*' (Bukhro, in Syriac). (1) Israel comprising 12 tribes is mentioned as firstborn to God, Ex 4:22, Ps 89:27. (2) Regardless, whether or not a couple has only one or more than one child, the first child is always known as the 'firstborn.' Presence of more children does not reduce the firstborn status of the child born first. It was the usual Jewish custom to call the first child, 'firstborn.' We Keralaites have the same custom! (3) The term 'firstborn' in the New Testament is a dictum referring to Christ for He is firstling before of all creations. "And again when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says..." Heb 1:6. Jesus Christ here is the "Firstborn of eternal God." Would anyone conceive that Eternal God begot another Son in the same manner He begot Jesus Christ? Do not forget we always say, "Only Begotten Son of God the Father." I fail to understand why then a different interpretation is in vogue in the case of Mary? Is it not thrust upon the faithful to misguide the "untaught and unstable"?

Holy Spirit purged her from all impurities of original sin just when she conceived Jesus. Her virginity was unaffected by the divine conception, bearing and delivery. She remained chaste virgin even after birth of Jesus. She was not defiled by human contact throughout life either before or after divine conception as God predestined. "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord, the God of Israel has entered in by it," Ezek 44:2. Jerusalem temple had most holy place, which was separated by a veil, usually shut and the high priest entered only once a year on the Day of Atonement, Heb 9: 7. Jerusalem Temple built by Solomon or any other temple for that matter had no such eternally shut gate through which human beings were forbidden to pass. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon invaded, besieged, ransacked and destroyed Jerusalem temple around BC 600. Ezekiel saw the vision in BC 574 that is 26 years after the temple destruction. Spoils of the temple were only survived then. Thus,

Ezekiel was referring to a heavenly 'New Messianic Temple,' not to the Jerusalem or any earthly temple. This confirms and supports ever-virginity of St. Mary. Now, there were five gates known as Eastern Gate, chiefly because they all were facing east. The two were outer and three were inner. (1) The outer boundary of the temple was a wall 9feet thick and 9 feet high. Its steps led to the eastern gateway, v5, which had a threshold 9ft x 15ft, v6. Beyond, there was porch. Length of the gateway was 75ft, v6-7. (2) Inner threshold. This inner threshold led to the inner Eastern gateway to house or temple proper, v 32-34. The altar was after the inner/second Eastern Gateway or at the center of the court. Proper temple was still beyond the court of sacrifice/altar. In it there were three gates; (3-1) from the altar to Holy place, (4-2) from holy place to Holy of Holies, and (5-3) Outer Gate. This is the gate the Lord told Ezekiel "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened and no man shall enter in by it," 44:2. The gate mentioned in 46: 1-2 is inner gate and thus both are different. None of the fathers of the ancient mentioned this gate (#4 above) as "shut gate" for it was not shut door. The door (#5 above) when God said, no man shall enter by it, it shall not be opened, and it shall remain shut for ever, because the Lord has passed through it, who will dare to go against what God said?

"Brothers"

Next problem is the statement of 'brothers.' This again, if taken in the traditional Jewish custom, there would be no ambiguity whatsoever.

- (1) Kinsmen of the same parents, Gen 27:6.
- (2) Of the same father; Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons in 4 women. They each other called 'brother' but they were half-brothers/stepbrothers as per present notation, Gen 28:2.
- (3) Of the same mother, Judge 8:19.
- (4) A man of the same country, Ex 2:11, Acts 3:22.
- (5) Member of the same tribe 2Sam 19:12.
- (6) An ally, Amos 1:9.
- (7) A kindred, Num 20:14.
- (8) A co-religionist, Acts 9:17, Rom 1:13.
- (9) Fellow office bearer, Ezra 3:2.
- (10) Someone of equal rank, 1K 9:13.
- (11) Any member of human race, Mat 7:3-5, Heb 2:17.
- (12) Someone greatly beloved, 2Sam 1:26.
- (13) Relative, Gen 14: 16, Mat 12:46. Handy Dictionary of the Bible" by Merrill C Tenney, Page 27 (A Protestant presentation, Zondervan publication)
- (14) Scofield reference Bible, (a Protestant version, series #3, pocket edition, page 999) reads: "A son of Alphaeus (or Cleopas) and of Mary the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, and Brother Joses (Mk.15: 40.) He was therefore, a cousin of Jesus Christ." Again, Scofield reference bible says, "son' or 'brother' has been variously translated. According to Jewish usage, James the brother of our Lord was cousin," page 999.
- (15) Abraham called Lot, his nephew, a brother, Gen 14: 14.
- (16) Elimelek was only a relative to Boaz but is spoken as brother, Ruth 4:3.
- (17) Joab called his first cousin as brother, 2 Sam 17: 25 and 20: 9.

Therefore it would be ridiculous and sinful to ignore all these facts and presume that "brothers" mentioned in Mat 13: 55-56, John 7:1-10 or elsewhere in reference to St Mary, namely James, Joses, Simon and Judas were born to St. Mary.

(18) Dummelow's bible commentary says "brethren," not brothers. Thus evidently, while Jesus had relations, He had no blood brothers. "Our Lord had four brethren, James, Joseph, Simon, Judas; and at least three sisters (Mat 13:55). What their exact relationship with Him was not certain. There are three main views- (1) that of St Jerome, hence called the Hieronymian view, that they were our Lord's cousins, being sons of Mary, the Virgin's sister and of Clopas (John 19:25). Most supporters of this view think

three of the brethren were apostles. Jerome's theory, until recently predominant one in England, is now held by very few. (2) The Epiphonian view, so called from its advocacy by St Epiphanius, that they were sons of Joseph by a former wife. This is the theory of the Eastern Church and has been learnedly supported in England by Lightfoot. (3) The Helvedian view, that they were children of Joseph and Mary born after Jesus. Prof Mayor is the chief recent exponent of this view. The arguments for the last two views are nearly balanced and it is difficult to decide which is right. The following points seem certain from the NT. (1) that brethren did not live with Mary of Clopas but with Virgin Mary and were regarded as members of her family (12:46, 13:55, Jn 2:12, 7:3.) (2) That they were jealous of Jesus and up-to the Resurrection disbelieved His claims (Mk 3:21, 6:4, Jn 7:5). (3) And that consequently none of the brethren were included among the twelve apostles. (4) They were converted after the Resurrection by the appearance to James, (1Cor 15:7) and henceforth associated themselves with the disciples (Acts 1:14). The chief arguments in favor of Epiphonian views are; (1) that it represents the most ancient tradition, being already current in Palestine in the 2nd century. (2) That if the Virgin had a large family, some of the members of which, like James the bishop of Jerusalem, attained to prominent positions in the Church, the practically unanimous tradition that she remained always a virgin, could never have arisen. (3) That it is more reverent to suppose that our Lord's mother never had any other children. (4) That Lk 1:26-38, implies that already before the birth of Jesus, she had devoted herself with her betrothed's consent to a life of virginity. (5) That our Lord upon the cross would not have committed the care of his mother to St John, if she had had four living sons to support her. The chief arguments in favor of Helvedian views are- (1) that the high esteem of virginity generally prevalent in the early Church made Christians unwilling to think of Mary as the mother of other children and consequently the Epiphonian theory was invented. (2) That Luke 2:7 implies that Mary had other children. (3) That Mat 1:18-25 imply that the connubial relations of Jesus and Mary after the birth of Jesus were of the usual kind. (4) That the brother when used without further explanation, naturally means a full brother. In the opinion of the present writer the arguments for Epiphonian view slightly preponderate," Comments by J.R. Dummelow 1920, edn page 670-671.

New relationship evolved with St Mary and St John proves St Mary's Ever-virginity

Hebrew or Aramaic language did not have words equivalent to the present 'brethren' or 'cousin' or step-brother. The brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Judas, said above were cousins in the modern English sense. Many Protestant leaders so agreed in the past, as quoted above. In other words, St Mary had no other children. It was for this reason Jesus Christ committed His mother to the care of Apostle John at the Cross envisaging a new relationship between Mary and John as mother and son. John immediately accomplished the commitment, John 19:25-26. Here John represents the Church; thus St Mary is the mother for all believers. Now imagine brothers as seen in John 7:5 were children of St Mary for an argument-sake. They did neither believe nor support Jesus. And yet there is no reason why they will not take care of Mary. (1) Jewish law demanded the surviving sons to take care of mother. Jesus could have no right to take a unilateral decision to without the consent of biological siblings; and even if he took such a decision it would not have any bearing because it was for the surviving sons to decide how they will do with their mother. (3) No mother on earth can think of leaving her own sons, even if they did not care her and opt to spend rest of her life with a third party, however close the third party might be. Alleging that St Mary had other sons and yet she left them to live with John is a slander against the very motherhood. Moreover we have no reason to allude that Mary neglected all her children but Jesus so that they all turned against and deserted her. Even heathens and atheists agree that St. Mary was a model mother par excellent, worthy of emulation. (4) What would have been the reaction of the brothers? How one thinks that they were emotionally detached to and alienated from mother? How the society would have viewed the whole situation? Do we know any reason why other sons she had, if any, would not take care of her? At least James, the so-called brother, believed in Jesus Christ after resurrection, 1 Cor 15: 7, became bishop and head of Church in Jerusalem Acts 12:17 and 21:18, presided over the first ever apostolic Council in Jerusalem Acts 15:13, advised Paul, Acts 21. Yet, Mary was with John. Had James been the son of Mary he would also have felt responsible to care her. St. Mary is last mentioned in Bible in Acts 1:14 where she,

with disciples and “his brethren” is in prayer and supplication waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s wording is especially important, “*and with his brethren.*” Apparently Jesus’ brethren are not Mary’s sons. Tradition has that she was actively involved in the developments and activities of the infant Church. This interpretation is against all natural norms, illogical and absurd. Jesus as the only son, dutiful son, was impelled to make provision for His mother. The disciples paid motherly glory to Mary and dedicated the first ever Church-parish in her honor.

“Woman, behold your son”

Jesus was compassionate to his mother. Even while suffering death pangs on the Cross He fulfilled a loving son’s duty. Pointing to disciple John, He said to mother, “Behold thy son,” and to the disciple He said, “Behold your mother,” and from that moment that disciple John took her to his own home, John 19: 26-27. He created new relationship of mother and child between Mary and the disciple. She has become mother not only to one disciple but also to the entire Christians of all ages. Ancient Churches believe and teach, as we have seen above, that Mary is ever-virgin and Mother of God (*Theotokos* or God bearer) because her son Jesus is God and had no other children. Joseph had predeceased; thus practically there were no immediate kindred to take care of St. Mary in the absence of Jesus. Had she other children as Protestants teach there was no need for Jesus to comment her to a disciple who was not blood-related. They heavily rely on the assumption that His brethren did not believe in Him as said in John 7:5 and completely ignore John 2:12 where it says, His mother and brethren accompanied Him to Capernaum. How if the brethren did not believe in Him they went with Him to Capernaum? The disbelief of the brethren was because to them Jesus was not moving swift enough to make Himself known in the whole of Judea. Synoptic gospels say that mother and brethren went desirous of speaking to Jesus while He was speaking to multitude, (see 11, 12). Thus belief or disbelief of brethren is not at all a cognizable reason why Jesus would completely ignore and take upon Himself what was the duty of His siblings, if any. Again, common sense cannot grant that other brothers, if any, would allow one’s mother to go and live with an unrelated person just because a dying brother said so. Alternatively, would a mother forsake and disregard her all others sons, if any, let alone the sisters, and act only upon the words of a dying son? Would a mother abandon her sons and daughters to live with a mere acquaintance? Thus evidently, Jesus had no sibling. St. Mary is then seen with the disciple at the gathering of 120, praying and fasting as Jesus commanded them to do, (see 16). This amply affirms that St. Mary spent rest of her life with the disciple and actively involved in the formation and growth of infant Church of Jerusalem. St. Ignatius of Antioch is said to have corresponded with her.

Yet another important point to bear in mind is, Mosaic Law poignantly forbid children to curse or disobey parents. “Everyone that curses his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he has cursed his father or mother; his blood shall be upon him,” Lev 20:9, Prov 20:20. If death penalty was imposed for cursing father or mother how a son could go scot-free if he neglected them when they need the help most? Concept of family according to Jewish custom was entirely different from that of our contemporary society. There were no old age homes or nursing homes to dump the elderly. It was nonnegotiable duty of every child to afford care for parents in their old age. Dereliction was viewed seriously and usually no one would have risked the consequences.

St. Mary is mentioned on 16 occasions in the New Testament.

On most occasions she plays prominent part and at other times name is simply mentioned.

- 1, Annunciation accounts, Angel announces divine conception, and Mary seeks clarification and submits to God’s will, Luke 1:26-26.
- 2, Mary betrothed to Joseph, Mt 1:18-25.
- 3, Mary visits Elizabeth, her kinswoman and mother of John the Baptist who is filled with Holy Ghost, Magnificat, etc Luke 1:39-56.
- 4, Journey to Bethlehem, rejection in the inn, Jesus’ birth, the manger, shepherds worship and heavenly hosts worship, etc, Luke 2:1-20.

- 5, Jesus brought in the temple for purification, circumcision (Mayaltho), Simon's prophesy, the prophetess Hanna etc, Luke 2: 22-39.
- 6, Wise men's visit from the East, Mat 2:11.
- 7, Flight to Egypt, Mt 2: 14.
- 8, Return from Egypt, at Galilee, Mat 2: 21-24.
- 9, Jesus at the temple, Lk 2: 41-52.
- 10, Mary thought about what she heard of infant Jesus, Lk 2: 19, 51.
- 11, People of Galilee identified her as mother of Jesus and alleged that James, Joses, Simon, Judas were brothers and sisters of Jesus, Mat 13:55-56, Mk 6:3, Jn 6:42.
- 12, Reached Jesus while He spoke to multitude, Mt 12: 47, Mk 3:31-35, Lk 8:19-24.
- 13, the first miracle performed at the marriage feast at Cana at the request of Mary, Jn 2: 1-5.
- 14, Goes to Capernaum with Jesus, Jn 2:12.
- 15, Present at Jesus' death, Jn 19:25-27.
- 16, Seen with disciples, AA 1:14.

Virgin Mother of God

Holy fathers defined and explained the position of St. Mary in the light of controversies surrounding Christology namely, the nature, attributes and deity of Jesus Christ, which emanated right at the end of first century. Gnosticism deserves special mention. Docetists followed, to deny the perfect human nature of Jesus Christ and argued that Jesus had no real and natural body. Apostle St. John defended this heresy by writing, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out in the world. By this you know the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of Antichrist," 1 John 4: 1-3. He begins the Epistle with the declaration: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled," 1 John 1:1-3. Some argued 'He' being perfect man 'virgin birth' was impossible. St. Ignatius defended saying, "The virginity of Mary, her giving birth and also the death of the Lord, were hidden from the prince of this world: three major mysteries loudly proclaimed," Letter to Ephesians. This conception did not impair virginity of Mary which fact is attested in 'Apostle's Creed.' St. Augustine wrote, "We must except the holy Virgin Mary. Out of respect for the Lord, I do not intent to raise a single question on the subject of sin. After all, how do we know what abundance of grace was granted to her who had the merit to conceive and bring forth Him who was unquestionably without sin," (Nature and Grace Ch. 36). St. Irenaeus says that 'Virgin Mary through obedience was able to cause salvation to herself and for the whole human race,' (Against heresies). Mor Cyril, Mor Saverious Of Antioch, Mor Aphrem and all early fathers and doctors of the Church taught that St. Mary was undoubtedly "the God bearer" (Theotokos). Mor Athanesius the Great is credited having first used the term, 'Theotokos.'

Arian heresy is another landmark. He said, 'Christ is not the Son of God but a created being (*ex nihilo*) who at one time did not exist.' Incidentally, it may be mentioned that present day's 'Unitarians' and the 'Jehovah witness' are offshoots of the Arian heresy (Britannica). The Holy Synod of Nicene under the towering leadership of St. Athanesius repudiated this heresy and adopted the creed. We confess every day, "One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, begotten of the father before all worlds, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of the same substance with the father and who made all things," etc. The analogy is that if Christ is confessed as God, His earthly mother is undoubtedly Mother of God. He rightly called Virgin Mary, "*Theotokos*" which means, Mother of God. Then came the Nestorian heresy, which said Virgin Mary can be called only, "*Christotokos*" that means, 'mother of Christ.' He denied the deity of Jesus Christ at birth. The Holy Synod of Ephesus (A D 431) under the leadership of St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Dioscoros repudiated this heresy and established that St. Mary was undoubtedly Virgin Mother of God (Basloos Mariam Yeldos' Aloho). Virginity of St. Mary before and at Birth of Christ is not vigorously pursued thereafter.

“Woman”

(1) Yet another apple of discord is that Jesus called her, “*Woman!*” Equivalent word in Greek language is, ‘Guine’ which imported respect and dignity and not contempt. In English, there are two words for female gender, ‘*Lady and woman*’ both purport the same gender but the meaning is different. ‘*Lady*’ means a woman of high social status like Countess, First Lady, etc. ‘*Woman*’ is simply a female, comparatively low in status. The same parameter applies to the original use of the word in Greek. (2) Some people interpret that by calling so Jesus was not giving her respect. As these people say, if Jesus disrespected his mother publically or privately, disrespecting mother being a sin, especially in the Jewish context, Jesus becomes a sinner. A sinner cannot redeem another sinner. How then a Christian can consider Jesus as a model? If he is a sinner and not a model son, the whole Christianity is jeopardy. This is utterly an improper predicament. No social custom of any society ever permitted to impolitely address one’s mother. Can we call Jesus as the Son of God and Christ and at the same time think that He mistreated His mother? Commonsense suffices to say that it is highly unbecoming of Jesus to salute her with a dishonorable word. By calling her “*woman,*” Jesus was identifying Himself as the “*Seed of the Woman*” who shall bruise the head of serpent and declaring Mary as the woman of the Edenic Covenant, Gen 3: 15. He was declaring to the world that He was the “*Seed of the Woman*” appointed to fulfill the Edenic covenant, that is the restoration of the lost Paradise.

“What have I to do with thee?”

Another issue is that Jesus said to her in John 2:4 “*What have I to do with thee?*” The events that followed adduce beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus instead of raising a negative inquisition he was positively responding to her request and one can impartially judge that something in the dialogue is improper. The actual wordings found in original ‘Peseetho Bible’ are, “*Athso moli ulek*” (Syriac) which means, ‘*what for me and you?*’ That is to mean, ‘*Is it a matter of concern for you and me because we are only invitees in the marriage feast!*’ And that makes sense. I have different versions of Bible like Catholic, Peseetho, King James, Revised standard, Zondarvan, Tract society, etc. They have different words on the subject. This is the best example of how numerous deliberate translation errors crept in the Holy Bible.

“Henceforth”

Of late in nineteenth century another catastrophe befell the Christendom when Roman Catholics defined and canonized the dogma known as, “*Immaculate conception of St. Mary,*” (1854 Pius IX). Our Church accepts the fact that St. Mary was sinless throughout life. The Church recognizes that conception caused by human involvement merits bequest of original sin descended from Adam. None but Jesus Christ is exempted from this anomaly. St. James liturgy written in AD 37 reads: “*In thy presence there is none sinless except thy only Begotten Son.*” “*I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me,*” Ps 51: 5. St. Mary’s statement is affirmative “*Henceforth all generations will call me blessed,*” Lk 1: 48. She became eligible to such blessedness neither because of noble birth, nor because of her own acquired merits before ‘*overshadowing of the Holy Spirit*’ but solely because of and from the time of and consequent to the ‘*overshadowing of Holy Spirit*’ that made the difference. Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas taught that her conception was not immaculate but tarnished as that of any human being, but God ultimately extinguished her original sin before she was born, Suma Theologica III Q 27. St. Augustine did not intent to raise any question on the subject of sin out of respect to our Lord. Neither of them meant she was out of original sin. Excluding her from the original sin goes contrary to scriptures and apostolic teachings. Please note also that Orthodox does not believe in the “*original sin*” as conceived by RC. It is said that Moslems do not believe in original sin and so ‘*Immaculate Conception theory*’ may fit them better but they do not consider the immaculate conception even of Jesus Christ. That means she was not a member of human race in which case she would be exempt from the necessity of deliverance or salvation through the atoning blood of Christ, thus conferring her equal status with God. This would cast serious impediments on the ‘*Triune God*’ principle. Thus evidently, ‘*Immaculate Conception theory*’ is a grave heresy and we repudiate it.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is the first Church and hence the mother of all Churches in Christendom. We neither added to nor deleted any thing from the apostolic teachings. We rightly honor her as blessed, glorified and extolled of all generations, holy, exalted, Ever-virgin and blissful mother of God. We believe that she was elevated to Paradise soon after death and are very keen to seek her intercession to appeal on our behalf.

Eve and Mary, a contrast:

Mary is the best model of obedience, chastity, humility and perfect womanhood. What the first mother Eve lost by disobedience Mary regained by her unconditional obedience. Eve is the first mother who lost the grace by greed and lust but Mary by grace and self-abnegation reinstated what was lost. Eve spoke to surreptitious devil in the Garden of Eden but Mary spoke to the Angel of light. Eve shared the guile and defilement of the devil but Mary shared the glory of the Creator. Eve connived with devil to become equal to God and attracted God's wrath but Mary without passion for self submitted herself as a mere slave of God in perfect obedience was a source of great blessing not only to Mary but to whole humanity. Do you want to enjoy freedom from sin and suffering, then, bind yourself as a slave of God! Those who seek freedom from other sources will eventually become slave of many sins. Angel helped Mary with respectful demeanor to understand how the Salvation plan was taking place. Eve conceived in sin a humanity that was doomed to sin but Mary conceived the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Second Adam-Christ, who liberated the humanity from the bondage of Satan. Eve inherited curse but Mary inherited eternal blessedness. Eve as a consequence of sin brought pain, groaning, suffering, death and decay but Mary brought forth the Redeemer who wiped away all the effects of sin. Through Eve Paradise was lost but through Mary Paradise was regained. Devil stripped off the glory and immortality and brought shame on humanity through Eve but through Mary came honor, life and Redeemer. Eve sold her body and soul leading the humanity to the bondage of Satan but Mary loaned her flesh and blood to God leading the humanity to glory and life. Thus we sing on Christmas Day morning, "Odom armih hvo hubolo, al athso dmeneh nepkath, yaumono pher'ath hubleh, Mariam dyeldath foruko" that is, the woman helpmate brought a debt upon Adam; Mary paid off that debt today by delivering the Redeemer. Let me stop here lest for length,

Early writings like Biography of St. Mary, expository songs and prayers say; Jesus with host of angels appeared to Mary at the time of her departing. Holy Spirit gathered the disciples from various places to the scene. Jesus asked the blessed mother if she had any wish. The blessed mother implored, "My only Son, grant the genuine wishes of the faithful, who seek my intercession." Jesus promised, "My beloved Mother, I will grand the reasonable prayers who seek your intercession."

I have briefly dealt with a subject most important to our faith and quite often exposed to unfair criticism from the unbelieving. Surely more remains to be said and so not conclusive. KK Johnachen, Dec. 15.1996

For fear of length I remain now, Love, KKJohnachen.