

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

In the Bible, some references are made to certain "brothers" of the Lord Jesus. Many have speculated about the identity of these "brothers". Some say that they are "half brothers" being the children of Joseph from a previous marriage. Others say they are real "blood brothers" of the Lord from St. Mary. Our church teaches the perpetual virginity of St. Mary, that she was virgin before as well as after she gave birth to the Lord Jesus. We shall now attempt to inquire about these "brothers" of Jesus by searching for clues in the Bible and piecing the clues together, in the manner one puts the pieces of a jig saw puzzle, in order to solve this Biblical puzzle.

Who are the "Brothers" of Jesus?

"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" (Mat 13:55). The same appears in Mar 6:3. So we have the names of the "brothers" of Jesus, James, Joses, Simon and Judas.

Later on, in describing the scene of the Lord's crucifixion, St. Matthew reports the following, "And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him, among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children." (Mat 27:55). Here we are told that the mother of James and Joses was named Mary, that she was originally from Galilee (where Jesus is) and that she was among those who "ministered" to the Lord. Obviously this is not the same as St. Mary the Mother of Jesus, because then he would have said, the mother of Jesus and James and Joses, or simply, the mother of Jesus.

St. Mark in reporting the same incident gives us another clue, "There were also women looking on afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome." (Mar 15:40). Now we are told that this James, who, together with his brothers Joses, Judas and Simon, was considered a "brother" of Jesus, is called James "the less".

Who is James the less?

In reporting the names of the twelve Apostles, St. Luke gives the names as, "Simon (whom he also named Peter), and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zealotes, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot which also was the traitor." (Lk 6:14-16). Among the twelve Apostles, we can recognize three pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, John and James Zebedee, and James and Judas Alphaeus. To differentiate between James Zebedee and James Alphaeus, the Apostles surnamed James Zebedee "the great" and James Alphaeus "the less". This is based on no other

criterion except seniority on the Job. The sons of Zebedee were chosen very early on, almost the same time as Peter and Andrew, while the sons of Alphaeus came on board later on. We shall give the reason for this later on.

Now we have another clue, James and Judas, were born to a woman named Mary and to a father named Alphaeus. How can they be blood brothers of Jesus?

Why were they Called Jesus' brothers?

In Jewish tradition the word "brother" had a broader meaning, it meant "close relative". Abraham called his nephew Lot "brother" (Gen 14:14), Boaz spoke of his relative Elimelech as his "brother" (Ruth 4:3), Joab called Amasa, his first cousin "Brother" (2Sam 17:25, 20:9). In upper Egypt the same is true, a cousin is always called "brother".

Even close associates were called "brothers". The Lord used the word to describe his disciples, speaking to Peter, the Lord says, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Lk 22:32). The Lord is referring to the other disciples as Peter's "brethren". The same happens when the Lord tells Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brethren and say unto them ..." (Jn 20:17). That Jesus was referring to his disciples as his "brethren" is quite obvious since we are told that Mary Magdalene "Came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had spoken these things unto her." (Jn 20:18).

James and his brothers were called "brothers" of Jesus because they were his relatives, members of the family.

How were they related to Jesus?

Our next clue to the puzzle comes from St. John's description of the scene near the Cross of Jesus, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." (Jn 19:25). St. John now identifies Mary the mother of James, Judas and Simon as Mary, Jesus' maternal aunt, his mother's sister!

Tradition tells us that St. Anna and St. Yuakim, the Virgin's parents were granted another girl after they entrusted their first girl Mary to the Temple as they promised. Because they loved St. Mary the Virgin so much, they called their second daughter Mary too! So James the less, Judas, James and Simon were first cousins of our Lord and, according to Jewish tradition, had every right to be called his "brothers".

One problem remains, if Mary the mother of James the less is the same as Mary the sister of the Virgin, how come she is called the wife of Cleophas by St. John, when we know that James the less is the son of Alphaeus? Semantics, you see, the name Alphaeus in the Hebrew tongue is pronounced "Halpa" with a strong "H" similar to the "H" in the Arabic "Halawa" or "Habib". When a Greek person tries to pronounce the Arabic name "Habib", it will come out "Khabib"! Similarly, the Hebrew "Halpa" becomes "Cloepha", when pronounced by someone speaking Greek. Of course all names when pronounced in Greek have to have an "s" in the end (Antony becomes Antonius, Cyril becomes Kirillos).

Conclusion:

James, Joses, Judas and Simon were maternal cousins of the Lord Jesus. They were the children of Mary, the Virgin's younger sister. They were the sons of Alphaeus (or Cleophas in Greek). Two of them, James the less and Judas became Apostles of the Lord Jesus. James became the first bishop of Jerusalem and is mentioned dozens of times in the book of Acts as well as in St. Paul's letters. He wrote the Epistle named after him. His brother Judas, also one of the twelve, wrote another Epistle named after him (The Epistle of Jude). Until his martyrdom shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem (Ad 70), James was known as the "brother of the Lord" because of his kinship to the Lord Jesus (Gal 1:19). He was considered one of the "pillars of the church", together with Peter and John. (Gal 2:9). Although being called the "brother of the Lord", James referred to himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Jas 1:1). His brother Jude (or Judas), showing similar humility called himself, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." (Jud 1:1).

Question: Why did the Lord refuse to see his mother and his "brothers" (cousins) when they came to him? (Lk 8:19-21)

Answer: Although they ultimately became his disciples, the "brothers" of Jesus did not believe in him when he started preaching, "For neither did his brethren believe in him." (Jn 7:5)

St. Mary the Virgin being aware of this tried to bring them to the Lord, so that, hearing him and seeing the great miracles he did, they might be converted. When the Lord was told that his mother and his brethren (cousins) were seeking to see him, He said, "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Lk 8:21) In saying so, the Lord was rebuking his cousins for their lack of faith, while in the same time showing the virtues of His mother, the Virgin. St. Luke tells us in his Gospel that the Holy Virgin did exactly what the Lord said, hearing the word of God, she hid it in her heart. "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Lk2:19). And again, "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." (Lk 2:51).

That the Lord was showing the virtues of His Mother becomes obvious from another conversation the Lord had with a woman among the crowds, "And it came to pass as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' But he said, 'Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'" (Lk 11:27-28) In reply to the woman's veneration of the Mother of God, the Lord is saying, Yea, blessed indeed she is, because she carried me in her womb and fed me from her paps, but rather more blessed is she because she heard the word of God and kept it in her heart. In saying so, the Lord was testifying that the Virgin's blessedness was twofold, first, because she kept the word of God in her heart, and second because she kept the Word of God in her womb.

The public rebuke of the Lord's unbelieving cousins was a necessary remedy, for it brought about their conversion. Later, they became His disciples.

Question: Why did the Lord call His Mother "Woman"?

Answer: This is the usual way to talk respectfully to a woman in the middle east. It means "Lady". The Lord used this word to address all women, "And Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith!" (Mat 15:28). "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." (Lk 13:12), "Woman, where are those, thine accusers?" (Jn 8:10). Even the angels that Mary Magdalene saw in the empty tomb addressed her similarly, "Woman, why weepest thou?" (Jn 20:13). There was nothing disrespectful in addressing a woman in this manner.

The Lord used this word to address His Mother twice. Once in the wedding at Cana Galilee, when his compassionate mother realized that the hosts ran out of wine and simply conveyed this information to Him, "They have no wine." The Lord answers her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." (Jn 2:3-4). On the surface one might think that the Lord is refusing His Mother's intercession on behalf of the people hosting the wedding, but in reality He said these words to show how much effective her intercession really is. In spite of telling her that the appointed hour for publicly disclosing His Divinity has not come, yet she, confident that her Son and her Lord was not going to refuse her, tells the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." And indeed the Lord, because of His Mother's intercession changes the water into wine, even though His hour had not yet come! We believe that the compassionate Mother of God is constantly interceding with her Son on our behalf, like she did there and then. And, like He did there and then, our Lord still honours His Mother's intercession.

The second time he addressed His Mother in this manner, was when seeing her and the beloved disciple standing at the feet of the Cross, He tells her, "Woman, behold thy son!" (Jn 19:26) An example of how much he cared for His Mother, in asking the disciple whom He loved to look after her. And then, in order to show how much He loved that disciple, He tells Him, "Behold thy mother!" (Jn 19:27), He bestows on him the greatest honour, by making the Mother of God, his own mother. The Fathers of the church from the beginning of Christianity always believed that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" was a representative of all of us, and that in him, we too were given the holy Virgin as our mother.

Had James and Judas and Joses and Simon been St. Mary's other children, why would the Lord allow John to "take her into his own home"? (Jn 19:27)

Question: Why do we venerate St. Mary?

Answer: St. Mary was venerated by Archangel Gabriel, "Hail, thou that are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women!" (Lk 1:28)

She was venerated by St. Elisabeth speaking by the Holy Spirit, "And it came to pass that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'" Awed by the great honour accorded to her, that the Mother of God would come to see her, Elisabeth then exclaims, "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me!"

She was venerated by an unborn baby! For St. Elisabeth tells her "For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she

that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." (Lk 1:41-44). Notice that as soon as St. Mary saluted St. Elizabeth, not only was Elisabeth filled with the Holy Ghost (Lk 1:41), but also John, still in his mother's womb was filled with the Holy Ghost, according to what the angel Gabriel predicted, that "He shall be filled with the Holy ghost, even from his mother's womb." (Lk 1:15)

She was venerated by the woman who said, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked."

She was venerated by the Lord Jesus, who, answering the same woman said, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.", which is what the blessed Virgin did, according to the testimony of the Gospel.

She herself prophesied, by the Holy Spirit, that she will be venerated by men from the time she was chosen to be the Mother of God and until the end of time, "For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." (Lk 1:48)

You see, she was venerated by God, by angels, and by men, isn't that reason enough that we too should venerate her?