

THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

The primary importance of the Virgin Mary to the Church is the Incarnation. Because of this, the Virgin Mary is portrayed in iconography as holding her young Son. The message proclaimed by the icon is that God has come in the flesh, and here is proof: His mother holding her Son. This outline seeks to introduce aspects of the life of the Virgin Mary that are not very commonly known from an historical viewpoint. The significance of some of the events in the life of the Virgin Mary including her place among the saints in glory is covered quite well in Reference 1, which is recommended for further reading.

This outline is divided into four parts as follows:

Part I:	Birth to Annunciation	BC 20 to BC 5
Part II:	Annunciation to Infancy of Jesus	BC 5 to BC 3
Part III:	Jesus' Life and Ministry	BC 3 to AD 30
Part IV:	Pentecost to Her Death	AD 30 to AD 55

Parts I and IV use historical writings as their primary source with Scriptural references woven in where appropriate. Parts II and III use Scriptural references as a primary source and supplement this with historical writings for clarification.

Figure I is a family tree of the Lord Jesus in the flesh. This was pieced together primarily from the Prologue from Ochrid² which is a collection of brief accounts of the lives of the saints that originated in the Macedonian churches in the 1st century and that has been added to over the years. Butler's Lives of the Saints³ is a similar work that came from the Church of Rome and that was started by Clement of Rome in the late 1st century. The goal of both References 2 and 3 is that future generations might not forget the price that was paid by their forefathers in establishing the Faith.

Figure I will be referred to from time to time to aid in understanding events in the life of the Virgin Mary. In the following four parts, when historical references are used, only the most commonly available ones will be footnoted in cases where many refer to the same events.

PART I

BIRTH TO ANNUNCIATION

Mary's Parents

The Virgin Mary's father, Joachim, was from the tribe of Judah, was a native of Nazareth, and was a descendant of King David. Mary's mother, Anna (Hebrew: *Hannah*) was the daughter of Matthan the priest (Figure 1) and was a descendant of Aaron the High Priest.⁴ According to First Century writings, Joachim was a shepherd by occupation and was very wealthy from owning large herds of sheep. In humbleness of heart, Joachim had the practice of offering more than the Mosaic Law required. One third of his income he gave to the Temple as his tithe, one third he gave to orphans, widows, strangers and the poor, and one third he kept for himself.^{5,6}

According to the Mosaic Law, a tenth (i.e. a tithe) was to be devoted to the Lord and was used to support the priests and Levites (Numbers 18:20-24). A second tithe was used for the festivals (Deuteronomy 12:12-19) and a third tithe every three years was set aside for the orphans, widows, strangers and Levites (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13). The Lord had promised that if people were faithful in doing this, He would open the windows of heaven and bless His people in the land (Deuteronomy 26:12-15, Malachi 3:8-10). The more Joachim gave, the more the Lord blessed him. While the Lord's blessing was strong on Joachim and Anna, there was one aspect where it was not: they were unable to have children.⁴

Just as Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, was ridiculed for being unable to have children (1 Samuel 1:1-10), so Joachim and Anna were ridiculed. People assumed that because the Lord's blessing was absent in this part of their lives, that there was some secret sin. (Compare the man born blind: it was assumed that either he or his parents sinned - John 9:2-3). In the case of Joachim and Anna, by the time of their 50th wedding anniversary, the high priest publicly refused to accept their offering, calling them cursed when they came to present their offerings in accordance with the Law.^{5,6}

The Conception of Mary

Following the public ridicule by the high priest, Joachim and Anna returned to Nazareth and retired separately for prayer and fasting with many tears. Joachim spent his time in the remote hill country with his flocks while Anna prayed in the garden of their home. Both prayed separately that the Lord would work in them the wonder that He had done with Abraham and Sarah. And they separately agreed that they would dedicate the child to the Lord as Hannah did with Samuel^{5,6,7} (1 Samuel 1:11-2:11).

When Joachim went to the hills to pray, he did not intend to return until the Lord answered his prayer. Knowing this, Anna prayed and wept, mourning her barrenness,

her reproach among the people, and her imminent widowhood. During this time of fasting and prayer, an angel appeared first to Joachim, then to Anna telling them three things. (1) Their charitable deeds have gone up into God's presence. (2) Their shame among men in the face of righteous living had not gone unnoticed. (3) The Lord was going to answer their prayers. As a sign of this, the angel instructed Joachim and Anna separately to leave Nazareth and go to Jerusalem immediately. When they got there, they would meet each other by the Golden Gate of the city. The angel went on to say that the child to be born (Mary) would be filled with the Holy Spirit from her mother's womb and her life would be exemplary among her peers.⁷ This is very similar to the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the priest Zachariah concerning the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:4-23).

Anna and Joachim hurried to Jerusalem without knowing that the other had seen the angel also. Anna arrived first and waited for a long time before Joachim arrived driving a large herd: 10 lambs for the Lord, 10 calves for the priests and elders and 100 goats for the people who had ridiculed him.^{6,7} Since this was not a prescribed offering but a freewill offering which even Gentiles could offer, the high priest could not refuse (Leviticus 17:8). An interesting teaching in a similar vein by the Lord 45 years later involved loving one's enemies and doing good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27-36).

When they saw each other, Joachim and Anna rejoiced greatly. The next day, they offered their offerings and returned home to Nazareth together. When it was heard that Anna had conceived, all their neighbors and acquaintances rejoiced also and the whole land of Israel congratulated them.^{6,7}

From the above account, there was no more of an "immaculate conception" of Mary than there was of John the Baptist. As a further illustration of the similarity of the birth of Mary to the birth of John, an icon of the Virgin with her Child and an icon of John are conspicuously displayed at the front of all Orthodox churches. The icon of John is placed next to the Lord on His left; the one of Mary on the other side of the altar on His right.

The Birth of Mary

The birth of the Virgin Mary is celebrated in the Orthodox Church as one of the twelve major feast days of the Church Year. There are extensive references to this in the writings of the church fathers regarding its significance. To illustrate this, consider the Gospel and Epistle chosen for this feast day: Matthew 10:37-11:1. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me..." Joachim and Anna exemplified this quite well as we shall see. The Epistle lesson is 1 Corinthians 2:6-9: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of

glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him''. This addresses the mystery of God becoming flesh which begins with the birth of Mary.

Mary was born c.19 BC after a normal 9 month pregnancy. According to the Mosaic Law, Anna came to the Temple 80 days after giving birth to Mary for the rite of purification (Leviticus 12:2-8). At this time she gave her child the name Mary (Hebrew *Miriam*, just like Aaron's sister). Some discrepancy exists in early literature as to Mary's birth place: Some say Nazareth; others say Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. For a man as wealthy as Joachim, it is quite possible he had homes in both locations. However, his primary residence seems to be Nazareth.

Anna made her infant daughter's bed-chamber into a miniature copy of the Holy Place, like a sanctuary, and permitted nothing common or unclean to come near her. She also invited certain young virgins into her home to help care for and play with Mary.¹ She was thus preparing Mary for the time when she would dedicate her daughter to the Lord's service as Hannah did the young Samuel.

According to Mosaic Law, the firstborn males received a blessing on the fortieth day after birth (Leviticus 12:2-4). This didn't apply to Mary; instead, Joachim invited the priests, scribes, elders and all the people to a feast at the first anniversary of Mary's birth. At this occasion, Mary was blessed by the priests and chief priests with the words, "O God of our fathers, look upon this child and bless her with the utmost blessing which shall be an everlasting blessing, and give her an everlasting name throughout all generations". And all the people replied, "Amen".⁷

The Entry of Mary into the Temple

When Mary reached the age of three and was weaned (Hebrew mothers nursed their babies longer than modern women, 2 Maccabees 7:27, 1 Samuel 1:24) the time came for her to be dedicated to the Lord's service just as Hannah dedicated the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:21-2:11). This occasion was celebrated with considerable pageantry and ceremony and today the Orthodox Church celebrates this as another of the Twelve Major Feasts of the Church Year.

The Gospel lesson for the Entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple is Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28. The first part is the story of Mary and Martha of Bethany and how Mary of Bethany was blessed for sitting at the Lord's feet listening to His Word. The second part is the record of a woman's remark from the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts which nursed You". To this Jesus replied, "More than that; blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it". Some have interpreted this as Jesus' belittling of His mother. He is not doing that; He is saying that those who receive the revelation of the Word are blessed also.

The Epistle lesson for the Entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple is Hebrews 9:1-7. This passage describes the earthly Sanctuary of the Tabernacle including the Lampstand, the Table of Shewbread, the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant. This reading was chosen to emphasize that the Lord's Sanctuary or Tabernacle became the womb of the Virgin Mary for 9 months as the mystery of God was revealed in the Incarnation. This is a difficult concept for us in the West to grasp. The emphasis here is not on the Virgin Mary herself but on the mystery of God and the importance of the Incarnation. Similarly, the Old Testament reading for Vespers of the Eve of the entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple is 1 Kings 8:1-11. This account describes Solomon's dedication of his newly constructed Temple and the bringing up of the Ark of the Covenant to reside there.

As part of the ceremony at the Temple, Mary was accompanied by a number of young virgins who had been her attendants. The chief priest was Zachariah who would later become the father of John the Baptist. The year was c.16 BC and there was some construction of the Temple going on as King Herod was financing major renovations. As Joachim and Anna presented their daughter to Zachariah as to the Lord, Zachariah was filled with the Spirit and said, "Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name to all generations and, by you, to the very end of time, the Lord will show His Redemption to the children of Israel".⁶ With many other words Zachariah prophesied and rejoiced; then he led young Mary into the Temple with the other virgins.⁷

For the next 7 years, Joachim and Anna visited young Mary often until they died. Joachim was 80 and Anna 79 when Mary was orphaned.⁴ During the construction of the new Temple, Herod had trained 1000 priests to be masons since only priests could enter the house and the inner court. At the time of Mary's entry into the Temple, the central

part was completed but much construction was still underway. According to Josephus, however, the Ark of the Covenant was not in the Holy of Holies at any time during this period.⁸ If this is correct, we may presume it had been carried away by the Babylonians or by some priests prior to the Babylonian invasion and not returned.

Growing up in the Temple

Mary's early years in the Temple were spent primarily in prayer and wool-work (weaving, etc.). From daylight to 9:00 a.m. she spent in prayer; from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. she spent doing her weaving; and from 3:00 p.m. until bedtime she returned to prayer. Even in her early years, she became well known as an excellent weaver surpassing older, more experienced women. Later as a young teenager, she and some other similarly skilled virgins were commissioned to spin the special thread for the new veil for the Holy of Holies that would separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.⁵

Her physical appearance was described as beautiful and joyful. No one ever saw her angry nor heard her speak evil and all her conversations were full of grace. She was anxious also about her companions (the other young virgins) that they might not sin even in one word or raise their voice in senselessness or act proud before their parents. Mary guarded herself carefully that she might not even inadvertently offend or appear proud before her peers. Thus, even as a young teenager, she gave the impression of one many times her age and was steadfast, immovable and unchangeable in her desire for the things of God.⁵

The Temple complex was much more than just the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Surrounding the Holy Place were many rooms that served as living quarters for the priests, Levites and attendants and for studying the Law. Yet it is uncertain how much of this was completed during Mary's stay there and there was probably some shuffling and movement as more was completed.

Early sources state that Mary spent a lot of her time in the Holy of Holies in prayers. (The Holy of Holies may have been incomplete and its veil may not have been installed yet.) She lived very much like her nephew John the Baptist who was to be born a few years later and she ate just one meal per day. The additional food given her by the priests, she gave to the poor. Angels were recorded as visiting her regularly and sometimes bringing her food.⁵

Mary was thus spared the turmoil of everyday life. She meditated and nourished her soul on the Scripture available in the Temple by day and night. None of her peers exceeded her in the praises and vigils of God and she was very learned in the Law of God. Yet no one was more lowly in humility, more elegant in singing or more outstanding in virtue. In short, she was well known as an extraordinary young girl.

Also living in and around the Temple during this time were the Prophetess Anna, the aged Simeon and the future Apostle Matthias. Luke described Anna's life as "serving God with fastings and prayer night and day" where she "did not depart from the Temple" for the last 50-60 years of her life (Luke 2:36-38). Anna was undoubtedly very instructive and supportive of the young Mary.

Simeon is referred to as the Host of God for his encounter with the baby Jesus at the time of Mary's purification (Luke 2:22). Simeon was also numbered among the seventy translators of the Septuagint⁹ (from Hebrew into Greek) where the Septuagint was the Old Testament text used by the early Church and quoted by most of the writers of the New Testament. The Apostle Matthias was a student of Simeon. Thus Simeon, and probably Matthias also, would have known the young Mary as she was growing up in the Temple. Simeon's knowledge of Mary's early life lends additional insight into his blessing of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:33-35) and his request to depart this life in peace (Luke 2:28-30), having now seen the Messiah.

Mary is Betrothed to Joseph

When Mary was 13, the Pharisees began to remark that it was not the custom to allow girls that old to remain a virgin in the Temple lest hanky-panky result and the Temple be defiled. Therefore, they said, Mary should be married along with the other virgins (since girls were often married in their mid-teens). The other virgins acquiesced, but Mary reminded the priests that her parents had devoted her to the service of the Lord and that she herself had vowed never to lie with a man. This put the high priest in a difficult situation. He did not wish to dissolve the maiden's vow and disobey the Scriptures. "Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them" (Psalms 76:11). "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). On the other hand, he did not wish to introduce a new custom among the people either.⁵

To resolve this, Zachariah was asked to consult the Lord in the Holy Place wearing the breastplate of judgment as high priest. When he went into the Holy Place, Zachariah was instructed by an angel to call together all the widowers in Israel and have each one bring his rod (or walking stick). To narrow things down, lots were cast over the 12 tribes of Israel and the lot fell to Judah. Therefore all the widowers of the tribe of Judah were called and asked to come to Jerusalem.⁵

Zachariah collected the rods of all the widowers of Judah as he was instructed by the angel, and placed them in the Holy of Holies overnight. The next day the men returned to receive back their rods. The man whose rod budded with leaves and flowers would be betrothed to Mary. Joseph's rod was the one that budded⁷ similar to Aaron's rod in the wilderness (Numbers 17:1-8).

Joseph who was already 80 years old was at first unwilling to take Mary as his wife, saying: "I am an old man and have children. Why do you hand over to me this infant who is younger than my grandsons?" Until he, himself, could ascertain the Will of God, Joseph asked the priests to send five other young virgins with Mary to accompany her. After the betrothal ceremony, Joseph returned to his own city, Bethlehem, to prepare for the marriage while Mary and her five companions left for Joseph's home in Nazareth.⁵

Before Mary left for Nazareth, Zachariah had another vision in the Temple where the angel Gabriel announced that his prayers had been heard. His wife Elizabeth would conceive in her old age and bear John the Baptist. Zachariah asked for a sign and was made mute for nine months (Luke 1:5-22). Being mute, Zachariah had to be replaced as high priest. His replacement, Samuel, commissioned Mary and her five companions to spin the special thread for embroidering the new veil for the Holy of Holies according to the pattern given to Moses (Exodus 26:31). This they did in Nazareth in Joseph's house.^{5,7}

Meanwhile, Joseph finished his preparation for his marriage to Mary in Bethlehem and returned home to Nazareth. However, he left immediately for many months to build houses abroad along the Sea of Galilee according to his trade as a carpenter. At least one of his sons went with him.⁷ Thus Joseph was still out of town when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the Annunciation that she would be the mother of God in the flesh (Luke 1:26-38).

With Joseph gone, Mary was left in charge of the household that included Joseph's younger children. James, the youngest at about 6-8 years old, was still brokenhearted and sad over the loss of his mother a year ago. Mary took young James under her wing and raised him from that time on. In the Scriptures, therefore, Mary was referred to as the "mother of James" (Luke 24:10). Mary had a profound effect on young James and he imitated her life of fasting and prayer the rest of his life. James was later Bishop of Jerusalem and presided at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-19). For 30 years after Pentecost, James spent a great deal of his time in the Holy of Holies asking his step brother (Jesus) to spare His people Israel in spite of the stream of atrocities they were committing against the Christians (Acts 7:54-60, 12:1-3, 22:27-31).

Joseph's other sons (see Figure 1) were older, were married (1 Corinthians 9:5) and had their own households. Joseph Jr. was later one of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-20), was probably the oldest and was also known as Barsabas or Justus. When two of the Seventy were proposed to take the place of Judas Iscariot and be numbered among the Twelve, Joseph and Matthias were brought forward. The lot then fell to Matthias (Acts 1:16-26). Joseph later was one of the leading men among the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22) and was a prophet (Acts 15:32). He and Silas delivered the decree of the Council of Jerusalem to the Church in Antioch (Acts 15:22-34).

Jude was one of the Twelve Apostles and was the author of the Epistle of Jude in the New Testament. He was also known as Lebbaeus (or Levi) and Thaddaeus (Matthew 10:13, Mark 3:18). Simon (in Hebrew *Simeon*) is listed among the Lord's brothers (Matthew 13:55) but little is known about him. It's possible that there is some confusion between him and the Lord's cousin Simeon, the son of Cleopas (or Alphaeus). The Lord's cousin Simeon was one of the Seventy and was the second Bishop of Jerusalem after James.

Joseph's daughter, Salome, was about Mary's age and still lived at home. She and Mary became very close and Salome was later numbered among the righteous women at the Cross and at the tomb (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:1). Salome later married Zebedee and bore two of the Twelve Apostles: James and John. Little is known about Joseph's other two daughters, except that they were probably older than Salome.

Thus the household in Nazareth consisted of Mary and her five virgin companions, James, Salome plus extended family living nearby. Mary, at this time, was about 14 years old, although manuscripts vary between 14 and 16 in describing her age.

PART II

ANNUNCIATION TO INFANCY OF JESUS

The Annunciation

With Joseph gone and working along the shore of the Sea of Galilee building houses, the archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary. Gabriel had appeared to Zachariah about six months earlier announcing the conception of John the Baptist and Zachariah was still mute from that encounter (Luke 1:19-23). Zachariah was now home in the hill country of Judah with Elizabeth, who was in her sixth month (Luke 1:36-39).

As Mary went out of Joseph's house to draw water from a well, Gabriel spoke. "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). Mary didn't see where the voice came from. Trembling, she picked up the water pot, went into the house and sat down to continue spinning the purple thread that she had been working on.⁷ The angel then came into the house (Luke 1:28) and repeated the greeting.

The word translated "highly favored" (v.28) and "favor" (v.30) are both forms of the Greek word *charis*, which is translated everywhere else as "grace". But what was it about Mary that led Gabriel to call her "highly graced" (v.28) and to say that she had "found grace with God" (v.30)? This is not a small thing! The archangel Gabriel did not say that to Zachariah six months earlier when he announced the conception of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-20).

It is useful to compare the visitation of Gabriel to Zachariah with his visit to Mary. Appearing to Zachariah he identified himself: "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God..." (Luke 1:19). He didn't say that to Mary. The implication is that Mary knew who he was from her previous life before God in the Temple. And the implication is that Mary's life before God was so special that she found such grace in the eyes of God.

But yet, Mary was troubled at what Gabriel said, and wondered what manner of greeting this was. Not only had Gabriel called her "highly graced", but also "blessed among women" (Luke 1:29). Mary was such a genuinely humble person that this just didn't compute!

When Gabriel announced that Mary would conceive and bear a son, the long awaited Messiah, Mary was also troubled because this would void her vow of chastity. So she said, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34). When Joseph returned home and when they were married, Mary could have conceived by Joseph.

But her statement here implies she had no intention in this direction; she intended to remain a virgin. She was holding steadfast to her vow to the Lord even in the face of an angelic announcement! She was a very determined young lady!

Gabriel then explained that she would conceive, but that her vow would not be dissolved: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the Power of the Highest (i.e. God the Father) will overshadow you. Therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

From Gabriel's words, the entire Trinity was involved in the Incarnation. And the importance of the Incarnation is difficult to overstate. Without Christ's death on the Cross, we are still dead in our sins (Colossians 2:13-14, Ephesians 2:1-9). Yet if He is not really God, He cannot keep the Law perfectly and thus cannot be the lamb without blemish (Hebrews 9:14). If He is not really man, He cannot die in our place (Hebrews 2:17-18). Thus the baby conceived in the womb of the Virgin was both God and man. He was without father in His humanity and without mother in His Deity.

There are many other effects of the Incarnation that, again, are difficult to overstate. For example, in the Incarnation divinity is united to material creation in the Son of God; and this has an enormous effect on healing and restoration of creation that is beyond the scope of this work.

After mentioning Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age (Luke 1:36), Gabriel concluded: "For with God, nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Mary did not ask for a sign, she simply believed the angel and replied: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's response indicates her depth of humility. The word "maidservant" is the feminine form of the Greek word *doulos* meaning slave. Slaves had some rights under Hebrew Law, but they were the lowest class in society. In this regard, Mary is a model of humility for us today. An archangel had just appeared to her giving her accolades that are unprecedented in human history and she still thought of herself as a slave.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Shortly after the Annunciation, Mary and her five companions left Joseph's house, first going to Jerusalem to submit the purple and other color thread to the high priest for the veil. The high priest was moved by the Grace of God and blessed Mary saying: "The Lord has magnified your name and you shall be blessed in all the generations of the earth".^{5,7}

Proceeding from Jerusalem they headed for Zachariah and Elizabeth's house, about five miles West of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judea (Luke 1:39). There Mary was greeted by Elizabeth in a most extraordinary manner.

The Annunciation, along with the Birth of Mary and the Presentation of Mary in the Temple is another of the twelve major feast days in the Orthodox Church all of which deal with the Incarnation. The Scripture readings used for this feast day focus on the Child who was conceived as well as the implications of the Incarnation. For example, the Epistle reading is Hebrews 2:11-18 which addresses Jesus' humanity. He could not die for mankind if He were not truly a man. On the other hand, one of the Old Testament readings for Vespers of the eve of the Annunciation is Proverbs 8:22-30 which addresses Jesus' divinity as the Eternal Son. The Gospel reading for Matins is the account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth which is linked to the Annunciation.

At Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy with John the Baptist (Luke 1:36) and Mary had just begun her first month of pregnancy with Jesus. Elizabeth was in her 70s, while Mary was about 15. Yet, from Figure 1, Mary and Elizabeth were first cousins and Elizabeth knew Mary quite well from Mary's growing-up in the Temple. Elizabeth also remembered how Mary was born 15 years ago to aged parents — and now Elizabeth herself is about to experience that same type of event.

As Mary entered the house of Zachariah and Elizabeth and greeted Elizabeth, the infant (or fetus!) John leaped in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:41, 44). John had been filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15) and would later be spoken of by Jesus as the greatest of the Prophets (Matthew 11:7-14). Thus John prophesied while still in his mother's womb.

Elizabeth was also filled with the Holy Spirit and responded to Mary with the same words used by the archangel Gabriel: "Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28, 42). Elizabeth knew that Mary was still a virgin and this fact was not lost on Mary's five companions either, as we'll see later. Even though Mary was just in the first week or two of her pregnancy, Elizabeth called her "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Thus Elizabeth, from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, recognized that the infant (fetus!) in her womb was God, the Second Person of the Trinity. Thus by the Holy Spirit, the mother of the prophet greeted the mother of the Lord, and both prophesied. As a side note, it is not inappropriate for us in the 20th Century to address Mary in the same manner as did the Archangel Gabriel and the Spirit-filled Elizabeth.

But one should also note Elizabeth's humility. She said, "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). Older women were treated with respect by teenagers. But Elizabeth, by the Holy Spirit, recognized

Mary as special because of Who she carried in her womb. And Elizabeth was very honored that her Lord had come to her.

The things Elizabeth said go beyond human understanding. Mary was barely into her first month; how could Elizabeth know she was even pregnant, never mind pregnant with the Son of God? She then went on to say (Luke 1:45) that Mary was blessed because she believed the things that were told her from the Lord; that is at the Annunciation.

Mary responded to Elizabeth with what has come to be called the Magnificat. [*Magnificat* is the first word in the Latin translation of Mary's response.] The prophecy contained in the Magnificat is remarkable, coming from a 15-year-old girl. In a way, it foreshadows Mary's Son as a 12-year-old boy when He astonished the teachers in the Temple with His understanding (Luke 2:46-47).

Beside prophesying that she would be called blessed by all generations from then on (Luke 1:48), Mary also spoke of:

scattering the proud
bringing down rulers
exalting the humble
filling the hungry with good things
sending the rich away empty-handed.

Some have said that the proud, the rulers and the rich were the scribes and Pharisees or the Greek sages, while the humble and hungry were the Gentiles who were afar off (Ephesians 2:11-18). The bringing in of the Gentiles was a mystery that was hidden from the ages, but it was now beginning to unfold (Ephesians 3:3-12, Romans 11:25-29, 16:25-26, Colossians 1:26-27).

Mary and her five companions stayed with Elizabeth for three months and returned to Joseph's house just prior to the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:56). Just as Elizabeth had hidden herself and stayed out of the public eye (Luke 1:24) when she became pregnant, so Mary did from the third month on. Thus no one but Zachariah and Elizabeth knew of her pregnancy.

Joseph Returns Home

After Mary had completed her sixth month — and was now very obviously pregnant — Joseph returned home with the intention of marrying the virgin who was betrothed to him. After seeing Mary, Joseph was stunned and wanted to die. Trembling, he is recorded as saying: "With what face can I look up to the Lord my God? What shall I say concerning this young woman? For I received her a virgin out of the Temple of the Lord my God, and have not preserved her in purity! Who has thus

deceived me? Who has committed this evil in my house? Who has seduced her from me and defiled her?"^{5,7}

Joseph then confronted Mary, "O you who have been so favored by God, why have you done this? Why have you debased your soul, O you who were educated and reared in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hands of angels?"^{5,7}

Mary replied with a flood of tears: "I am innocent and have known no man". Joseph said, "How then are you with child?" Mary answered only, "As the Lord my God lives, I do not know by what means".^{5,7}

Mary's five companions then spoke to Joseph and testified that she was a virgin and untouched. She had continued with them in prayer and daily the angels of God had spoken with her and daily she received food from their hand. They didn't know how it would be possible for her to have sinned and they suspected that the Holy Spirit had caused her to conceive. Joseph was very suspicious at this and suspected that someone pretended to be an angel of the Lord and seduced Mary. Weeping, Joseph went away feeling as if he had betrayed the trust placed in him by the priests.⁵

Joseph was very perplexed as to what to do. According to the Mosaic Law, if a betrothed virgin willingly had sex with someone, both she and her lover were to be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). On the other hand, if Mary and her five companions were right, he didn't want to betray the life of an innocent person. Thus, "Joseph, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away (i.e. divorce her) secretly" (Matthew 1:19).

"But while he thought about these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bear a Son; and you shall call His Name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21).

To Joseph, this cleared up a lot of misgivings he had. He had been reluctant to accept young Mary as his wife but had done so in obedience to the high priest who received instructions in the Temple to do so. But now recognizing that Mary was pregnant with the long-awaited Messiah, Joseph can understand. From the angel's words "you shall call His Name Jesus", implies that the angel expected Joseph to fill the role of Jesus' legal father. The genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 both reflect this, where Jesus' genealogy is traced back through Joseph, His legal father. Since Joseph and Mary were cousins having the same grandfather, Matthan, Matthew's Gospel effectively traces Mary's genealogy while Luke traces Joseph's genealogy through his legal father, Eli. For more details, see the Sunday of the Genealogy of Christ. "Then

Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife" (Matthew 1:24).

Joseph is also recorded as giving thanks to God for giving him this grace (i.e. being the legal father of the Messiah). He then spoke to Mary and her companions and told them the vision. Comforting Mary, he said to her, "I have sinned, in that I suspected you at all".⁵ And he kept her in chastity and continued to take care of her during her pregnancy (Matthew 1:25).

A day or two later, Joseph was visited by one of the scribes from Jerusalem, who noticed that Mary was pregnant. The Scribe reported this to the priests in Jerusalem, "Joseph has defiled the virgin whom he received out of the Temple of the Lord and has not revealed it to the sons of Israel". Both Joseph and Mary were then seized by the officers of the Temple and brought before the tribunal. Under intense interrogation, both Joseph and Mary denied any wrongdoing. Mary denied that she had known a man and restated that she never intended to. Joseph testified that he had not defiled her.⁵

The priests then constrained both Joseph and Mary to drink the water of conviction (or the water of bitterness) that was to be used to discern extra-marital affairs (Numbers 5:11-31). This water was holy water mixed with dust from the floor of the Temple (Numbers 5:17). This water caused the stomach of an adulterer to swell and their flesh rot if they were guilty; it would have no effect on the innocent. When Joseph and Mary returned unharmed after the appointed time of isolation, the priest said, "If the Lord God did not disclose your sin, neither will I judge you". Joseph and Mary then returned home glorifying God.⁵ By this encounter in the Temple, the Virgin Birth was proclaimed for the first time to any willing to understand it.

The Lord's Birth

About this time, the census of Caesar Augustus took place requiring every man to return to his own city. "His own city" was that area of Israel that represented the inheritance of his tribe and family. Land could not be sold permanently and title to the land reverted every 50 years (the year of Jubilee) to the family of its original inheritor at the time of Joshua (Leviticus 25:8-28). Because of this, Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because he was of the lineage of David (Luke 2:1-4). Since Mary went with Joseph to be registered with him (Luke 2:5), they had to have been married, since customs of the day would not allow her to travel with him if they were not married.

When Joseph, Mary, Joseph's sons and their families arrived in Bethlehem to be registered or enrolled, Bethlehem was crowded. Every house was full with guests from outlying areas, as was the inn (Luke 2:7). Just as they arrived at sunset, Mary, who was riding a donkey, asked to be helped down since her labor was starting. Joseph helped her down and led her to a nearby shepherd's cave for shelter. Joseph then left Mary

with his sons and their families while he went to find a midwife. Returning to the cave with Salome (Mary's first cousin) and Zelomi, the three noticed a luminous cloud over the cave and found out that Mary had already given birth. In their post-natal care of Mary, the midwives were amazed that Mary's hymen was undisturbed — indicating a true virgin birth. Joseph explained to them how the child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit.^{5,7} Wrapping the baby Jesus in swaddling cloths (long, thin rags like the wrappings of a mummy), Mary nursed Him and laid Him in a manger (Luke 2:7).

“Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord stood before them and the Glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them: ‘Do not be afraid, for behold I announce to you (literally: I evangelize you) great joy which will be to all people. For there was born to you today in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger! And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of a heavenly army praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest places and on earth peace among men of goodwill’ “ (Luke 2:8-14).

These shepherds were the caretakers of the sacrificial lambs that were offered continually in the Temple. Thus, they were the first ones to be evangelized for the Lamb of God. In hurrying to see what the angel had spoken of, they brought some things from their flock (milk, etc.) for Joseph, Mary and the baby.

How did they know where in Bethlehem to go? The angel had told them that they would find baby Jesus lying in a manger. Being shepherds, they undoubtedly knew where all the mangers in Bethlehem were. But every baby in town was wrapped in swaddling cloths. This manger wasn't too difficult to find because of the luminous cloud that covered the entrance to the cave when Joseph and the midwives arrived.⁵ And the shepherds found it quickly (Luke 2:16). If this baby really was God Incarnate, then one would expect to see angels around, and a luminous cloud is not out of place at all. Compare the luminous cloud in the wilderness and in the Tabernacle (Exodus 13:21-22, 33:9-11, Numbers 9:15-23, 1 Kings 8:10-11).

After seeing the baby, the shepherds “made known the statement which had been told them about this child. And all who heard it marveled at the things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:17-18). If all that the shepherds saw was a cute manger scene and a very poor couple with a newborn child, would all have marveled at what the shepherds told them? It seems very likely that the shepherds saw what Israel in the wilderness saw: the cloud on the Tabernacle by day and fire in the Tabernacle by night (Exodus 40:38). “Returning to their flocks, the shepherds glorified and praised God for all that they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20). Thus, this was a major event in the Bethlehem neighborhood and everyone knew what had happened.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

Eight days after His birth, Jesus was circumcised in the Temple according to the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:1-3). It was at this time that babies were given their name (Luke 2:21, 1:59-65). Forty days after birth, Mary and Jesus came to the Temple for the rite of purification according to the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:4, Luke 2:22). This event is remembered as another of the Twelve Major Feast Days of the Orthodox Church, and is called the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

The Epistle reading used for this Feast Day is Hebrews 7:7-17 which centers on the Old Testament figure Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek is described as “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, He abides a priest perpetually” (Hebrews 7:3). He is contrasted with the mortal Levitical priests as being immortal (Hebrews 7:8). The only person in human history that fits these descriptions is Jesus, the Son of God, who is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:1-4, Matthew 22:41-46). Forty days after His birth by the Virgin Mary, this Melchizedek (Hebrew: king of righteousness, Hebrews 7:2) was carried by His mother into the Temple that was built to worship Him.

Two people met Joseph, Mary and Jesus at the Presentation: Simeon and Anna. Simeon was a very old man, was righteous and devout, and looked for the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah (Luke 2:25-26). According to traditional sources, Simeon was over 200 years old and had been a translator of the Septuagint (the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Greek). The Apostle Matthias was described as once a student of Simeon¹⁰; thus Matthias was one of the oldest of the Twelve Apostles.

Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and prophesied concerning the mystery, which for ages had been hidden in God. Namely that the Gentiles were to be fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body of Christ and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Ephesians 3:4-11, Colossians 1:26). With his Lord in his arms, he then asked his Lord to let him depart this life in peace after waiting so long to see his salvation (Luke 2:29-30). Other sources add that Simeon’s eyes were opened, like the eyes of Elisha’s servant (2 Kings 6:15-17), and he saw angels standing in a circle around him, like bodyguards standing by their King.⁵ Simeon then blessed Joseph and Mary and prophesied again about the impact Jesus was to have and about “a sign that shall be spoken against”, which would be the Cross (Luke 2:34-35). One might wonder who is presenting whom. Was Simeon presenting Jesus in the Temple or was Jesus presenting Simeon to His Father (Let your servant depart in peace...) after a long and very fruitful life?

Just as Simeon was saying this, the Prophetess Anna entered. She was an 84 year old widow who did not leave the Temple, but served God with fasting and prayers day and night (Luke 2:36-38). She spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Israel. Anna had undoubtedly known Mary during the 10+ years that Mary grew up in the Temple. The Temple area was not so big that someone could be overlooked for 10 years, especially someone who was known to have regular contact with angels.

Anna also knew about the virgin birth when she spoke to everyone because of the actions of Zachariah. In Part I, Zachariah had been the high priest who was responsible for choosing Joseph as a husband for Mary. Right after that, he lost his voice during an encounter with Gabriel in the Temple, which was the announcement of the conception of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-23). Because he couldn't speak, he was temporarily retired from service in the Temple. When John was born and Zachariah regained his voice (Luke 1:57-65), he began to serve in the Temple again, being greatly revered for his vision and the miraculous birth of John (Luke 1:67-79). When Joseph and Mary came for the Presentation of Jesus, Zachariah had been serving in the Temple again for just a few months, since John was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:36).

Zachariah knew about Mary's pregnancy due to the water of conviction test that had been applied four months earlier. In addition, he had inquired of the midwives who attended Mary and who testified about the virgin-birth. Therefore, when Joseph and Mary came to present Jesus in the Temple, Zachariah had Mary stand in the place reserved for virgins where women with husbands had no right to stand. The Pharisees and some other priests objected, but Zachariah insisted that she was still a virgin even though she was carrying her Son.

The Jewish elders were so angry with Zachariah for this that they sought to have him killed and went to advise Herod on how to do this. During the massacre of the Holy Innocents, they got their chance. Zachariah wouldn't disclose where John was hidden (Elizabeth took him to the wilderness) and Herod's soldiers killed Zachariah right in front of the Temple. Later, the Lord laid this murder charge against them, also calling them sons of Cain (Matthew 23:35).

The Magi Visit

According to tradition, the Wise Men or Magi came from Persia. They were descendants of the Prophet Daniel and knew something about God from Daniel's writings. Daniel had predicted that there would be 483 years from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah came (i.e. 69×7 years; Daniel 9:25). Having access to the records in Babylon, they knew about what year to expect Messiah.

Daniel had been promoted in Babylon in the 6th Century BC to be chief of the soothsayer priests, conjurers, master astrologers and diviners (Daniel 5:11). This was a

position of technical and priestly duties. But Daniel and his three co-workers also had political responsibilities with Daniel as prefect and Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in administration (Daniel 2:48-49, 5:29). It has become widely known that Daniel's God was a revealer of mysteries (Daniel 2:47) and that Daniel possessed "the wisdom of the gods" (Daniel 5:11-12, 6:1-3). And Daniel's God was even proclaimed to be above all others (Daniel 6:25-28).

The result of all this was a ruling class of Magi in Persia who ran the government, appointed the kings and performed the religious functions. Three of these Magi led the entourage over the 800-mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. According to tradition, their names were Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar; in later centuries, the relics of these three Magi were very highly honored both in Constantinople and later in Medieval Europe.¹²

Fifty years prior to the birth of Christ (in the Battle of Carrhae) the Persians had defeated the Romans and had occupied Jerusalem. But Herod's father (Antipater) had re-established Roman rule in Palestine. Thus the three Magi coming to town with an entourage that included a small army commanded instant respect and very careful negotiations.¹³ All Jerusalem was troubled that a foreign army was in town (Matthew 2:3).

The Magi claimed to be following a star all the way from the East (Matthew 2:2). This was no ordinary star, and the Magi knew it! As the star moved, they moved; finally the star stopped over the house that Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living in (Matthew 2:9). Some people have tried to link this star with several planets; this may not be possible due to the context. Some of the Church Fathers suggested that the star was supernatural; that is, a very luminous angel.¹⁴

The Prophet Balaam (15th Century BC), from Babylon, had prophesied concerning a star in connection with the coming Messiah (Numbers 24:17). That the Magi made the connection between the star they followed and 15-century-old prophecies indicates that their enlightenment was quite advanced.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they must have known they were close. But the star had disappeared for a while (either intentionally or due to cloud cover); otherwise Herod's soldiers could have followed the star also. John Chrysostom reached this conclusion also.¹⁴ After leaving Herod's palace, the Magi "rejoiced with exceedingly great joy when they saw the star" again (Matthew 2:10). This indicates that the star reappeared to them.

The Magi saw right through Herod's lies about wanting to worship the new King himself (v.8). After all, Herod had no idea that this event had happened in his own backyard and he hadn't noticed the star. The Jewish leaders also were totally unaware of what had happened. They, on the other hand, had come 800 miles with a small army

carrying treasures (v.11) to present to the new King that prophecy spoke of as the turning point of human history. One might excuse Herod for not knowing, but the Jewish leaders had no excuse at all. If they had missed the announcement by the shepherds, they certainly hadn't missed the proclamation of the Virgin Birth by Zachariah, the chief priest and father of John the Baptist.

John Chrysostom commented on this as follows: "The Magi sought the Lord Christ, born King of the Jews, among those from whom they knew that Balaam, a prophet from the Gentiles, had prophesied that He would come. The faith of the Magi is the condemnation of the Jews. The Magi believed on the authority of their one soothsayer Balaam and the Prophet Daniel; but the Jews, from the testimony of many prophets, refused to believe. Whereas the Magi acknowledged that the coming of Christ would terminate their profane knowledge and magical acts, the Jews would not accept the Lawgiver's doing away with their sacrifices and refused to accept the mysteries of the divine dispensation. The Magi confessed a stranger; the Jews rejected their own" (Sermon for the Epiphany, cited by Holy Apostles Covent, *Ibid.*, p. 202).

When Herod secretly called the Magi for a private audience (v.7), he asked what time the star appeared. Herod figured — probably correctly — that the star appeared when Jesus was born. Thus Herod found out how old Jesus was and used this information as part of his murderous plot on the Holy Innocents (vv.16-18). The Magi probably didn't trust anything Herod said; he had been in power for over 30 years and had a reputation for extreme cruelty. For example, Herod had a number of his own family slain on the merest suspicion; Augustus Caesar was said to have commented "it is better to be Herod's hog than to be his son". Just before he died, Herod rounded up and imprisoned a number of the Jewish leaders. Then he gave orders that they all be executed the day he died so that no one would rejoice that Herod died (Josephus, Antiquities, Books 15, 16, 17; Wars of the Jews, Book 1, chapters 22-33). In short, Herod was a monster and Josephus recorded him dying an agonizingly painful death. When the Magi were divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod (v.12), they didn't need a lot of persuasion.

When the Magi reached the house where Mary, Joseph, Jesus (and probably James also) lived, they fell down and worshipped Him (v.11). Joseph was not wealthy; the offering they gave at the time of their purification was two turtledoves — the default offering for those too poor to afford a lamb (Luke 2:22-24, Leviticus 12:1-8). Joseph, being a carpenter who built houses, had had time to build something to take the place of the cave. Jesus was about a year old when the Magi arrived.

The treasures the Magi gave to the baby Jesus were gold, frankincense and myrrh (v.11). It was common for kings to present gifts to other kings when they visited, where there was often some significance to the actual gifts presented. For example, when the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon, she was very impressed by all he did

and by his wisdom. Therefore she presented him with 120 talents (4.5 tons) of gold plus a great deal of spices and precious stones (1 Kings 10:1-10). The gold in the Magi's gifts thus represents earthly royalty visiting heavenly royalty.

Frankincense was a costly gum-resin from plants that grew in certain parts of Arabia. It was to be used only in connection with the things of God and was customarily beaten very finely (Exodus 30:36). For example, it was used:

- As part of the Holy Incense of the Holy Place (Exodus 30:34-36)
- As part of the Grain Offering (Leviticus 2:1-2, 14-16, 6:14-18)
- As a topping for the Loaves of Shewbread (Leviticus 24:5-9)
- Never as part of a Jealousy Offering (Numbers 5:15)
- Never as part of personal use perfumes (Exodus 30:37-38)

For the Magi to give frankincense to Jesus indicated they knew something about His deity and holiness.

Myrrh was made from the gum of an Arabian tree (*Balsamodendron Myrrha*). It was used:

- As part of the Holy Anointing Oil (Exodus 30:22-33)
- In the beautification of royal women (Esther 2:12)
- As part of the fragrance of Messiah (Psalm 45:8)
- For embalming (John 19:39)

The Magi giving myrrh to Jesus indicated that they knew He was Messiah and that He planned to give His life for mankind.

The Holy Innocents of Bethlehem

After their visit to Jesus, Joseph and Mary, the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Therefore they left for their own country by another route (Matthew 2:12). When they departed, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Arise and take the child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the child to destroy Him. And he arose and took the child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod..." (vv.13-15).

Just as Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James left for Egypt, Herod went on a rampage. "When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the Magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the

Magi" (v.16). According to tradition, Jesus was about one year old when the 14,000 innocent children were massacred.

In connection with this slaughter, Matthew quoted a prophecy of Jeremiah, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more" (Matthew 2:18, Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel was the wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel had been barren for a long time prior to Joseph's birth and had given her maid to her husband because of her barrenness; her children were very important to her (Genesis 30:1-8). As Jacob and his family were traveling back to Canaan from Mesopotamia, Rachel gave birth to Benjamin just before they arrived in Bethlehem. Rachel died in childbirth and was buried there (Genesis 35:16-20). Later, when the promised land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, Ramah along with Bethel, Jerusalem and Bethlehem were among the cities within the land allocated to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:21-28).

Thus, Jeremiah's prophecy goes beyond the weeping of the mothers of the slaughtered children; even Rachel, herself, was weeping inconsolably. One might object that Rachel had been dead for c. 1800 years; how could she weep? To understand this, one needs to understand the Lord's viewpoint concerning who's dead. As proof of the Resurrection the Lord had quoted a much-used passage, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32). If Jacob is not dead, neither is Rachel.

The heartless slaughter of all these children raises another issue: how could a loving God allow this tragedy to happen? After all, the Lord had said that a sparrow doesn't even fall to the ground apart from the Father's will and that the very hairs of our head are numbered (Matthew 10:29-30). So He knew what was going on!

John Chrysostom addressed this issue at length: "Although there are many people that injure (others), yet there is not so much as one that is injured. That which we may suffer unjustly from any one, it speaks either to the doing away of our sins, God so putting the wrong to our account, or it goes to the recompense of rewards".

"To be clearer, let us use an illustration. Consider a certain servant who owes his Master a lot of money, and suppose that this servant has been spitefully used and robbed by unjust men. If it had been in the Master's power to stop the plunderer and He didn't, but instead He credited what was taken toward the servant's debt, has the servant been injured? By no means! What if the Master credits the servant more than he lost? Has he not gained in the process?"

Chrysostom gave several other illustrations. "Remember David, as a fugitive from Absalom, came upon Shimei, a relative of Saul. Shimei followed David as he went

along cursing him continually, throwing stones at him and reviling him, trampling on his afflictions as being well deserved". David's captains wanted to "cut off this dead dog's head". But David forbid it saying: "Let him alone and let him curse; perhaps the Lord will look upon my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day" (2 Samuel 16:5-12).

Quoting David again, "Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Look upon my enemies, for they have been multiplied, and they have hated me with unjust hatred" (Psalm 25:18-19 LXX). "And Lazarus again for the same cause enjoyed comfort having in this life suffered innumerable evils (Luke 16:20-25). They therefore who are wronged are not wronged at all if they bear nobly all that they suffer. Rather they gain even more abundantly whether they are disciplined by God or scourged by the devil" (Homily IX on Matthew 2).

With regard to the 14,000 children slaughtered in Bethlehem, the Church has referred to them as The Holy Innocents and has counted them among the martyrs. Chrysostom stated in another place: "Nothing is holier than the tongue which, in evils, gives thanks to God. Truly in no respect does it fall short of that of martyrs; both are alike crowned. For over the martyr stands the executioner to force one to deny God by blasphemy. In the other case, the devil stands over one torturing him with executioner thoughts, darkening him with despondencies. If then, one bears his grief and gives thanks, he has gained a crown of martyrdom. If her little child is sick and her mother still gives God thanks, this is a crown for her. What torture is so bad that despondency is not worse? Still it does not force her to vent any bitter word. If the child dies and again she gives thanks for the time spent, she had become a daughter of Abraham. She didn't sacrifice with her own hand, yet she was pleased with the sacrifice, which is the same thing. She felt no indignation when the gift was taken away" (Homily VIII on Colossians 3).

Christ had said, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). "For whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

Most of the martyrs didn't go out of their way to put themselves in harm's way and seek martyrdom. They just couldn't avoid it and faced it courageously and head-on. The Holy Innocents didn't seek to die in their Lord's place, but that's what they did. "Their Lord knows what they might have achieved in terms of good works had they lived. For this reason, He laid up for them no small reward" (Homily IX on Matthew 2).

The Flight to Egypt

According to tradition, Joseph's youngest son, James (author of the Epistle of James) was too young (about 10 years old) to leave behind and went with Joseph, Mary

and Jesus to Egypt.¹⁶ Jesus was about one year old when they left. The route they took led them due West to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea and then along the well-traveled caravan route to Egypt. By taking this route, they were able to reach Egyptian soil in about 14 days; this was the quickest route to Egypt.¹⁷

In ancient iconography, the Virgin Mary is often pictured carrying Jesus while riding on a donkey with Joseph and James taking turns leading the donkey. In one case Jesus is pictured sitting on Joseph's shoulders with Mary riding the donkey.

At this time, there was a significant Jewish population in Egypt, primarily in the area of Alexandria and along the Nile Valley and Delta. It was because of this Jewish population that the Septuagint was commissioned by Pharaoh Ptolemy II several hundred years earlier. Thus Joseph and Mary were able to find accommodations among their own people during part of the journey.

There are many early accounts of the adventures of the Holy Family that occurred during the Flight to Egypt. For example, there are a number of accounts of idols and statues of Egyptian deities collapsing or crumbling as the Christ Child entered that town. This is supported by Old Testament prophecy: "Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them" (Isaiah 19:1). The early Church Fathers also bear witness to this and this is expressed in ancient hymns and ancient icons.

Some accounts portray the Christ Child as a precocious infant who performed many miracles. This is denied by Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom who reasoned that if such were the case: (1) He would not have needed John the Baptist to go before Him. (2) He would have been crucified much earlier¹⁸ since He would have irritated the Scribes and Pharisees much earlier (Homily XXI on John).

Regarding the collapsing idols, the first instance occurred just East of the Nile Delta after they had entered Egypt. One of the idols had warned the pagan priests (by the voice of Satan) that a God had come to their town. At the same time, a young son of the priest, who had been demon-possessed since birth, wandered into the building where Joseph, Mary, James and Jesus were staying. Picking up some of Jesus' freshly washed clothing and putting them over his head, he was healed of his demon possession and began praising God. Meanwhile, the idol that had spoken along with the other idols, collapsed and shattered on the ground. This created quite a commotion! After some inquiring, the priest whose son was healed recognized Jesus as the Son of the Living God and treated the Holy Family very well while they stayed there.²⁰ This seems reminiscent of the time that the idol of Dagon in the Philistine Temple collapsed and fell before the Ark of the Covenant when the Philistines had captured the Ark (1

Samuel 5:1-4). The same Lord who dwelt between the Cherubim on the Ark (Exodus 25:22, 30:6, Leviticus 16:2, Numbers 17:4, 2 Samuel 6:2) now had come to Egypt.

Concerning Egyptian idolatry, Jerome (4th-5th Century) remarked that, "No nation was so given to idolatry and worshipped such a countless number of monsters as the Egyptians".²¹

In addition, historical writings attribute some prophecy of Jeremiah as predicting this. Later in his life, Jeremiah was forced to go to Egypt with some of the Hebrew royalty who were fleeing Nebuchadnezzar prior to the Babylonian conquest (Jeremiah 43:1-13). Jeremiah's own countrymen stoned him to death in Egypt, but not before he had done considerable prophesying. One of these prophecies (not recorded in Scripture) involved the idols of Egypt falling and being destroyed when a virgin mother with her Son entered Egypt. Jeremiah was highly revered by the Egyptians and hieroglyphics depicting this prophecy were included on one of the Egyptian temples. Later when Pharaoh Ptolemy II (who commissioned the Septuagint) inquired about the meaning of these images, the Egyptian priests replied that it was a mystery. A Hebrew prophet had foretold it and they were awaiting its fulfillment.²²

In the same vicinity, Joseph and Mary came upon a large group of robbers. Details of this encounter vary from one source to another; but one common element of all the sources has one of the robbers standing out and letting them pass unmolested. Some accounts say this one robber, named Dysmas (or Titus), even bribed another robber to let them go.²⁰ Thirty two years later this robber Dysmas was one of the thieves that was crucified with Jesus, who rebuked the other thief for blaspheming, and who Jesus said will be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:39-43).

At a number of other occasions, Egyptian idols collapsed as the Lord and His earthly parents entered a town. For example, this also occurred at Mataria (near Heliopolis, NE of Cairo), at Hermopolis (Ashmunein in Upper Egypt), and at Cusae (Qusia in Upper Egypt near Thebes). At Cusae, angry priests drove them out of town; but at the other two towns, they were received warmly.

At Hermopolis, they arrived at the village of Sotinen (or Sotrina) and found no Hebrews from which they could seek hospitality. So they went to the area of the local temple to inquire about a place to stay. This temple had 365 idols - one for each day of the year - and all 365 toppled and smashed as they entered the temple area. The governor of the city heard this and rushed to the temple with his army. Upon seeing the devastation of the idols, the governor was stunned. Turning to address his army, he said, "Unless this were the God of our gods, our gods would not have fallen on their faces before Him. By their silence, they confess Him as their Lord. Unless we, too, confess Him, we may run the risk of His anger and come to destruction. Thus, it

happened to our pharaoh who, not believing in powers so mighty, was drowned with his army". Thus all the people of that city believed in the Lord God.⁵

The end of the journey in Upper Egypt was near the Qousqam Mountains about 100 miles from Thebes where they lived in a cave for the better part of a year. Today this cave is the site of the Dair al-Muharraq Monastery. The first church was built on that location in about 60 AD when the Evangelist Mark traveled throughout Egypt, finding a very receptive people as he went. The Monastery was built in the 4th Century as were a number of other monasteries and churches that commemorated the various places Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James stayed. Many of these still exist today and the historic sites are visited by many people every year.¹⁹

While they were living in the cave near the Qousqam Mountains, Herod died. "When Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the child's life are dead' " (Matthew 2:19-20). Thus, Joseph began the approximately 600-mile journey back to Nazareth.

The route home most likely was a retrace of the route used in their flight from Herod. Considerable tradition exists as to places they stopped and their length of stay in returning home. From this, we can surmise that they were not in a great hurry to get back and that they took their time.

Most of the places that tradition assigns for their stopping points were springs, wells or sources of water. Being devout Jews and following the Mosaic Laws regarding purification (Exodus 19:14-15, Leviticus 13-15, Numbers 19), this seems logical that they would stop to wash periodically in the hot climate.

Reaching the land of Israel, Joseph had another decision to make. "And when he (i.e. Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene' " (Matthew 2:22-23).

Consequences of Flight to Egypt

One thing that stands out from Matthew 2:13 is that Joseph was called upon to react immediately and quickly and flee to Egypt. The word flee (Greek: *pheugo*) carries some urgency in terms of escape or run. Joseph was about 81 years old at the time (Prologue, December 31) and this was not an easy task for him to live as a refugee for three years. Chrysostom pointed out some contradictions Joseph had to deal with: "Didn't You just say that He should save His people from their sins? And now He can't

even save Himself, but we must flee far away from home and be away a long time? The facts are contrary to the promise" (Homily VIII on Matthew 2). But yet, he didn't question the command; he just did it.

The Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah) had prepared the people of Egypt for the Lord's arrival, and the Holy Family's visit left them with a number of very memorable events. When Mark, James (Alphaeus), Peter and others of the Apostles came through with the rest of the story thirty-some years later, people were eager to accept what they knew was the Truth.

In the centuries that followed, Egypt became one of the great world centers of holiness and asceticism. Chrysostom wrote of this in the 4th Century. "And now, should you come into the desert of Egypt, you will see this desert become better than any paradise. You will see 10,000 choirs of angels in human forms, and nations of martyrs, and companies of virgins and all the devil's tyranny put down" (Ibid).

Referring to the life of the Apostle Paul, Chrysostom described their life style: "With their great exactness in doctrine, they exhibit also by their life that extreme seriousness. For when they have stripped themselves of all that they have and are crucified to the whole world, they urge their course on yet further using the labor of their body for the nourishment of those in need. For neither because they fast and watch (by night) do they think it is all right to be idle by day. But their nights they spend in holy hymns and in vigils and their days in prayers; and at the same time laboring with their own hands imitating the zeal of the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:3, 20:34, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 2 Corinthians 12:13). For he, when the whole world was looking at him (1 Corinthians 4:9), for the sake of nourishing them that were in need, both occupied a workshop and practiced a craft. Being thus employed he did not so much as sleep by night (2 Corinthians 4:8-12, 6:5, 11:27). How much more, say they, is it fitting that we, who have taken up our abode in the wilderness and have nothing to do with the turmoils in the cities, should use the leisure of our quiet for spiritual labors" (Ibid.).

Returning to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary were content to live a meager existence. They were never rich, but always had something to eat. The gifts given by the Magi (Matthew 2:11) were most likely consumed in supporting themselves during the three years in Egypt. Jesus therefore grew up being called a Nazarene as was spoken by the prophets (Matthew 2:23).

The prophet that Matthew referred to in v. 23 is uncertain. Some think it may be a reference to the Branch of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Others think it could refer to the Nazirite vow of Samson and others (Judges 13:5). But in neither of these places are the words recorded as Matthew quotes them. Since there were many prophets' writings that haven't survived (due to destruction by their enemies), this may refer to one of them

(compare 2 Chronicles 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 1 Chronicles 29:29, also Jeremiah 36:20-29, 2 Kings 22:8-13) as noted by Chrysostom (Homily IX on Matthew 2).

Being a Nazarene, Jesus was later scorned by proper Jewry. Even though Nicodemus (a Pharisee) defended Jesus, the other members of the Sanhedrin ridiculed Jesus just because He was from Galilee. They said to Nicodemus: "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (John 7:52). They were technically incorrect in this point; Jonah and Nahum came from Galilee, but no one else that we know of (compare 2 Kings 14:25).

But the Lord accepted His humble roots and did not seek status or the things of this world, for His Kingdom is not of the world (John 18:36). As He moved around during His three year ministry, He did not have His own house to return to (Matthew 8:20). At the time of His crucifixion, the only property He owned were the clothes He was wearing (John 19:23-24). The Lord illustrated His own life style when He said: "Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave, just as the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

PART III

JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

Except for one incident when Jesus was 12 years old, we are told very little in the Scriptures about His life growing up in Nazareth. “And the Child grew and became strong, being filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40). However, by looking at what life was like in First Century Nazareth and what all Jewish families did, we can infer some things about what Jesus and His mother did.

Galilee was a beautiful area in the First Century with a rich forest growth that is not present today and a great fertility of soil that has been only partially reclaimed in the 20th Century. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee, calling it Tiberias after the Roman emperor. Within Galilee, Nazareth was on one of the main caravan routes (the Via Maris) leading from Acco on the Mediterranean to Damascus. Nazareth was also one of the priest-centers or stations of the priests. The priests had been divided up into 24 lots and served in the Temple in Jerusalem for one week every 24 weeks (1 Chronicles 24). When it came the turn for the lot centered in Nazareth, they all traveled together to Jerusalem. Those that couldn't go for some reason spent the week in fasting and prayer for their brethren.²³

Because of its distance from Jerusalem and its mixed Jew-Gentile population, there was a general contempt for all that was Galilean in strict Rabbinical circles. For example, when the Pharisee Nicodemus endeavored to uphold the Mosaic Law and give Jesus a fair hearing, he was shouted down by his fellow Pharisees: “Are you also from Galilee?” (John 7:52). Even the Apostle Nathanael was surprised on meeting Jesus “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

Galileans were even identifiable by their accent. They had developed a local pronunciation that “mispronounced” the Hebrew gutturals according to the strict standards in Jerusalem.²⁴ This would probably be equivalent to differences in accent between one who grew up in Boston, Atlanta or Los Angeles.

Carpentry in Nazareth

One of the main tasks of the carpenter was in building houses. While the walls were usually made of sun-dried brick, the roofs were flat and supported by beans, with thatching and packed mud on top. The carpenter's job was to fell the trees, square them and cut them into beams (either with a crude rip saw or with a hand adz) and set them in place for the roof. These beams needed to be very sturdy since they supported a lot of weight. Adding to the weight was the practice of using the roof area as living

quarters (1 Samuel 9:26) and for constructing booths during the Feast of Tabernacles (Nehemiah 8:16-17).

Houses of the poor were about 10 feet square and had only one window that was set rather high up and was covered with a wooden lattice similar to venetian blinds. In cold weather, it may have been covered with animal skin. The main source of light was generally through the open door or from an oil lamp fastened to the wall. The floor was composed of stamped-down earth and had a raised platform toward the back for cooking and sitting. A fire for heating or cooking was often used in this area with the smoke left to find its own way out of the house; thus choking people inside.²⁵ In a dimly lit house like this, a lost coin could be difficult to find (Luke 15:8). With Jesus' extended family, houses of relatives probably shared some of the walls with no alleys between.

Other tasks of the carpenter included making doors, door frames, window lattices, locks, low tables and chests for the home. Besides home furnishings, carpenters also made agricultural instruments such as yokes, ploughs, ox goads, shovels, pitchforks, and threshing sledges. Wagons and their wooden wheels took a special skill. Wooden frames were also needed for pack animals.

The carpenter's tools included a measuring line (also used as a plumb line), a compass and stylus for circles, and adz, an awl and a copper saw with a wood handle. He used an ax consisting of a bronze head lashed to a shaft and a stone hammer to drive nails. He also used a copper chisel and a crude drill to bore into wood. To obtain a good finish on his implements with these simple tools took skill on the part of the carpenter.²⁶

Jesus learned the carpentry trade from His father, Joseph (Mark 6:3). All Jewish boys learned a trade and Jewish sentiment stressed the nobility of manual labor. Contempt for manual labor did not exist and disdain for it was associated with the heathen. An early Jewish tractate states "Whosoever does not teach his son work, teaches him to rob" (BT Kiddushin 99a, 2:2).

The Life of a Child

The duty of the parents was to "train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Perhaps foremost was the creed "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). This was required to be taught "diligently to their sons and they were to talk about this when they sit in their house and when they walk by the way and when they lie down and when they rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). The adults were even to bind these words into phylacteries that dangled in front of their foreheads to remind them (Deuteronomy 6:8, Matthew 23:5). Josephus wrote that the

Scriptures and the traditions were taught in every city to Jewish boys “from our first consciousness”.²⁷

At about the time of Christ, Rabbi Joshua ben Gamala instituted school outside the home in every town and village. Jesus would have started attending this school at about age 6. The textbooks were the Scriptures and most learning was by memorization. Writing was taught by ink applied with a sharp stick or by writing on the ground (compare John 8:6-8). By age ten to fifteen, Jewish boys were taught traditional Jewish Law.²⁸

Schools and education went back a long way. The Prophet Samuel set up some kind of a school at Ramah (1 Samuel 19:18-23). The Prophet Elijah was part of some kind of school of the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 2:5-7). From this developed the practice of calling the priest “father” (2 Kings 2:3, 12) since he played a fatherly role in teaching the children. In the return from exile in Babylon, “Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). As people gathered together (literally synagogued) during the exile to learn the Scripture, the roots of the modern synagogue were established.²⁸

Domestic Activities

Most people got up before the sun was up in order to make the best use of the hours of daylight. In some areas, the heat during the middle of the day warranted a break to avoid heat exhaustion. Breakfast was an informal meal of typically a cake of bread with olives, cheese or fruit inside. The men and older boys left for work, eating as they went while the mother, older girls and young boys did the domestic chores for the day. The youngest generally minded any animals owned by the family — as David once did (1 Samuel 16:11).

Most families milled their own flour every day or every other day using a small hand mill. This was made of two disc-shaped stones about 18 inches diameter, where the upper stone was turned by a wooden handle. Barley grains (used by the poor a lot) or wheat grains were put into the pivot hole and were crushed between the two stones, coming out as flour onto a clean cloth. A woman could do the milling by herself, but it was easier working with a companion (Matthew 24:41).

Getting water and going shopping were two jobs performed outside the house and were done by the older girls. Abraham’s servant, Eliezar, took advantage of this in seeking a wife for Isaac, knowing it was the older, unmarried girls who came to fetch the water (Genesis 24:10-16, also 1 Samuel 9:11). The water jar was generally carried on the woman’s shoulder (Genesis 24:15). Since women usually fetched and carried the water, a man doing so was distinctive enough for Jesus to direct Peter and John to the

spot where they would eat the Last Supper meal (Luke 22:7-10). The only source of water in Nazareth was a well just inside the city.

Shopping was necessary almost daily since food did not keep well in the hot climate without drying or salting. Bread was baked almost daily, sometimes at home, sometimes in community ovens. Hosea made an analogy to this where bread was baked overnight in community ovens, with the baker stirring up the fire in the morning for the next day's batch (Hosea 7:4-7).

Bread was the basic food and was prepared in several ways. A thin bread, like pita bread, was often used at the evening meal to scoop a thick sauce (or casserole or stew) out of a common pot (Matthew 26:23). Biscuit size loaves were often taken along when traveling as a mid-day meal (John 6:9). A thicker, heavier loaf was also used for some occasions (Judges 7:13). For leavened bread, a lump of dough from the previous day's baking (or starter) was mixed with a newly made dough and the whole lump was left by the fire until the yeast from the old dough had permeated the whole (Matthew 13:33, Galatians 5:9). Once leavened, it was baked.²⁹

The evening meal was prepared in time for the men returning from work. This usually consisted of vegetable or lentil stew made with home-grown vegetables or those purchased at the market place (Genesis 25:29, 34; Daniel 1:12). On special occasions, meat was added to the stew. Passover was different in that the lamb was roasted and eaten that evening. Leviticus 11 gives strict directions as to which meat could or could not be eaten. For dessert, fresh or dried fruit was served.

Another important activity during the day at home was spinning and weaving to make clothing, rugs, etc. A good wife was described as one who searched for wool and flax, then spun and weaved it into cloth, making clothes for her family and selling the surplus in the market place (Proverbs 31:10-24). While working at doing so, she taught her young children about kindness and strength and dignity (Proverbs 31:25-28). As mentioned earlier, the Virgin Mary was very skilled in the area of spinning and weaving.

Hygiene was very poor and sanitation was almost completely lacking. No one had bathtubs except the very rich. Washing was addressed in the Scripture almost entirely in terms of an inner cleansing. For example, washing was required:

1. To prepare to meet God (Exodus 19:10-15; 29:4; 30:18-21; Leviticus 8:6; 16:4) and be clean from one's sins (Leviticus 16:30, Psalm 51:2, Jeremiah 33:8, Ephesians 5:26).

2. To be cleansed
 - After childbirth (Leviticus 12)
 - From leprosy (Leviticus 13, 14)
 - From bleeding or infection (Leviticus 15)
3. For removal of guilt (Deuteronomy 21:1-9)
4. Thus, it addressed a person's inner life more than externals (Matthew 23:25, Mark 7:1-5).

To take a bath usually meant going to a river. Even Pharaoh's daughter came to the Nile to bathe (Exodus 2:5). As part of his healing from leprosy, Elisha told Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:10). If a river didn't flow nearby, bathing was infrequent and a simple washing had to suffice at the end of the day (2 Samuel 11:2). More common was a shallow earthen-ware bowl for washing the feet. Washing clothes could be done easily in a stream, the current running through the coarse cloth and carrying dirt away. In Nazareth, with no stream nearby, clothes had to be washed by laying wet clothes on flat rocks and pounding out the dirt.³⁰

Jesus at Twelve Years Old

The account in Luke 2 of Jesus as a 12 year old with understanding beyond His years is the only reliable account we have of His childhood. Other accounts of His childhood exist, but most Christians are skeptical of them for several reasons. They present Jesus as working many miracles as a child and for some childish reasons. These accounts are not held to be reliable by the Church because:

1. They deny the Scripture which says that Jesus' beginning of signs occurred at Cana of Galilee at the wedding feast and not as a child (John 2:11).
2. He would have been crucified much earlier had He begun to show Who He was earlier.³¹
3. If such were true, He would not have needed John the Baptist to go before Him.³¹
4. Some of the supposed miracles had the effect of alleviating the poverty of His human experience (and bringing judgment on children who opposed Him) and may have been written by some of the early heretics who denied His humanity. The obedience of Jesus to His parents in Luke 2:51 contrasts the "maverick Jesus" in some of the other childhood accounts.

Referring to the account of Jesus' experience as a 12-year-old in Luke 2, the account revolves around an annual trip (v.41) to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover.

It had been commanded by the Lord that every man was to present himself before the Lord three times per year: at Passover, Pentecost and at Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16). They would bring their tithes and offerings with them and feast and rejoice before the Lord in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). At Passover, this feasting lasted 7 days.

The distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem is over 60 miles and represented at least a 3-day journey, especially if they were herding animals for sacrifice in Jerusalem. Referring again to Figure 1 regarding Jesus' family, there were at least 30 members traveling together from Figure 1 including children. Simon, Jude, Justus and Esther were married and had their own families. Zebedee and Salome also came with their children, where John was about 4 years old then. Similarly with Matthew, James and Simeon. The context states that they traveled with their relatives and friends. This probably included just those living nearby in Nazareth. Jesus being old enough to take care of himself, He probably played with the other kids in the group a lot. In journeys such as this, it was customary for men and women to travel in separate groups³², with the younger children travelling with the women. This could easily create an "I thought He was with you" situation.

The group was evidently large enough that Jesus wasn't noticed as missing by His parents until they had already gone one day's journey homeward (vv.43-44). Returning to Jerusalem, it then took them three days to find Him (v.46). This must have been especially hard on Joseph who, at 93, didn't get around as he used to. Mary scolded Jesus: "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously" (v.48). Jesus replied: "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that it behooves Me to be involved in the (things) of My Father?" (v.49). Joseph and Mary didn't understand His reply, but Mary kept this and everything else in her heart (vv.50-51). Later on when He was lifted up, everything made sense (John 8:28).

In understanding Mary's scolding, we note that it is not Joseph but Mary that spoke. Joseph may have been hurting in forcing his old bones to look for Jesus; but he didn't complain. Mary was only about 27 years old; she seems to be chiding Jesus for putting Joseph through all this. From earlier, Mary was not the kind of persons to raise her voice for anything. Bede (8th Century) stated that Joseph knew that Jesus was greater than he and ruled Him as a father with trepidation.³³

Another aspect of this encounter is that Jesus was just doing what Mary had done 13 years ago. Why should this be so surprising to her? Luke, the writer, had known Mary personally and had painted several icons of her holding her Son. In order for Luke to have known this information, Mary in her humility must have told him in order to emphasize her own human meekness.

According to Jewish custom, a boy entered manhood at age 13 and became a "son of the Law" (Hebrew: *bar mitzvah*). This trip to Jerusalem, then, was the last time

Jesus would attend Passover as a child. Once He attained His *bar mitzvah*, He could be one of ten men who could constitute a synagogue.³⁴

From the ages of 10-15 years, Jewish boys were taught traditional law. Those that showed promise, such as the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1:14, Acts 22:3) were then sent to rabbinical schools in Jerusalem to be taught by abler teachers.²⁸ Thus Jesus had had some teaching already in Nazareth and He found it very interesting to continue this, sitting and listening to the great teachers in Jerusalem (v.46). He also asked them questions, “and all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (v.47). Yet Jesus never went on to any of the rabbinical schools; He stayed in Nazareth and worked as a carpenter with His father (Mark 6:3). Later, people marveled at His teaching because He hadn’t had the schooling of the doctors of the Law (John 7:15).

One of the historical sources gives an example of one of Jesus’ questions. He asked, “Whose Son is the Messiah?” They answered, “The Son of David”. Jesus then asked, “Why then does David, in the Spirit, call Him Lord when he says ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’ “ (Psalm 110:1). This is a question that Jesus posed again 21 years later during Holy Week just before He was crucified (Matthew 22:42-45). The same historical source states that the teachers complimented Mary on having such a Son when she came to get Him.²⁰

Since Joseph and Mary had been looking for Jesus for three days, presumably Jesus had begun sitting and listening to the great teachers prior to that also. Yet Jesus did not identify Himself as the Messiah and thus got along very well with them. At this point, they did not see Him as a threat; after He revealed Himself at age 30, they did.

Mary’s reaction to all this was to “keep all these things in her heart” (v.51). She had done the same thing when the angels sang and the shepherds visited at His birth (Luke 2:19). When Jesus was 40 days old, Mary did the same thing as Simeon and Anna prophesied over Jesus as an infant (Luke 2:33). Joseph and Mary were very humble about the blessings the Lord had bestowed on them with their child.

The closing statement on Jesus’ childhood was that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (v.52). Some heretics used this passage to deny His deity, arguing that He cannot be God if He is increasing in wisdom. Cyril of Alexandria (4th-5th Century) wrote: “As the Word He did not grow, for He is perfect as is the Father. The Word Incarnate knew the age of childhood and adolescence”. Therefore the divine nature revealed its own wisdom with the growth of the bodily stature.³⁵ Epiphanius of Cyprus (4th Century) wrote that “it was after twelve years, not after His thirtieth year, that Christ is found to be astonishing in utterances of power. Accordingly, it may not be said that after the Spirit descended upon Him in baptism He

became the Christ, that is, was anointed with divinity; but that from very childhood He acknowledged both His Temple and His Father.³⁶

The Death of Joseph

There is a consistent absence in the Scripture of any reference to Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, after the pilgrimage to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. Joseph died of old age just about the time Jesus began His public ministry. Jesus began revealing Himself at His baptism at age 30 (Luke 3:23). Immediately following this, we note that Joseph is conspicuously absent at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-12).

Joseph had four sons and at least two daughters by his first wife (see Figure 1); and as was the custom of the day, he wished to divide his property up between his sons before he died. Justus and Simon, the oldest, were married and had families of their own, as did his daughters. Jude and James still lived at home as did Jesus. At the urging of Jude, Justus and Simon felt that Jesus did not deserve a share of the inheritance since He was not really part of their family. While Mary was Joseph's wife, she related to Him more like a ward than a wife and remained a virgin while married to Joseph.

James, on the other hand, was devoted to Jesus and was very close to Him ever since the Flight to Egypt when he accompanied Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Regarding Joseph's inheritance, James volunteered that Jesus could have half of his share of the inheritance.³⁷ Later on, James was referred to as "the Lord's brother" because of this (Galatians 1:19). Even during the early part of Jesus' public ministry, the Scripture states that Jesus' brothers "did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). This refers to Simon and Justus, since Jude (also called Lebbeaus or Thaddaeus) had already been chosen as one of the Twelve and had been sent out two by two to heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead (Matthew 10:5-23). While Jude was not one of the first Apostles chosen, he had had a change of heart by then and was so ashamed of his behavior earlier that he never referred to himself as "the Lord's brother." Instead, out of humility, he referred to himself as "the brother of James" (Jude 1:1) in his Epistle. Justus and Simon also came around and were sent out as members of the Seventy a year later (Luke 10:1-10).

Later on, when Peter announced that someone needed to take Judas Iscariot's place among the Twelve, Justus and Matthias were proposed (Acts 1:23); these two probably were the oldest and both had been with the Apostles since the baptism of John (Acts 1:22). Matthias was chosen by lot (Acts 1:26) but Justus (also called Barsabas, Joseph and Judas) remained as one of the leading men among the brethren (Acts 15:22). Justus, himself, was a prophet (Acts 15:32) and went to Antioch with Paul and Silas following the Council of Jerusalem to exhort and strengthen the Church of Antioch (Acts 15:30-33). Silas stayed in Antioch with Paul; Justus returned to Jerusalem.

According to historical sources, just before Jesus began His public ministry, an angel informed Joseph that his departure was close at hand. Even though he was 111 years old at that time, Joseph immediately went to Jerusalem to pray in the Temple, pouring out his heart before the Lord. Returning to Nazareth, he became sick and was bed ridden until his death. The Lord Jesus was with him as he died. The righteous Joseph asked Jesus to forgive him for even thinking about divorcing Mary when she was pregnant with Him and to receive his soul into His Kingdom.³⁸ Jesus then closed Joseph's eyes as he expired, and wept over him in thankfulness for all Joseph had done for Him.

The Marriage at Cana

The marriage at Cana took place just after Jesus was revealed at His Baptism. Following His Baptism, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast for forty days and be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13). Following His return on the day after John the Baptist's conversation with those sent by the Pharisees, John pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29-34). The next day Andrew and the Apostle John began following Jesus. Andrew went and got Peter; John most likely got his brother James (John 1:35-42). The following day, Jesus called Philip and Philip found Nathanael, where Nathanael was very impressed with Jesus (John 1:43-51). Jesus had wanted to leave for Galilee that day.

"On the third day", or the day after tomorrow, they were in Cana for the wedding feast. Jesus, His new disciples, His mother and His brothers were there, and perhaps His sisters (John 2:1, 2, 12). According to tradition, the bridegroom at this wedding was the future Apostle, Simon the Zealot.³⁹ The Virgin Mary seems to be featured prominently in this wedding, suggesting that Simon may be a relative or a close friend.

Wedding feasts were an event that lasted a week (Judges 14:12), and took place usually at the home of the groom. Both bride and groom dressed in their finest clothes and were decked with jewelry. They sat under a canopy -- like a throne -- and presided over the feast. A great deal of time was spent in eating and drinking and the guests were there to witness that the marriage had been consummated. Guests were often given a special wedding garment for the occasion (Matthew 22:12). There was always a person in charge of the feast who supervised everything to see to it that all went smoothly.⁴⁰

A problem occurred at this feast; they ran out of wine (John 2:3). Mary approached Jesus saying, "They have no wine." Jesus replied, "What is that to you or Me? My hour is not yet come." Mary turned to the servants: "Whatever He says to you, do it!" (vv.3-5). For Mary to command someone else's servants boldly indicates that she was involved with the feast.

John Chrysostom (4th Century) stated that this was Jesus' first miracle as stated earlier. However, he asks, how did His mother know to ask this of Him? She had been treasuring things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 33, 51); namely the conception, Elizabeth's prophecy, the angel's songs, the shepherds' visit, Simeon and Anna, the Magi, the Flight to Egypt, the twelve year old in the Temple. She knew Who He was, but she did not have confidence to say any such thing to Him before. But now He was beginning to be revealed (by John the Baptist) and now He had disciples.³¹

Regarding the request for wine, Chrysostom stated that the request should have come from the ruler of the feast (the headwaiter). Mary seems to be acting on her own, privately, so as to avoid drawing attention. By saying, "My hour is not yet come", Jesus was telling Mary that He rejects a show-yourself-to-the-world attitude as exhibited by His brothers later (John 7:4). He instructed her for the future not to do the same.³¹ Mary seemed to understand this and backed off by telling the servants to do as He says. Then she left. We note that Mary did not say to the servants: "Do as I say", but "Do as He says" (v.5).

There are a number of references to Jesus' "hour not yet come". In all cases, the Jewish rulers sought to kill Him. Reviewing these sequentially:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>REFERENCE</u>	<u>CONTEXT</u>
Late 27 AD	Luke 4:30	Nazareth wanted Him to perform miracles; He refused due to their unbelief. They tried to throw Him off a cliff, but He passed through their midst untouched.
Sept. 29 AD	John 7:8	He did not go with His brothers to Feast of Tabernacles.
Sept. 29 AD	John 7:30	He went to Feast of Tabernacles later and taught in the Temple; no one laid a hand on Him.
Sept. 29 AD	John 7:44	Officers came to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him. No man ever spoke like this Man.
Oct. 29 AD	John 8:20	Claims God is His Father; no one laid hands on Him.
Late 29 AD	John 8:59	Referred to Himself as I AM who pre-dated Abraham. They took up stones, but Jesus passed through their midst untouched.
Winter 29 AD	John 10:39	Claimed His works were His Father's. They sought to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

Holy Week 30 AD John 12:23, 17:1 Now the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified (i.e. crucified).

John Chrysostom concluded from all these references to His hour not yet come that He is not subject to the necessity of seasons and times, but that He works things when they are appropriate, not all at once. Otherwise a kind of confusion and disorder would have ensued.⁴¹

Chrysostom continued, "Why then after He had said, 'My hour is not yet come' and gives her a denial, did He do what His mother desired? He did it to honor His mother, that He might not seem in the presence of many, entirely to contradict and shame her that bore Him." Chrysostom compared this to the Canaanite woman where He said, "'It is not proper to take the children's bread and to give it to the dogs' (Matthew 15:26). He still gave the bread, as considering her perseverance. From this we learn that although we are unworthy, we often by perseverance make ourselves worthy to receive."⁴¹

In responding to Mary's request, Jesus told the servants to fill six nearby stone water pots with water. These water pots had been used for purification rites and thus were used for nothing but water. When the servants had filled them to the brim, Jesus told them to draw some out and take it to the ruler of the feast. When the ruler of the feast tasted it, he congratulated the bridegroom for keeping the best wine for last (vv.6-11). Thus Jesus engineered this miracle such that the bridegroom got the credit from the guests for doing things well.

While Jesus did things quietly, Simon must have known that this wine was not his. According to tradition, he was so impressed with Jesus' miracle that he left everything like the other Apostles (Matthew 19:27). He and his bride agreed to live as brother and sister instead of husband and wife for the cause of the Gospel.³⁹

Chrysostom also pointed out that the quality of the wine was not judged by an assembly of drunken men but by the ruler of the feast who had to stay sober. The text does not mention the guests giving their opinion on the quality of the wine; only the ruler. The Lord instructed the servants to bring some of the wine to the ruler, not to pour it for the guests.⁴¹ The effect of Mary's request was to rectify a very embarrassing social situation for Simon: running out of refreshments in the middle of a big celebration.

Glimpses of Mary During Jesus' Ministry

Understanding the role of the Virgin Mary during Jesus' three year public ministry requires an understanding also of the development of the group of women

referred to as the Myrrh-Bearing Women. There are eight women generally identified as making up this group:

- Mary Magdalene
- The Virgin Mary
- Joanna
- Salome
- Mary, the wife of Alphaeus (or Cleopas)
- Susanna
- Mary of Bethany
- Martha of Bethany

At the crucifixion in 30 AD, this group of women was prominent. “Now many women who followed Jesus from Galilee ministering (literally: deaconing) to Him were there looking on from afar. Among these were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph (i.e. the Virgin Mary) and the mother of Zebedee’s sons” (Matthew 27:55-56). These women had followed Him, had ministered (deaconed) to Him in Galilee and had come up with Him to Jerusalem (Mark 15:40-41).

Two years earlier in 28 AD, these women were also traveling with Him as “He went through every city and village preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). In this case, the women are credited with contributing to the support of the ministry from their possessions, where Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna were mentioned as the most prominent (Luke 8:1-3). This could mean that Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna were the wealthiest and contributed the most financially. Since Joanna was the wife of Herod’s steward, she was probably well off financially.

Little is said directly about the financial situation of Mary Magdalene or Susanna. To make matters more confusing, Western tradition has sometimes identified Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the “sinner” who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears (Luke 7:37) as the same person. Eastern tradition has consistently identified them as three separate individuals. In addition, Eastern tradition describes Mary Magdalene as a virgin who was devoted to charitable causes but who was harassed by seven demons before she was healed by the Lord⁴² (Luke 8:2, Mark 16:9). Since Luke listed her first, ahead of Joanna, the implication is that she was a woman of means.

Mary and Martha of Bethany with their brother Lazarus helped out considerably also. When Jesus was in Jerusalem, He generally did not spend the night in the city since the Jewish leaders sought to kill Him. Since Bethany was just two miles away (John 11:18), He often stayed there with His disciples to give the Jewish leaders less opportunity (Mark 11:11-12, 19). Six days before the crucifixion, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet with a very costly oil that Judas Iscariot said should have been sold

for 300 denarii to give to the poor (John 12:2-5). For Mary to be able to afford that oil indicates that her family was not poor. (For more details of this, see Palm Sunday).

In addition, for Jesus and Lazarus to “sit at table” in their house while Martha served (John 12:2) indicates that their house was not the small 10 ft. by 10 ft. house that poor folk in Nazareth lived in. On another occasion, Jesus (and the Twelve and others) sat at table at Mary and Martha’s house; Martha complained to Jesus that Mary had left her to serve alone (Luke 10:38-42). This only makes sense for a large household and many guests.

Lazarus’ funeral also gives indications of family wealth. He had his own tomb and he was bound and wrapped like a mummy in a way that was generally only done for the wealthy.⁴³ The mourners coming to their house at Lazarus’ funeral imply a large house and a prominence among the citizens of Bethany (John 11:19, 31).

The need for an organization of the Myrrh-Bearing Women paralleled the development of the Twelve. During Jesus’ three-year ministry, the Twelve and the Seventy went through five stages of development:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>REFERENCES</u>
Spring 27 AD	Part-time Disciples	John 1:35-51
Fall 27 AD	Twelve were full-time disciples; left everything	Luke 5:1-11, 27-28; Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-14; Matthew 4:18-22, 9:9-10
Summer 28 AD	Twelve chosen as Apostles	Luke 6:12-16; Mark 3:13-19
Fall 28 AD	Twelve sent out 2 by 2 as Apostles	Luke 9:1-10; Mark 6:7-13, Matthew 10:1-23
Late Fall 29 AD	Seventy sent out 2 by 2 as Apostles	Luke 10:1-20

Of the Twelve Apostles, four are children of Myrrh-Bearing Women. James and John are sons of Zebedee and Salome. James and Matthew (or Levi) are sons of Alphaeus and Mary. Thus, in Autumn of 27 AD when the Twelve left everything to follow Jesus in His travels (Matthew 4:22, 9:9; Mark 1:20, 2:14; Luke 5:11, 5:28), there was a need for some financial support. By late Summer 28 AD, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna had joined the group (Luke 8:3).

All but Martha and Mary of Bethany were Galileans. Mary Magdalene came from the town of Magdala on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Virgin Mary, Salome

and Mary, the wife of Alphaeus lived in Nazareth. Joanna, being of Herod's household, lived in Tiberias on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Herod's palace was located. Susanna is only mentioned in Luke 8:3; since the context is Galilee, she is presumed to have come from Galilee also. Mary and Martha of Bethany played a key role in supporting Jesus when He was in Judea and at a distance from the Galilean support base.

As Jesus traveled from city to city preaching, it was customary for the women and men to travel in separate groups even though they were all going to the same place at the same time.³² This may make the women appear to be in the background when they really are active participants. If the six Galilean women didn't travel with Jesus, or did so only occasionally, they would not have been in Jerusalem for Jesus' Crucifixion in 30 AD.

To understand more about the Myrrh-Bearing Women prior to 28 AD, we need to look at Jesus' step-brothers' progress in believing in Him. Jude was chosen as one of the Twelve in the Summer of 28 AD. James had been devoted to Him from the beginning. Joseph and Simon were chosen as members of the Seventy in November, 29 AD.

At about the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (i.e. September), 29 AD, Jesus' brothers "did not believe in Him" (John 7:2-5). This must refer to Joseph and Simon since Jude had already been numbered with the Twelve the year before (Luke 6:16). While Joseph and Simon "did not believe in Him", they were still traveling with Him. This can be inferred from Peter's comment when it came time to select a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Joseph (called Barsabas) and Matthias were the two candidates, and they were said to have "accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John" (Acts 1:21-22).

Following the wedding in Cana, Jesus was already traveling with His mother, His brothers and His disciples. This was true in the Spring of 27 AD, just before Passover (John 2:12-13). Since James and John (sons of Zebedee) were there, Salome probably was also. James and Matthew (sons of Alphaeus) were there also because of Peter's statement about the requirement for choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:21-22). Therefore Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, was probably there, too.

This places the three women: The Virgin Mary, Salome and Mary, the wife of Alphaeus with Jesus from the beginning in the Spring of 27 AD. Since the Virgin Mary was the oldest (about 47), she was also the leader. With the decision of the Twelve to leave everything to follow Jesus in the Fall of 27 AD, more support was needed.

John Chrysostom posed the question: "Could not Christ, then, Who with five loaves fed 5,000 men, and with seven loaves fed 4,000, could not He have supported

Himself and His disciples? For what reason then was He maintained by women? For women, it is said, followed Him and ministered unto Him (Mark 15:41, Luke 8:3). It was to teach us from the first that He is concerned for those who do good. Could not Paul, who supported others by his own hands, have maintained himself without assistance from others? But you see him receiving and requesting aid. And hear the reason for it. 'Not because I desire a gift', he says, 'but I desire fruit that may abound to your account' (Philip. 4:17). And at the beginning too, when men sold all their possessions and laid them at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-35), the Apostles, do you see, were more concerned for them (i.e. the givers) than for those who received their alms. For if their concern had been only that the poor might be relieved by any means, they would not have judged so severely the sin of Ananias and Sapphires when they kept back their money" (Acts 5:1-10). In this context, Chrysostom was commenting on Paul's letter to Titus: "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14).⁴⁴

There are two other references in the Scriptures to interactions with Jesus' family. The first, just after Pentecost 28 AD⁴⁵, was an incident where Jesus' mother and brothers came to speak to Him, but could not approach because of the crowd. When Jesus was told His mother and brothers were outside, He stated, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the Word of God and do it" (Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:32-35). This, again must refer to His step-brothers Joseph and Simon (Matthew 13:55), since James was devoted to Him from childhood and Jude had been already numbered with the Twelve (Luke 6:16). Joseph and Simon were later numbered with the Seventy (Luke 10:1-20), but at this point, they did not believe in Him (John 7:5).

The context for this incident is the accusation by the "Scribes who came down from Jerusalem" saying that Jesus is ruled by Beelzebub and casts out demons by the ruler of the demons (Mark 3:22). Jesus was being accused of major heresy and there were legal grounds now for them to stone Jesus (Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:10-20). Alarmed at this, Jesus' own people (i.e. His relatives) went out to lay hold of Him, thinking that He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21).

Noting that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him, John Chrysostom states, "It is clear that nothing but vainglory led them to do this." In addition (a little later), "they were for dragging Him to Jerusalem for no other purpose but that they themselves might reap glory from His miracles" (John 7:3-8).

Jerome (4th Century) states, "It seems to me that the person bringing the message was not simply doing so for the occasion at hand, but was laying a snare for our Savior to see whether He would prefer flesh and blood to His spiritual task. Our Lord, therefore, did not think scorn to come out, as disavowing mother and brothers, but He spoke as answering one who was laying a snare for Him."⁴⁶

Cyril of Alexandria (4th-5th Century) wrote: "Let not anyone imagine that Christ spurned the honor due to His mother, or contemptuously disregarded the love owed to His brothers. His object here is highly to exalt His love toward those who are willing to bow the neck to His commands. The greatest honors and the most complete affections are that which we all owe to our mothers and brothers. If, therefore, He says that they who hear His word and do it are His mother and brethren, is it not plain to everyone that He bestows on those who follow Him a love thorough and worthy of their acceptance?"⁴⁷

John Chrysostom concurs with this, but adds, "The Virgin Mary was also caught up in the attempt by His brothers to restrain Him." Joseph and Simon may have intimidated her into this, since they were old enough to be her father⁴⁸. "They ought to have gone in and listened with the multitude; or if they were not so minded, they ought to have waited for Him to bring His discourse to an end, and then to have come near. Instead, they called Him out and did this before all, evincing a superfluous vanity, and wished to make it appear that with much authority they enjoin Him"⁴⁹. While Mary was full of grace (Luke 1:28), she may not have "understood in what the service and the greatness of her Son would consist. The Hebrew conceptions of the Messiah were still close to her; and natural (maternal) feelings caused her to be concerned for Him. This included preserving Him from labors and dangers which appeared excessive."^{49,50}

The Lord had taught consistently that spiritual kinship is stronger and higher than blood relationship. In sending the Twelve out two by two (Fall, 28 AD), He said, "For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:35-37). In addressing the rewards in store for the Twelve, He said, "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the Gospel's who shall not receive a hundred fold now in this time (houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

In the late Fall of 29 AD, all of Jesus' brothers had come to believe in Him. The Seventy, including Jesus' brothers Joseph, Simon and James, were sent out two by two to heal the sick and cast out demons just like the Twelve did a year earlier (Luke 10:1-20). Whereas the Twelve had been sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and not to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-6), no such restriction was placed on the Seventy. They were even instructed to eat whatever was set before them, implying non-kosher food (Luke 10:8).

After the Seventy had returned, a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!"

Jesus replied, "Indeed, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28). From Greek grammar, the meaning being conveyed is that the Lord's mother and those hearing the Word of God are parts of the same group and not contrary or contrasting entities. From the Scriptures we know that the Virgin Mary did hear the Word of God and keep it, and was blessed because she did (Luke 1:38, 45, 48). This also applies to others who do so. (For a similar Greek usage, compare Romans 10:18, Philippians 3:7-8).

In other words, the woman in the crowd called Mary blessed because of her Son. Jesus replied and called His mother blessed, but because she heard and obeyed.

The Crucifixion

Jesus' Crucifixion came as a shock to His followers, including His mother, in spite of the fact that He told them it would happen. He even prophesied His Crucifixion three times. The first occasion was just prior to the Transfiguration (August 29 AD), where He said that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, be killed, and be raised on the third day. Peter's reaction was to take the Lord aside and rebuke Him, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" The Lord replied, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:21-23). Jesus then proceeded to speak of His disciples' need to take up their cross.

Six days later (Matthew 17:1), Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop while Peter, James and John fell on their faces (Matthew 17:6). Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about His departure (i.e. His death) which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. If they weren't convinced that Jesus was the Son of God yet, they were now. Peter had confessed this just prior to the transfiguration (Matthew 16:16). Now He had proof!

The day following the Transfiguration (Luke 9:37) as they passed through Galilee, Jesus spoke to His disciples again about how He was going to be betrayed, killed and rise on the third day (Mark 9:30-31). His disciples were exceedingly sorrowful at this (Matthew 17:23) but they did not understand what He said and were afraid to ask (Mark 9:32). It was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it (Luke 9:45).

In the Spring of 30 AD as they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the Twelve aside and spoke again to them about how He was going to be betrayed, condemned, delivered to the Gentiles and crucified, yet would rise on the third day (Matthew 20:17-19). "But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken" (Luke 18:34). Shortly following this conversation, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and was

acclaimed by the multitudes saying, "Blessed is the King Who comes in the Name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38, Psalm 118:26).

The next day, Monday of Holy Week, Jesus drove out the money-changers and the vendors, not allowing anyone to carry wares through the Temple. He said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of thieves!" (Mark 11:15-17). The next day, the chief priests and elders confronted Jesus as He was teaching in the Temple, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). Jesus was recognized as neither a Levite nor a Rabbi and had no right, in their mind, to "cleanse" the Temple. In fact, He was a descendant of Aaron, and thus did meet that requirement (Numbers 8:14-26).

Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders sought to kill Him, so He left the city at night and lodged in Bethany at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Matthew 21:17). Besides the Twelve, many of the Seventy traveled with Him also (Acts 1:21-23) in addition to the Holy Women (Matthew 27:55-56). All these needed a place to spend the night, since most of them were Galileans. Mary and Martha accommodated them in Bethany, a few miles East of Jerusalem.

On Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem after dark to eat the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-19) according to the Mosaic Law (Exodus 12). This was Judas Iscariot's first opportunity to betray Him and the Jewish leaders' first opportunity to seize Him by night. They couldn't do so by day because they feared the multitudes who regarded Jesus as a prophet (Matthew 21:22, 46). Jesus even told Judas as they were eating the Passover meal at the Last Supper, "What you do, do quickly." Judas then left immediately (John 13:30) to go get the Jewish leaders (John 18:1-3).

When the rest of Jesus' followers returned to Jerusalem on Friday morning, Jesus' trial was well under way. He was being mocked, spit on, scourged, punched and ridiculed by the Romans, and the Jewish leaders had organized a lynch mob demanding His crucifixion (Mark 15:10-11). His back was raw and bleeding from the scourging and His face was bruised and swollen from the punching. He had on a crown of thorns, causing more bleeding, and a ridiculous purple robe as they mocked Him as "King of the Jews" (John 19:1-3). The Messiah, the Great Prophet who had been so invincible, whom the demons bowed to and whom the wind and the waves obeyed now seemed so helpless, miserable and ridiculed. And this all changed overnight!

The elder Simeon had prophesied this at the time of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple 33 years ago. He said to Mary, "This child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against; and a sword will pierce through your own soul also so as the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Cyril of Alexandria (4th-5th Century) interprets Simeon's words as follows: The fall of many in Israel refers to the Jewish leaders being broken and scattered like

chaff by the chief cornerstone. The sign spoken against refers to the cross, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23). The sword piercing Mary's soul was "the pain which she suffered for Christ, in seeing Him Whom she brought forth crucified and not knowing at all that He would be more mighty than death and rise again from the grave."⁵¹

John of Damascus (8th Century) stated, "But this blessed woman (Mary) who was deemed worthy of gifts that are supernatural, suffered those pains which she escaped at the birth, in the hour of the Passion, enduring from motherly sympathy the rending of the bowels. And when she beheld Him, Whom she knew to be God by the manner of His generation, killed as a malefactor, her thoughts pierced her as a sword."⁵²

As Jesus was led to Golgatha to be crucified, Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to help carry Jesus' cross when His strength gave out because of the beatings. At that time a great multitude followed Him and many women who mourned and lamented Him, (Luke 23:26-27). Among those women were the Virgin Mary and the other Myrrh-Bearing Women. Jesus spoke to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say 'Blessed are the barren'. For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:28-31). The days He was talking about was the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD by the same Romans who were now crucifying Him. If they do such injustice and cruelty to a green tree (Himself) with leaves and fruit and flowers who was completely innocent, what will they do to Israel and the Jewish leaders who are dry and fruitless wood⁵³ and who have called down His blood on themselves and their children? (Matthew 27:25).

Standing at the cross were the Virgin Mary, her sister-in-law Mary, the wife of Clopas (i.e. Alphaeus), Mary Magdalene (John 19:25), and Salome along with many other women (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40). The Apostle John was also there. Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, behold your son" and to John "Behold your mother. And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). From tradition, we learn that Mary lived in John's home the rest of her life. (This we cover in Part IV).

From this we might also ask why John was chosen ahead of Jesus' four stepbrothers. Jesus had prophesied to the Twelve the day before "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27, Zechariah 13:7). Two days later, the disciples were still huddled together (in the upper room where they ate the Passover meal) for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Since John was the only one of the Twelve and the Seventy who ventured near the cross, it was he who received the honor of caring for the Lord's mother. John's mother, Salome, the wife of Zebedee, was the Virgin Mary's

stepdaughter and was very close to her. Thus Jesus provided a good home for His mother for her later years.

The Burial

Friday, the day of the Crucifixion was the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Lord's Passover (Exodus 12:6, 18). Since days were reckoned from sundown to sundown (and not from midnight to midnight as we count them), Jesus and the Twelve ate the Passover meal on the 14th of Nisan, just after sundown on Thursday evening. This means that they ate the Passover meal at the beginning of the day according to their reckoning. The next day, the 15th of Nisan beginning at sundown on Friday was a Sabbath (even if it wasn't a Saturday) and no work could be done (Leviticus 23:5-8). In order that there might not be any dead bodies around on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate if the three people crucified might have their legs broken (so they might die quicker) and that they might be taken away (John 19:31). Since Jesus was already dead, the soldiers just pierced His side to satisfy the Jews that He was really dead.

At the same time, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin and also a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jewish leaders, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus (John 19:38). Pilate marveled that Jesus was already dead, since it usually took longer for crucifixion victims to die. When the centurion verified that He was already dead, Pilate granted Joseph the body (Mark 15:44-45).

Joseph was joined in this effort by Nicodemus, also a member of the Sanhedrin and who had come to Jesus by night knowing that He was "a teacher come from God; for no one could do these signs that He did unless God was with Him" (John 3:1-2). Together, Joseph and Nicodemus removed the nails from the body, took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in strips of linen. In this wrapping, they used a hundred pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes, similar to a mummy, and according to Jewish burial customs. They then laid Jesus' body in Joseph's new tomb that he had prepared for his own burial (John 19:39-41). Joseph and Nicodemus then rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and departed (Matthew 27:60).

Jesus' burial rite was common only for the wealthy. The procedure used was that the "body was covered in spices and in paste and these were tied to the body by layers of white *roller bandage*. The paste hardened and impregnated the bandages until a hard preservative mold or cocoon was formed about the body. A cap was put on the head, and often the jaw was held in position by a bandage under the chin"⁴³. When Peter and John came to the tomb on Easter morning, they "saw the linen cloths lying there" (John 20:5-6). This was the undisturbed cocoon; Jesus had passed through the cloth of the cocoon as He rose leaving them lying there. This is why John believed as soon as he saw them lying there -- they were undisturbed! (John 20:8).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (i.e. the Virgin Mary) perhaps with the others followed Joseph and Nicodemus and “observed the tomb and how His body was laid” (Luke 23:55) as they “sat opposite the tomb” (Matthew 27:61). “Then they returned (home) and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56).

The Virgin Mary thus witnessed the entire passion: the unjust trial, the beatings, the procession to Golgatha, the Crucifixion, His death, the piercing and the burial. In her grief, she undoubtedly also remembered how the Magi had brought as gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. She watched as Joseph used myrrh in Jesus’ burial rite and then she and the other women prepared similar oils containing myrrh.

Some have pointed out that the Gospel texts described many women weeping at Jesus’ Crucifixion (Luke 23:27). But the Virgin Mary was not described as weeping when she stood at the foot of the cross (John 19:25), at a distance from the cross (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40) or at the tomb on Easter morning (Matthew 28:1ff, Mark 16:1ff, Luke 24:1ff). Mary Magdalene was weeping at the tomb (John 20:11); however, the others are described as greatly perplexed at the tomb (Luke 24:4), but not weeping.

The Virgin Mary had had a similar experience when her Son was twelve, where she couldn’t find Him for three days. She was very anxious over this, and may have wept inside, but she held up quite well (Luke 2:41-49). She knew her Son was the Son of God due to Gabriel’s Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) and her Son’s own words (John 11:4, Matthew 27:43). She must have known that the Crucifixion was not the end of the story, but she probably didn’t know what to expect next.

Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary had watched Joseph and Nicodemus perform the burial rite using a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (Matthew 27:61, John 19:39-42). Yet they still returned immediately to where they were staying (in Bethany) to prepare additional spices and fragrant oils (Luke 23:56). They couldn’t do anything on the Sabbath because they were more than a “Sabbath day’s journey” away in Bethany (compare Acts 1:12, John 11:38). A “Sabbath day’s journey” was 2,000 cubits or about 1/2 mile while Bethany was about 2 miles away. But they seemed to be hurrying to get there at the crack of dawn on the day after the Sabbath. Why? What were they expecting? The burial rite was done and the tomb was sealed! Perhaps the Virgin Mary was expecting the unexpected, wondering what would happen, but being ready for anything.

Joseph, for his part in helping at Jesus’ burial was fettered and cast into prison by the Jewish leaders. The risen Lord appeared to him and brought him to believe in His Resurrection. The Jewish leaders then released him from prison and drove him from his fatherland. He traveled around the world, preaching the Gospel of Christ and took

this Good News to England, where he entered into rest in the Lord⁵⁴. In being driven from Israel, Joseph undoubtedly had to leave his wealth behind and live the same itinerant life that the fisherman and his Lord had lived.

The Resurrection

Early Easter morning, a number of women came to the tomb carrying the myrrh-laden spices they had prepared. As they came, some of them said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" "For it was very large" (Mark 16:3-4).

A common way of sealing a tomb was to have a circular disc-shaped stone roll in a track across the doorway. Sealing the tomb could be done quickly by a couple men because the stone rolled downhill into place. (See Reference 43). If the stone was four feet in diameter and one foot thick, it weighed about 2,200 pounds and could not easily be moved uphill away from the door of the tomb. To do that would take a team of men using levers and pry bars.

In the Gospel accounts of Easter morning, a confusing aspect is that there were four women named Mary involved, and two of them had a son name James. Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, was the mother of James, one of the Twelve Apostles; the Virgin Mary was the stepmother of James, the Lord's brother (Matthew 13:55, Galatians 1:19).

In Western church tradition, James the son of Alphaeus, and James, the Lord's brother, have sometimes been identified as the same person. From Eastern tradition James, the Lord's brother was Bishop of Jerusalem from 30-62 AD and never left the vicinity of Jerusalem. James, the Lord's brother, was martyred in front of the Temple in Jerusalem. He is the James who rendered the decision of the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15:13-19). Eastern tradition links James the Son of Alphaeus with evangelism abroad, especially in Egypt where he was martyred.

One helpful tip that can clear up some references to these two Marys is Matthew 13:55 where the Virgin Mary was generally referred to as the mother of James and Joseph (or Joses). This Joseph is also called Barsabas, Justus and Judas (Acts 1:23, 15:22). Therefore, (Matthew 27:56) the women looking on from afar at the cross were Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary (that is, Mary the mother of James and Joseph) and Salome (the wife of Zebedee and the Virgin Mary's step-daughter). Mary, the wife of Alphaeus (Clopas) was there also (John 19:25).

Matthew refers to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary", which is the Virgin Mary also from the context (Matthew 27:61 and 28:1).

Each of the four Gospels describes the events of Pascha morning from a different viewpoint. The roles of the eight Myrrh-Bearing Women at the cross and at the tomb are somewhat confusing and the eight probably arrived in different groups coming from different locations at different times.

By piecing together the four Gospel accounts, the probable sequence of events on Pascha morning was:

- Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary set out for the tomb when it was still dark and arrived at the first glimmer of daylight. They witnessed the angel descend with an earthquake and an appearance like lightning. The guards passed out in fear, but not the two Marys (Matthew 28:1-4).
- Mary Magdalene immediately ran to tell Peter and John leaving the Virgin Mary alone at the tomb (John 20:1-4).
- As the sun was rising, the other women arrived at the tomb, joining the Virgin Mary and saw the stone already rolled away (Mark 16:1-4, Luke 24:1-2).
- Going into the tomb, they spoke with the two angels (one inside, one outside) who had taken the appearance of young men. The angels told them to go tell the Apostles that the Lord had risen as He said He would. Then they remembered His words (Matthew 28:5-8, Mark 16:5-8, Luke 24:3-8).
- As the women left to tell the Apostles, the angels left, the guards recovered and reported what happened to the Sanhedrin, and Peter and John arrived. Peter and John did not report seeing any angels but believed when they saw the undisturbed, empty cocoon of the grave clothes lying there. They believed that He rose from the dead from the evidence⁵⁵, even before they understood the Scripture that said it would happen (John 20:5-10, Luke 24:12).
- As the Virgin Mary and the other women returned, they spoke to no one until they reached the Apostles. On the way, the Lord Himself met them (Matthew 28:9-10).
- Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene had returned to the tomb with Peter and John, but stayed there after they left. As she wept, she saw the two angels and met the risen Lord (John 20:11-18, Mark 16:9).
- Mary Magdalene rejoined the other women and she, the Virgin Mary and the other women reported all these things to the Apostles (Mark 16:10-11, Luke 24:9-11).
- During the day, Cleopas (Mary's husband) and Luke were traveling to Emmaeus and met the Lord on the way. They immediately returned to Jerusalem to the Apostles in the upper room (Luke 24:13-35).
- Also during the day, the Lord appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34).
- The Apostles (except for John and Peter) didn't believe the women until the Lord appeared to the ten of them in the upper room that evening (Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-23).

All the above occurred on the Sunday after the Sabbath (Pascha Sunday). Eight days later, or the following Sunday, the Lord appeared to the Eleven again in the Upper Room. This time Thomas was present (John 20:24-29).

The third time Jesus appeared to His disciples (John 21:14) occurred a little later at the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (i.e. Sea of Galilee). Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John (Zebedee) and two others (probably Andrew and one of the Seventy, since the others of the Twelve probably weren't fishermen) had gone fishing. With the Lord not present in their midst daily, they seem to have had a lack of direction and went back to their trade until they received direction. After that, Jesus appeared to 500 brethren at once. Then, He appeared to James, His stepbrother (1 Corinthians 15:6-7). Tradition holds that it was at this time that Jesus appointed James as Bishop of Jerusalem^{56,57}. James also wrote a Liturgy for the Early Church worship⁵⁸. Paul added that Jesus appeared to all the Apostles (i.e. the Twelve and the Seventy) after He appeared to James. Lastly, according to Paul, He appeared to Paul himself several years later on the road to Damascus (1 Corinthians 17:7-8, Acts 9:3-5).

All these appearances, except for the appearance to Paul, occurred in the forty days following the Resurrection. Following these appearances, Jesus ascended into heaven from their midst (Acts 1:9-11). Probably everyone, i.e. the 500, was present at the Ascension, including the Holy Women. After the Ascension, the Eleven, the Virgin Mary, the other women and Jesus' brothers continued with one accord in prayer and supplication in the Upper Room where they were staying (Acts 1:13-14).

John Chrysostom stated that it was his opinion that the Ascension occurred on a Sabbath, since Luke mentioned that the Mount of Olives was just a Sabbath-day's journey from Jerusalem (Acts 1:12)⁵⁹. Today the Orthodox Church celebrates Ascension Day, one of the Twelve Major Feast Days of the Church year, on a weekday and not on a Saturday.

The fifty days after Passover were numbered from the day after the Sabbath (Lev. 23:15-16), where the "Sabbath" was the 15th of Nisan. Thus Pentecost occurred 50 days after the 16th of Nisan, where the first day after the 16th of Nisan was the 16th of Nisan itself. In some areas, Pentecost was counted 50 days after the Sabbath that fell during Passover week⁶⁰. In the year 30 AD, the weekly Sabbath fell on the 15th of Nisan; so by either way of reckoning, Pentecost, the 50th day, was a Sunday. Thus, the 42nd day was also the weekly Sabbath. Luke's statement of "many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days" (Acts 1:3) is consistent with an Ascension Day Sabbath, where the forty days would then be numbered from the day after the Resurrection (17th Nisan) to the day before the Ascension.

During the days leading up to leading up to Pentecost, Peter stood up and proposed selecting someone to replace Judas Iscariot among the Twelve. Joseph, called

Barsabas or Justus, Jesus' oldest stepbrother, and Matthias were proposed since both were among the oldest of the Seventy and both had been involved "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John." Matthias was subsequently chosen by lot (Acts 1:15-26).

The choosing by lot was often done in the Temple before the Lord by the high priest using the Urim and Thummin -- literally lights and truth (see Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21). James, the Lord's brother, who had just been appointed Bishop of Jerusalem by the Lord^{56,57}, may have also taken the Urim and Thummin before the Lord at times to do this. Thus choosing Matthias by lot was considered a means of seeking the Will of God in this matter (compare Jonah 1:7).

Eusebius states that James "alone was permitted to enter into the Holy Place; for he wore not woolen but linen garments like the priests. (Compare Exodus 28:39-43, Leviticus 16:4, Ezekiel 44:15-19). And he was in the habit of entering alone into the Temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people. His knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God and asking forgiveness for the people"⁶¹.

As they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14), some of the things that the Virgin Mary had treasured in her heart (Luke 2:19, 33, 51) needed to come out so that they might understand the full impact of what Jesus had accomplished.

PART IV

PENTECOST TO HER DEATH

The Day of Pentecost occurred on either the 5th, 6th or 7th of Sivan depending on the sighting of the new moon to mark the beginning of the month⁶². In the year 50 AD, this occurred on a Sunday, the first day of the week. Thus there were back-to-back Sabbaths; the weekly Sabbath followed by the Feast of Pentecost, which was also a Sabbath.

Gathered together at this time were the Twelve, most of the Seventy⁶³, the Holy Women plus others totaling about 120 (Acts 1:15). They had been meeting in the upper room where the Twelve had eaten the Passover and Last Supper (Mark 14:15, Acts 1:13). Continuing in prayer and supplication, they were all with one accord in one place (Acts 1:14, 2:1).

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2). The sound was not just a wind blowing horizontally, but “from heaven.” This calls to mind the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night that led Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).

Jerusalem was crowded for the two day Sabbath (where no work could be done) and the sound of this “wind” created a curiosity among the multitude of devout Jews in town for the feast (Acts 2:6). The sound of the wind was localized to the house where the 120 were staying such that the multitude could pinpoint the source of the sound.

For 120 people to fit into the upper room indicates that the house was fairly large and well built. Access to upper rooms of houses or the roofs in general was by an outside staircase and also by a staircase from an inner courtyard. There was usually a railing around the edge of the first story roof (required by Law) such that people using the roof or the upper room wouldn’t accidentally fall off (Deuteronomy 22:8). The edge of the first story roof, just behind the railing presented an ideal spot for Peter to address a large gathering of people, the eleven standing with him shoulder-to-shoulder (Acts 2:14).

When the multitude was attracted to the house by the sound of the “wind”, they were confused. They recognized all or most as Galileans, but heard them speaking the language of their home country (Acts 2:6-7). The recognition as Galileans was easy. Galileans had a characteristic accent due to the way they pronounced some of the gutturals of the Hebrew alphabet²⁴ (Mark 14:70). But for several thousand people (Acts 2:41) to hear 120 other people speak in at least 13 different languages (Acts 2:9-10) all at the same time presents a question of logistics.

The Greek word for tongue (*glossa*) means both the fleshly part of the human mouth and a language as being controlled by the human tongue. Rufinus of Aquilea (4th Century) in his commentary on the Apostles' Creed stated that "after Pentecost, they were enabled to speak a variety of different languages such that they found no nation strange to them and no foreign speech beyond their comprehension"⁶⁴. Paul stated to the Corinthians that he spoke in languages (tongues) more than all of them (1 Corinthians 14:18). This was necessary for him. From the thirteen different languages mentioned in Acts 2:9-10, Paul evangelized people speaking seven of them on his various missionary journeys: people in Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Rome and Crete. Wherever Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus, etc. went, there was never a language barrier recorded in Acts.

The text states that when the sound from heaven came, "there appeared to them distributed languages (tongues), like as of fire, and one sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3). Thus the Holy Women and the Virgin Mary, as well as the Seventy, received this gift also. Later on the same thing happened to Cornelius and the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46).

John Chrysostom stated: "Observe how it is always *like us*; and rightly so, that you may have no gross sensible notion of the Spirit. Also, *as of a rushing, mighty wind*; therefore it was not a wind. For when the Spirit was to be made known to John (the Baptist), then it came upon the head of Christ in the form of a dove. But now, when a whole multitude was to be converted, it is *like as of fire*. And it sat upon each of them. This means that it remained and rested upon them. For the sitting is significant of settledness and continuance"⁶⁵.

If the languages rested on each of the 120 *like as of fire*, there was something visibly different, perhaps like the haloes or glowing spheres that are used in iconography around the heads of the saints. And they each began to speak with other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The multitude heard the noise of the "wind"; they saw the glow of the "fire" that sat upon each of the 120; and they heard them speaking in their own languages the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11). The multitude was both amazed and confused at the same time (Acts 2:6-7).

John Chrysostom pointed out that this occurred at the third hour or 9:00 a.m. This meant that it was broad daylight and the "fire" still stood out strongly in the sunlight.

As the multitude was both amazed and perplexed (v.12) and wondered what this meant, others mocked the 120 saying that they were drunk with new wine (v.13). Part of the Old Testament Pentecost liturgy was a new grain offering from the wheat harvest. Two loaves of bread were offered to the Lord with some animal sacrifices and some recently fermented wine (Leviticus 23:15-18). Thus, the mockers used the

illustrations from the Pentecost liturgy to describe the 120: they appeared to the mockers to be drunk.

There are occurrences in the Scripture similar to what happened on Pentecost, 30 AD. The Seventy Elders under Moses received the same Spirit that was upon Moses. When the Spirit came and rested upon them just outside the tent of meeting (the Tabernacle), they began to prophesy. However, they did so just that one time; never again (Numbers 11:17, 25).

That this prophesying was unusual behavior and quite noticeable can be seen from two of the seventy Elders who were not at the tent of meeting. They began to prophesy in the camp such that Joshua suggested that Moses restrain them. Moses replied, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:26-29).

King Saul experienced this "prophesying" on two separate occasions. The first time occurred just after the Prophet Samuel anointed him king. He met a group of prophets and "the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. When all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, 'What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?' " At this time God changed Saul's heart (1 Samuel 10:1-11).

The second time occurred while Saul was hunting down David to kill him. It was reported to Saul that David was with the Prophet Samuel at Ramah. Saul sent messengers three times to arrest David and bring him back. Each time the messengers came to Ramah, they began to prophesy along with the prophets who had Samuel presiding over them. And they returned to Saul empty-handed. Finally Saul, himself, went to Ramah and he, too, prophesied all day long, prostrating himself and stripped to his loin cloth (1 Samuel 19:18-24).

In other cases, the Apostle John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (i.e. Sunday) when he received a vision (Revelation 1:10). Again, when he was "in the Spirit", he was taken to heaven to see future things (Revelation 4:1, 2). Peter was in a trance while he was praying and saw heaven opened (Acts 10:10). Similarly, Paul was praying in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was in a trance and saw Christ speaking to him (Acts 22:17-18).

The Prophet Joel had predicted this: "And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind. And your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

Peter's reaction to the mockers on Pentecost was to confront them. They couldn't have gotten drunk because it was only 9:00 a.m., i.e. the third hour. (This implies that either the 120 had just concluded a Matins service or an all-night vigil.) Then Peter quoted the above passage from Joel 2:28 to explain what was happening (Acts 2:16-21). Peter further stated to them (Acts 2:17-36):

- They all knew Jesus of Nazareth that He was attested by miracles, wonders and signs.
- By God's foreknowledge, he was lawlessly crucified.
- God raised Him up, since death couldn't hold Him.
- We (the 120) were all witnesses of this.
- Now that Jesus is exalted to the Right Hand of God, we have received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit.
- God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and asked what they should do. Peter said: "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39). Three thousand souls were then added to their numbers.

John Chrysostom pointed out that the tone of Peter's address was one of gentleness and humility. He calls them "men of Judea" (v.14), "men of Israel" (v.22), "men and brothers" (v.29), "all the house of Israel" (v.36), and concludes with "the promise is to you and your children"⁶⁶ (v. 39).

Church Life Following Pentecost

Since the 3,000 new converts were from all over the world (Acts 2:8-10), and many were in Jerusalem just for Pentecost, many had no job, income or livelihood if they stayed. For the 120, or perhaps the 500 (1 Corinthians 15:6) to find food and lodging for this many people was a major task. Fortunately, the Holy Women had already been doing that for three years on a smaller scale.

As a result "all who believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Shortly afterward, as a result of Peter and John healing a 40 year old man who was born lame (Acts 3:1-2, 4:22), 5,000 more men believed (Acts 4:4). This 5,000 most likely represents residents of Jerusalem and vicinity since this occurred after the feast days and at the 9th hour of prayer (3:00 p.m.).

Referring to both the 3,000 and the 5,000, "the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Nor was there anyone

among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the Apostles' feet. And they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:32, 34).

Two examples of this are given: that of Barnabas and that of Ananias. Barnabas was the uncle of John Mark (Colossians 4:10) whose house was the meeting place for some of the Christians when Peter was imprisoned in 44 AD (Acts 12:12). He was a Levite born in Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and, according to tradition, his family owned property in Jerusalem around the Garden of Gethsemane⁶⁷. Barnabas sold his portion and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:37).

Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a similar piece of property, but kept back part of the proceeds, and laid the rest at the Apostles' feet as if it were everything. Because they lied to the Holy Spirit, they collapsed and died when confronted by Peter over their sin. In this incident, we note Peter's words to the effect that Ananias was not forced to give over all the money and that it was okay to withhold part of it. The problem was that he pretended it was all the proceeds (Acts 5:1-11).

This serves to illustrate the spirit of the church following Pentecost. Everyone contributed what he could. Ananias served to illustrate this by being a notable exception. "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer" (Acts 2:42). Also, they "continued daily with one accord in the Temple; and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). The "breaking of bread" refers to the first use of the Lord's Supper as part of the worship of the Church.

In the next few years, James, the Lord's brother, put together a Liturgy for the Jerusalem Church⁵⁸. The copy of the Liturgy of St. James that exists today probably includes a few changes made later and is quite long. In the 4th Century, Basil the Great and John Chrysostom shortened this liturgy down to what is still used today in the Eastern Church. The fact that James' liturgy is so long illustrates the statement in the Scripture that they continued in prayer.

John Chrysostom stated that all this implies a life of fasting and prayer; that is, a "hard life" with the rigors of fasting and denial of personal pleasure. "The poor man knew no shame; the rich, no haughtiness. This is gladness. The latter deemed himself the obliged and fortunate party; the others felt themselves as honored herein, and closely were they bound together."

"Two things there were which might deject them; their abstinent living and the loss of their property. Yet on both accounts did they rejoice! For who cannot love men of this character as common fathers? They conceived no malice toward each other; they committed all to the grace of God. Fear there was none, even though they had taken

their position in the midst of dangers (cf. John 20:19). By singleness (Acts 2:46), however, he denotes their entire virtue, far surpassing their contempt of riches, their abstinence, and their perseverance in prayer. For this also they offered pure praise to God. But observe also here how they immediately obtain their reward: that is in having favor with all the people (Acts 2:47). They were engaging and highly beloved”⁶⁸.

Two leaders by example in this regard were James, the Lord’s brother, and his stepmother, the Virgin Mary. Both had lived their entire life in fasting and prayer, and they continued in that way of life. Except now they had more visibility: James as Bishop of Jerusalem and Mary as the Queen Mother (where her Son was revered as King of Kings).

The Holy Women Split Up

Several things happened shortly after Pentecost, which caused the Myrrh-Bearing Women to go to different parts of the world. While they had become very close-knit, especially over the last three years, there were some things they were called to do.

Mary Magdalene: After the Ascension, Mary Magdalene lived in the same house as the Virgin Mary; that is, the Apostle John’s house. At this time, the Virgin Mary was about 48 years old, Mary Magdalene about 41 and John about 25⁶⁹. If Mary Magdalene had been a woman of means and able to help support Jesus’ three year ministry (Luke 8:3), this may mean that she, too, sold everything and laid it at the Apostles’ feet.

Shortly after Pentecost, Mary Magdalene was led by a strong desire to expose those who unjustly condemned Christ. Traveling to Rome, she asked to present her case before Tiberias Caesar^{69,70}. That Tiberias Caesar would actually listen to her suggests that she was a Roman citizen and had the right to appeal to Caesar (Acts 22:25-29, 25:7-12), and that she was a woman of means.

Appearing before Tiberias Caesar, she presented him with a red egg and announced “Christ is risen!” She told Tiberias the whole story of Pilate’s unjust trial, the release of a murderer and insurrectionist in His place and of the cowering of Pilate to the plotting of the Jewish leaders (Acts 3:13-15, Matthew 27:15-24). Tiberias also heard that Pilate had massacred some Samaritans unjustly and summoned him to Rome to answer for his actions. By the time Pilate arrived in Rome, Tiberias had died and Caius Caligula was Emperor. Pilate was unable to defend himself and was banished to Gaul where he committed suicide⁷¹. Pilate’s wife, Procula, came to believe in Christ and lived an ascetic life along with others of the Holy Women⁷². She had sent word to her husband during Jesus’ trial to “have nothing to do with that Just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him” (Matthew 27:19).

Mary Magdalene was renowned in the Early Church for her evangelistic efforts, both in Rome and later in Ephesus working with the Apostle John, and was referred to as "Equal to the Apostles"⁷⁰.

Mary and Martha of Bethany: At the time that Jesus raised their brother Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-46), the Jewish leaders began plotting to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus "because on account of him, many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus" (John 12:10-11). If Mary, Martha and Lazarus were wealthy and prominent citizens of Bethany, Lazarus presented a much greater difficulty to the Jewish leaders than the son of the poor widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16) or a child like Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:42-56). Being wealthy, Lazarus was also very influential.

Sometime after Pentecost, the Jews followed through with their plot to kill Lazarus. They put Lazarus, his two sisters and one Maximinus in a leaking boat with no oars, rudder, food or water and set them adrift at sea in the Mediterranean. From this point two different traditions have developed, perhaps due to the (mistaken) identification in Western tradition of Mary of Bethany (Lazarus' sister) with Mary of Magdala (Magdalene).

In one account, the boat landed on Cyprus. Lazarus was later ordained Bishop of Kition (or Larnaka) and died peacefully about 60 AD.

In the other account, the boat landed on the southeast shore of Gaul. Lazarus, Mary and Martha proceeded to evangelize the whole area. Lazarus was ordained Bishop of Marseilles and was martyred under Domitian (reign 81-96 AD). Mary, in this account, evangelized Provence and spent the last 30 years of her life in strict fasting and prayer in a cave in the Alps. Martha is remembered primarily for evangelizing Tarascon in France. In trying to reconcile the two accounts, it may be that the Lazarus in Gaul was really Simon the leper, who was Lazarus' friend (or relative)^{72,73} and at whose house Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with costly fragrant oil (Matthew 26:6-7, John 11:1-2). For more details, see the discussion for Palm Sunday.

Mary, the Wife of Cleopas: This Mary was the mother of two of the Twelve Apostles, James and Matthew, the sons of Alphaeus or Cleopas. Her husband was the brother of Joseph, the Virgin Mary's husband; thus she was the Virgin Mary's sister-in-law (John 19:25). Since Joseph died at the age of 111 years just before Jesus' public ministry, Cleopas was probably quite old when the risen Lord appeared to him and Luke on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-18). Tradition is silent regarding Cleopas after Pentecost, indicating that he probably died shortly thereafter, leaving Mary a widow.

Spanish tradition indicates that Mary, the wife of Cleopas, accompanied James, the son of Zebedee (Her niece Salome's son) to Spain. She was buried with great honor at Compostela in Spain after she died⁷⁴. James, the son of Zebedee, returned to

Jerusalem in 44 AD and was martyred by Herod to please the Jews (Acts 12:1-3). Some accounts state that James' body was returned to Spain (where he had been working) for burial with great honor.^{75,76}

Joanna, Salome and Susanna: Not as much is known about these three women. Since Joanna's husband, Chuza was the steward of Herod Antipas (Luke 8:3), Joanna most likely remained in the area of Tiberias along the Sea of Galilee where Herod's palace was located. After Herod died in 39 AD, she may have gone elsewhere.

Salome, being very close to the Virgin Mary, probably remained in the Jerusalem area with her son, John, at whose house the Virgin Mary was staying.

James, Bishop of Jerusalem

At the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD, James, the Lord's brother, is clearly the authority figure in Jerusalem. After everyone had spoken, James answered saying, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God..." (Acts 15:13, 19). Then it pleased the Apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men: Joseph (Barsabas), i.e. James' brother, and Silas with a letter to the Gentile churches documenting this.

We see James in this position much earlier also. Paul's conversion was about 34 AD. (For the reasoning behind this, see the discussion for Galatians 1:11-19, the 20th Sunday after Pentecost.) Three years after this (or 37 AD) Paul went to Jerusalem, but had to leave after 15 days due to an assassination plot (Galatians 1:18, Acts 9:26-30). During those 15 days, Paul only saw Peter and James, the Lord's brother; he saw none of the rest of the Twelve (Galatians 1:19). Later on, he saw the Apostle John and remarked that James, the Lord's brother, Peter and John were the pillars of the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). That this is James, the Lord's brother, and not James, the brother of John, is clear from Acts 12:2. James, the brother of John, was martyred by Herod in 44 AD, right after returning from Spain, or four years before the Council of Jerusalem. James, the son of Alphaeus, was away evangelizing Egypt according to tradition. For more details, see Appendix A.

Eusebius, the 4th Century church historian, wrote concerning James: "Then James, whom the ancients surnamed the Just on account of the excellence of his virtue, is recorded to have been the first to be made bishop of the church of Jerusalem. This James was called the brother of the Lord because he was known as a son of Joseph. But Clement in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes⁷⁷ writes thus: 'For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Savior, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just bishop of Jerusalem'. But the same writer, in the seventh book of the same work, relates also the following things concerning him. 'The Lord, after his resurrection, imparted knowledge to James the Just and to John and

Peter, and they imparted it to the rest of the Apostles, and the rest of the Apostles to the Seventy, of whom Barnabas was one.' Paul also makes mention of the same James the Just, where he writes, 'Other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother'"⁷⁸ (Galatians 1:19).

Eusebius also went into great detail about the martyrdom of James. "But after Paul, because of his appeal to Caesar, had been sent to Rome by Festus, the Jews were frustrated in their hope of entrapping him by the snares which they had laid for him. They then turned against James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopate at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the Apostles. They undertook the following daring measures against him. Leading him into their midst they demanded of him that he should renounce faith in Christ in the presence of all the people. But, contrary to the opinion of all, with a clear voice, and with greater boldness than they had anticipated, he spoke out before the whole multitude and confessed that our Savior and Lord Jesus is the Son of God. But they were unable to bear longer the testimony of the man who, on account of the excellence of ascetic virtue, and of piety which he exhibited to his life, was esteemed by all as the most just of men, and consequently they slew him. Opportunity for this deed of violence was furnished by the prevailing anarchy, which was caused by the fact that Festus had died just at this time in Judea, and that the province was thus without a governor and head. The manner of James' death has been already indicated by the above-quoted words of Clement, who records that he was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and was beaten to death with a club. But Hegesippus⁷⁹, who lived immediately after the apostles, gives the most accurate account in the fifth book of his Memoirs. He writes as follows: 'James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the Apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Savior to the present day, for there were many that bore the name of James. He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank neither wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place, for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people. His knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people. Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, *Bulwark of the people* and *Justice*, in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him."

"As many as believed (among the Jews) did so on account of James. Therefore when many even of the rulers believed (Acts 15:5), there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for Jesus as the Christ. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, 'We entreat you, restrain the people, for they are gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat you to persuade all that have come to the feast of the

Passover concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in you. For we bear you witness, as do all the people, that you are just, and do not respect persons (Matthew 22:16). Do therefore persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:5), that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that your words may be readily heard by all the people. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, are come together on account of the Passover.’ The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple. Crying out to him, they said: ‘O just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus?’ And he answered with a loud voice, ‘Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven’ (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62). And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, ‘We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.’ And they cried out, saying, ‘Oh! Oh! The Just Man is also in error.’ And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, ‘Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us; therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings’ (Isaiah 3:10). So they went up and threw down the Just Man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, ‘I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34). And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, (Jeremiah 35) cried out, saying, ‘Stop; what are you doing? The Just One prays for you.’ And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the Just Man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them.”

“These things are related at length by Hegesippus, who is in agreement with Clement. James was so admirable a man and so celebrated among all for his justice, that the more sensible even of the Jews was of the opinion that this was the cause of the siege of Jerusalem. This happened to them immediately after his martyrdom for no other reason than their daring act against him. Josephus, at least, has not hesitated to testify this in his writings, where he says⁸⁰, “These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, that is called the Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man”⁸¹.

One might object to the opinions of Eusebius, Hegesippus, and Clement and say that the destruction of Jerusalem was due to the treatment of Christ by the Jewish leaders. And the Lord foretold this many times. However, just as the preaching of Jonah

and the repentance of the Ninevehites delayed destruction for about 100 years, so the prayers of James and the turning of the hearts of many of the Scribes and Pharisees (Acts 21:20, 6:7) may have delayed the destruction of Jerusalem until 70 AD.

Eusebius went on to say: "After the martyrdom of James and the conquest of Jerusalem, which immediately followed, it is said that those of the Apostles and disciples of the Lord that were still living came together from all directions. They gathered with those that were related to the Lord according to the flesh (for the majority of them also were still alive) to take counsel as to who was worthy to succeed James. They all with one consent pronounced Simeon, the son of Clopas, of whom the Gospel also makes mention (Luke 24:18, John 19:25), to be worthy of the episcopate of that parish. He was a cousin, as they say, of the Savior. For Hegesippus records that Clopas was a brother of Joseph^{79,97}.

Thus James was very highly regarded, both among the Christians and among the Jews who rejected Christ. How did James come to be the person he was? One answer is that he imitated his stepbrother and Lord. James was 8-10 years older than Jesus. Imitation of Christ was possible for James when he was in his 20's; but before that, credit for James' training in righteousness can be laid at the feet of his stepmother, Mary, and also at the feet of his father, Joseph. Since Joseph was away from home much of the time building houses⁸³, Mary had the primary responsibility for the young children. Since Mary's lifestyle from the time she was a toddler was one of prayer and fasting and devotion to God in the Temple, it was just natural for the young James to imitate her. And it is out of this life of devotion to God that James wrote his liturgy for the Jerusalem Church.

The First Seven Deacons

At first, when everyone had everything in common, people sold their possessions, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the Apostles' feet. And they (the Apostles) distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:34-35, 2:44-45). Over the next year or so, some of the Holy Women undoubtedly had a hand in the distribution since that was what they did during the Lord's three year ministry.

However, if Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha of Bethany and Mary the wife of Alphaeus were leaving town because they were called to other things, or because they were forced to do so, this left a hole in the operation that others needed to fill. During transitions, something often gets overlooked. In this case, it was the Greek-speaking widows who were overlooked and neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).

"The Twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said: 'It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren,

seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word' "(Acts 6:2-4).

At this point, it is instructive to look closely at the Scriptures to see both what it says and what it doesn't say. If the issue was for the Twelve to leave the Word of God and serve tables, this implies that they weren't serving tables at that time. They were busy teaching the people daily on Solomon's porch (Acts 3:11, 4:1-3, 5:12, 20-21) and in every house (Acts 5:42). But it also says that the Twelve "distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:35) of the proceeds of the things that were sold. This seems to make a compelling case for the distribution to have been delegated to someone, and the Holy Women stand out as the most likely probability. Regarding delegation, John Chrysostom mentioned that the Twelve "had been taught by Moses' example (Numbers 11:14-17, Exodus 18:14-27) not to undertake the management of everything by themselves"⁸².

Some have pointed out that these first seven are not called deacons in the Scripture. This is correct, but the Greek word *diakonos* is used to describe their activities. For example, the widows were "neglected in the daily deaconing", i.e. *diakonia* (Acts 6:1). The Twelve did not think it desirable that they should "leave the Word and deacon, i.e. *diakonein*, tables" (Acts 6:2). Instead the Twelve gave themselves "continually to prayer and to the deaconing, i.e. *diakonia*, of the Word (Acts 6:4).

Later on as the Church developed, the office of deacon as distinct from that of a presbyter (or priest) and bishop came into being. In this context, a deacon has a defined liturgical role assisting at the Altar that these first seven aren't mentioned as having. So they are not necessarily deacons in the sense that we know deacons today. Chrysostom stated that their designation was neither deacon nor presbyter⁸². However, in Orthodox ordinations, a presbyter is first ordained as a deacon, then as a presbyter. And a true bishop still considers himself as a deacon at heart. (Compare 2 Timothy 4:5, Titus 1:7, Colossians 1:23, 25).

According to tradition, all seven of these men had been members of the Seventy (lesser) Apostles⁸³ that Jesus sent out two by two in late 29 AD (Luke 10:1-20). Chrysostom pointed out that they were not chosen by lot -- although that could have been done -- but the Apostles wanted the testimony of the people. The fixing of the number, and the ordaining them, and the setting them for this kind of business rested with the Apostles. But the choice of the men they left to the people, just as God left it to Moses to choose elders from those he knew (Numbers 11:16).

Chrysostom also pointed out that these men needed a great deal of wisdom in discernment. "This business was not simply handed over to them without further ceremony, but the Apostles prayed over them, that power might be given to them. But

observe, I pray you, if there were need of seven men for this, great in proportion must have been the sums of money that flowed in, great in proportion also the number of widows. So then, the prayers were not made in an off-hand way, but with much deliberate attention; and this office, as well as preaching, was thus brought to good effect"⁸².

It is interesting to note that the complaint against the Hebrews by the Greek widows that they were neglected in the daily deaconing resulted in the ordaining of seven men with Greek names to oversee the entire daily deaconing. These men were probably Greek speaking Jews except for Nicholas who may have been a Gentile proselyte (Acts 6:5). The Greek widows were also Greek speaking Jews; their being left out was not intentional, but it was rectified rather dramatically. Care and attention for the poor was a very high priority in the early Church (Galatians 2:10).

The Stoning of Stephen

At this time, "the Word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the Faith" (Acts 6:7). These priests were Levitical priests who ceased serving under the Old Covenant priesthood, becoming obedient to the direction of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This does not imply that they automatically became presbyters (or priests) in the church, although some may have done so. This is referred to in Hebrews: "We have an altar from which those who serve the Tabernacle (i.e. Old Covenant) have no right to eat" (Hebrews 13:10). Chrysostom made it a point to say that even the High Priest under the Old Covenant was not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper (Homily xxxiii on Hebrews 13).

Following his ordination, "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Philip did so also. "The multitudes (in Samaria) with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed" (Acts 8:6-7). Thus the seven "deacons" did more than just serve tables.

When the Lord sent out the seven "deacons" as part of the Seventy, the seven "deacons" performed similar miracles (Luke 10:1-20). But upon their return they were again restrained. Now they were re-commissioned to do that by the ordination of the Twelve. In their mission with the Seventy, they were not limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel as were the Twelve (Matthew 10:5-6). A similar situation occurred with Philip and Stephen. Philip evangelized the Samaritans and Stephen ran into a dispute with the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Acts 6:9).

The term “Freedmen” is of Latin origin and refers to Jews who had been taken captive by Pompeii (mid 1st Century BC) and later set free. Philo, the early 1st Century Jewish philosopher, stated that they built a synagogue in Jerusalem at their own expense which they frequented when they were in Jerusalem⁸⁴. This synagogue became a home away from home for Greek speaking and Latin speaking Jews.

Some people from the synagogue of the Freedmen (that is, some from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia) got into a dispute with Stephen. Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. Since the Apostle Paul was from Cilicia (Acts 22:3), and since he was prominent in Stephen’s death (Acts 7:58), he may have been one of Stephen’s antagonists in this dispute. According to tradition, Paul and Stephen were kinsmen⁸⁵.

Unable to refute Stephen, they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, set up false witnesses, seized Stephen and brought him to the Council; i.e. the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:11-13). Stephen gave a very eloquent defense (Acts 6, 7) during which “all who sat in the council, looking steadfast at him, saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). In other words, his face glowed, as did Moses’ face after Moses spoke with the Lord (Exodus 34:34-35). In the midst of this unjust trial, Stephen concluded his defense by referring to the council, itself, as stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears (Deut. 10:16). They resisted the Holy Spirit, murdered the prophets and the Messiah just like their fathers did. They received the Law by the direction of angels, but (as this Council attests) they haven’t kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

As they gnashed their teeth at him, he had a vision of Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God. “‘Look!’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the Right Hand of God!’ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord. And they cast him out of the city and stoned him” (Acts 7:56-58).

According to tradition, the Virgin Mary witnessed Stephen’s martyrdom, standing at a distance with her nephew, the Apostle John, and was praying for Stephen as he was being stoned. This occurred exactly a year after Pentecost and Gamaliel took Stephen’s body secretly (Acts 8:2) and buried him in his own ground⁸⁵, similar to the way Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did with the body of Jesus (John 19:38-42).

The death of Stephen began a major bloodbath in Jerusalem. Nicanor, another of the seven “deacons” was martyred that same day also, along with 200 others in short succession⁸⁶. According to tradition, Nicodemus died at this time also as he and others were lamenting the death of Stephen, Nicanor and the others. The “great lamentation” (Acts 8:2) over the death of Stephen encompassed more than just Stephen. Gamaliel buried Nicodemus in the same crypt as Stephen, and was later buried there himself⁸⁷.

“Now Saul (Paul) was consenting to Stephen’s death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the Apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:1, 3). In Paul’s testimony nearly 30 years later, he admitted that he forced them to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). This persecution lasted for about three years, or until 34 AD when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. With Paul not leading the attack against the Christians, “the Churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified” (Acts 9:31). For more details on Paul’s early life, see the epistle lesson for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost.

The Twelve Cast Lots

The last mention of the Twelve as being together in Jerusalem is at the ordination of the seven “deacons” (Acts 6:1-7). At the martyrdom of Stephen and the others, which occurred one year after Pentecost⁸⁵, the saints “were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles” (Acts 8:1). It is significant that Luke doesn’t refer to the Twelve here and subsequently, since some of them had already left for missions abroad. For a summary of where they went, see Appendix A, “Whatever Happened to the Twelve and the Seventy.”

To determine who went where, the Twelve divided up the world into different regions, and then cast lots as to who went to which region⁸⁸. For example, Thomas’ lot was India and the Far East; John’s lot was Ephesus and Asia Minor; Andrew’s lot was Russia plus other areas and Matthew’s lot was Africa.

The Virgin Mary was said to have requested one lot also in the preaching of the Gospel. Her lot came to be Iberia (Georgia in Southern Russia), but she never went there herself. Instead Nina, called “Equal to the Apostles” and “The Enlightener of Georgia” went there with the Virgin Mary’s blessing.

The Role of the Queen Mother

To understand Mary’s role in the Early Church better, it is helpful to understand the customary role of the Queen Mother in ancient times. For there to be a Queen Mother at all, the king would have to have died (or relinquished the throne) such that his son was reigning in his place.

One time this happened when King David was an old man. David had promised that Solomon, the son of Bathsheba would reign in his place (1 Kings 1:13, 17, 30). Realizing that David was bedridden and near death, Adonijah, the son of Haggith (one of David’s wives - 2 Samuel 3:4) exalted himself saying, “I will be king” (1 Kings 1:5). Getting Joab, the commander of the army and Abiathar, the high priest, to side with

him, Adonijah set himself up as heir to the throne. When David heard about it, however, he had Nathan the prophet and Zadok the priest anoint Solomon king and organize a parade through Jerusalem.

This put Adonijah in the role of a traitor and usurper. Adonijah later admitted that the kingdom belonged to Solomon from the Lord and that he almost had it for himself. When he begged for mercy from Solomon, Solomon sent him home and did not execute him.

After David died, Adonijah came to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and now the Queen Mother, and asked her to ask Solomon for the hand of Abishag, King David's nurse, in marriage (1 Kings 2:13-17). Abishag had been selected to care for David in his old age and even to lie next to him to help him keep warm (1 Kings 1:1-4). This meant Abishag was like one of David's concubines and for David's sons to request her for a wife was to request incest (compare 1 Corinthians 5:1).

When Bathsheba went to present this request to King Solomon, Solomon rose to meet her, bowed down before her and then set her on a throne at his right hand. Then Solomon told his mother to present her request, "for I will not refuse you" (1 Kings 2:19-20). Solomon had to refuse her, however, because her request violated Mosaic Law (Leviticus 18:6-29), even though Abishag never had sexual relations with David.

The Queen Mother was not always influential for the good of the nation. King Asa (Solomon's great grandson) was trying to do what was right in the sight of the Lord. However, his mother Maacah was busy making a horrible image as an Asherah. Asa removed his mother from the position of Queen Mother and destroyed the Asherah (2 Chronicles 15:16, 1 Kings 15:13).

A similar situation occurred with Asa's great grandson, Ahaziah. The Queen Mother then was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri, King of Israel. Omri was the father of the evil King Ahab who fought against the Prophet Elijah. As Queen Mother, Athaliah counseled her son to walk in the ways of the house of Ahab (2 Chronicles 22:2-4).

Even in matters of state, the Queen Mother had a role. For example, when King Jehoiachin was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the dignitaries that went out to meet Nebuchadnezzar were Jehoiachin, the Queen Mother, his servants, his captains and his officials, in that order (2 Kings 24:12; Jeremiah 22:24-26).

Table I is a list of the kings of Judah from Solomon to the Babylonian captivity. For every one of these kings, the Queen Mother is also mentioned in the summary statement of his reign. [There is one exception: King Ahaz of Judah who apparently had no Queen Mother; that is, she died before he became king.] One might note also

that the king's wife is not mentioned in these summary statements since the king often had more than one wife. But the king had only one mother!!

These examples illustrate the influence of the Queen Mother. She was regarded as a very important person, worthy of a throne, whose requests will be granted by the King. Since Jesus was universally regarded in the Church as the King of Kings (Revelation 19:16, Daniel 2:47, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:36), Mary, as His mother, held a similar place of honor. She was the Queen Mother just as was Bathsheba during the reign of Solomon, Maacah during the reign of Asa, and Athaliah during the reign of Ahaziah. Whereas numerous Queen Mothers during the history of Judah were not necessarily devoted to godliness, Mary was.

The sons of Korah in Psalm 45 also prophesied Mary's role as Queen Mother. Verses 6 and 7 are quoted in Hebrews as referring to the Son of God: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" (Psalm 45:6-7, Hebrews 1:8-9). But then verse 9 states, "Kings' daughters are among Thy noble ladies; at Thy right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir" (Psalm 45:9). Since Jesus never married, the "queen" can only refer to Mary, the Queen Mother.

Of interest also are two letters from Ignatius, later Bishop of Antioch (martyred c. 107 AD), to the apostle John and one letter from Ignatius to the Virgin Mary and her reply⁸⁹. These letters had to have been written prior to Ignatius' ordination as Bishop (late 60's AD) since the letters address the Virgin Mary who died c. 55 AD. Some critics discount these letters as later forgeries due to a different literary style than the letters genuinely attributed to Ignatius in 107 AD. This is really inadequate ground for rejection. (1) A person's literary style can change over 60 years. (2) These letters were drafted by Ignatius himself while the "genuine" ones from c. 107 AD were dictated to a scribe while Ignatius was being led as an old man to Rome to be fed to the lions.

TABLE I
REFERENCES TO THE QUEEN MOTHER

<u>KING</u>	<u>FATHER</u>	<u>MOTHER</u>	<u>REF</u>	<u>GOOD/EVIL</u>
Solomon	David	Bathsheba	1 Kings 2:19	G - E
Rehoboam	Solomon	Naamah the Ammonitess	1 Kings 14:21, 31	E
Abijam (Abijah)	Rehoboam	*Maacah, daughter of Abishalom	1 Kings 15:2	E
Asa	Abijam	Maacah, daughter of Abishalom	1 Kings 15:10	G
Jehoshapat	Asa	Azubah, daughter of Shilhi	1 Kings 22:42 2 Chr. 20:31	G
Joram (Jehoram)	Jehoshaphat	Daughter of Ahab, King of Israel	1 Kings 22:50 2 Kings 8:16-18	E
Ahaziah	Jehoram	Athaliah, granddaughter of Omri, King of Israel	2 Kings 11:1; 8:25,26 2 Chr. 22:2	E
Joash (Jehoash)	Ahaziah	Zibiah of Beersheba	2 Kings 12:1 2 Chr. 24:1	G
Amaziah	Joash	Jehoaddin (Jehoaddam) of Jerusalem	2 Kings 12:21, 14:2	G
Azariah (Uzziah)	Amaziah	Jecoliah (Jechiliah) of Jerusalem	2 Kings 15:2, 13 2 Chr. 26:3	G
Jotham	Uzziah	Jerushah, daughter of Zadok	2 Kings 15:33 2 Chr. 27:1	G
Ahaz	Jotham		2 Kings 16:1	
Hezekiah	Ahaz	Abi (Abijah), daughter of Zechariah	2 Kings 18:2 2 Chr. 24:1	G
Manassah	Hezekiah	Hepzibah	2 Kings 21:1	E

* Micaiah, daughter of Uriel of Gibeah 2 Chr. 13:2

TABLE I continued

<u>KING</u>	<u>FATHER</u>	<u>MOTHER</u>	<u>REF</u>	<u>GOOD/EVIL</u>
Amon	Manassah	Meshulleneth, daughter of Haruz of Jotbah	2 Kings 21:19	E
Josiah	Amon	Jedidah, daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath	2 Kings 22:1	G
Johoahaz	Josiah	Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah	2 Kings 23:31	E
Eliakim (Johoiakim)	Josiah	Zibidah, daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah	2 Kings 23:36	E
Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)	Jehoiakim	Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem	2 Kings 24:8	E
Mattaniah (Zedekiah) (Jehoiachin's uncle)		Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah	2 Kings 24:18	E

The content of the four letters is very brief. The first letter to the Apostle John asked John to come speak to the Church in Antioch and to bring the Virgin Mary with him, since she was living in his house (John 19:26-27). Many of the women in Antioch wanted to meet Mary. Some even made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to meet her and one lady named Salome stayed with her for five months. This Salome gave a glowing report in Antioch of Mary as a model of godliness and good works. In the second letter, Ignatius requested John's leave to visit Jerusalem himself to see first the Virgin Mary, and also James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19) and Bishop of Jerusalem.

In the letter to the Virgin Mary, Ignatius asked her about things related by John concerning Jesus that only she would know; that is, the things she treasured in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). Mary replied that she will come to Antioch with John soon, and encouraged Ignatius to stand fast in the Faith and not to let the fierceness of the persecution move him.

The Virgin Mary's Journeys

In about 44 AD, Herod began to persecute the Church, killing James (Zebedee) with the sword (Acts 12:1). He also arrested Peter since he saw it pleased the Jews; but an angel let Peter out of prison at night (Acts 12:3, 7). Peter stopped by at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where everyone was praying for him. There he told them he was okay; but that he was leaving town, and they should be sure to tell James the Bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). From there Peter made his way first to Caesarea and eventually to Antioch. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch c. 46 AD while Peter was still there (Galatians 2:11-15, Acts 11:25-26).

John and the Virgin Mary left Jerusalem also at the time of Herod's persecution. Since John's lot in the evangelization of the world was Asia Minor, they sailed for Ephesus. There they stayed until the death of Herod (Acts 12:20-23). To put this in context, the Apostle Andrew had already been to Ephesus briefly, but the Apostle Paul would not arrive until 52 AD, at the end of his Second Missionary Journey. Since Herod died not too long after he killed James, John and the Virgin Mary most likely stayed in Ephesus less than two years. As was her custom, the Virgin Mary spent her time in prayer, fasting and meditation on the Scriptures.

A few years later in the early 50's, after Mary returned to Jerusalem following the death of Herod, she heard that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha desired to see her very much. Lazarus had been ordained Bishop of Cyprus by the Apostle Barnabas, but did not dare enter Jerusalem for fear of the Jews. It had been over 20 years since the Jewish leaders had tried to kill him; but they still sought to do so.

To solve this dilemma, Mary wrote to Bishop Lazarus asking him to send a ship for her so that she might visit him on Cyprus. This he did and the Virgin Mary, the

Apostle John and some others set sail for Cyprus. Out at sea, however, they encountered a violent storm that took them far off course and up to the northern part of the Aegean Sea near Macedonia. There, they put in to the port of Clemes on Athos at the tip of the 50-mile long peninsula. At this location today, there are a number of famous monasteries that trace their origin to the visit of the Virgin Mary in the early 50's, and most of the information we have concerning the Virgin Mary's voyage comes from these monasteries⁹⁰.

At that time, the population of Athos consisted of young virgins dedicated to the goddess Diana who were expected to become priestesses to serve in the Greek temples. Also on Athos was a large gold and ivory statue of Jupiter on top of the 6,600-foot peak of Mt. Athos. This statue was mentioned in ancient history accounts of Plutarch and Anaximander as having large gems for eyes; it was used for navigation by seamen. Also present on the peninsula was a huge temple of Apollo where fortune telling, divining and witchcraft took place.

When Mary and John arrived at the port of Clemes, the huge statue of Jupiter fell and shattered to pieces with a thunderous noise. At the same time, the ground shook and idols and pagan statues in the temple and in all the shrines fell prostrate and broke in pieces. During the chaos of this collapse, a voice was heard saying, "Men of Apollo, all of you, go to Clemes Harbor and welcome Mary, the mother of the Great God Jesus." Thus the demons inhabiting the idols were forced against their will to proclaim the truth.

Seeing the destruction around them, all the inhabitants of Athos hurried to Clemes Harbor to meet the Virgin Mary. They received her, the Apostle John and the others with great honor and brought them to a large meeting hall. There they asked her to explain who was the God that she bore and they inquired diligently into the mystery of the Incarnation. They also wondered at how Mary, a Hebrew woman, could explain everything to them in Greek. (This was due to the gift of languages that Mary received along with the 120 at Pentecost.)

All this resulted in the entire group of the residents of Athos accepting the Christian Faith. They were all then catechized and baptized into the Faith. During their stay on Athos, Mary and the Apostle John performed many miracles among the new converts. Before leaving, they appointed a leader and teacher for the newly illumined residents of Athos from among their traveling party. In addition, Mary prayed for the blessing of Athos, that the Lord would have mercy on it and keep it free from harm until the end of the world along with its inhabitants.

Having blessed Athos, Mary, John and the others set sail for Cyprus. Meanwhile, Lazarus had grown very concerned about Mary's delay, assuming it was because of a storm, and not knowing that all was well. When the ship arrived, there

was great rejoicing and thanksgiving. Mary presented Bishop Lazarus with an ornophorion and spimanikia (part of a bishop's vestments) that she had made. And Mary and John shared the good news of all that happened on Athos.

After staying on Cyprus for a short time, Mary blessed the Christians there and returned to Jerusalem with John and the others.

Animosity in Jerusalem

Shortly after Mary and John returned from Cyprus, Mary Magdalene also returned to Jerusalem from her evangelism in Rome and elsewhere. Since she had been very close to the Virgin Mary during Jesus' three-year ministry, she stayed with the Apostle John for several years until the Virgin Mary's death. The Virgin Mary was now in her early 70's and Mary Magdalene was in her late 60's.

Earlier in the Virgin Mary's life, it had been possible for her to live a quiet life of fasting and prayer without a great deal of interruption. But during the last few years of her life, men and women journeyed from all parts of the world to visit her. One such visitor was Dionysius the Aeropagite and Damaris, his wife (Acts 17:34). He had been a member of the Greek Supreme Court (the Aeropagus) in Athens and was converted by the Apostle Paul on Paul's Second Missionary Journey in about 51 AD. He was very impressed by the saintly grace of both Mary and John⁹¹.

Mary was accustomed to taking many of the visitors to Jerusalem around the city, showing them the places where her Son was born, where He had walked and preached, where He was scourged and carried His cross, and where He was crucified and buried. The effect of this was a substantial undermining of the Gnostic heresies going around in the First Century. These heresies taught that Jesus was divine and not really a man. Yet here was His mother demonstrating all the very human events in His life. From Mary's custom, which included kneeling and burning incense at the various sites, it became customary in later centuries to make pilgrimages to the holy sites and to offer up prayers there.

Word of Mary's activities was reported to the chief priests and scribes, and they sought an opportunity to seize her and kill her. Placing guards at the various sites, they gave them orders that no Christians may approach; if the Virgin Mary were to approach, she was to be slain. This did not deter Mary; she came anyway and prayed that the guards would not notice. Somehow, their recognition was withheld and she continued unmolested.

They also tried to slander the Virgin Mary by saying that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier and that Mary was a loose woman. This was

obviously a lie since everyone in Nazareth knew her and everyone else knew everyone's family matters.

In addition, this lie neglected to account for Jesus' respect from everyone and how He was asked to read the Scriptures and to preach in the synagogues (Luke 4:16, Matthew 12:9-10). From the Mosaic Law, "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:2). Would the Scribes and Pharisees have missed that opportunity to ridicule Jesus if it were true?

THE DORMITION OF MARY

The earliest documents describing details of Mary's death are attributed to the Apostle John⁹³ and Joseph of Arimathea⁹⁴. However, these documents are nowhere near the state of preservation of the canonical New Testament texts. Whereas the earliest New Testament manuscripts date from the 4th Century, the earliest manuscripts regarding Mary's death date from the 11th Century. Three versions and many manuscripts exist of these documents, one version in Greek, two versions in Latin and they differ substantially from each other. Since Epiphanius (4th Century) refers to both the Greek and Latin versions⁹⁵, we know that they were both very early documents and represent the current accounts of events at that time. However, they cannot be taken as Scripture any more than Josephus' writings can. In the following, they will be treated as historical documents and only points of agreement will be mentioned. These details will be supplemented with Scriptural readings used over the centuries for the Orthodox Feast Day of the Dormition of Mary. Other writers from the 4th Century on give more details regarding the Dormition, elaborating on some of the earlier documents. This additional information will not be considered here in the interest of simplicity.

As Mary reached her mid 70's, she was feeling the effects of old age. She longed to see her Son again and felt like her soul was trapped in her aging body like a prison. On occasion she would go to the Garden of Gethsemane where the Zebedee family owned a small plot. There she would pray near the spot where the Lord prayed prior to His crucifixion⁹² (Luke 22:39-44, Mark 14:32, John 18:1), often accompanied by three other virgins. And it was there that the archangel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that her departure was imminent^{93,94}, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated from Ephesus, similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotas (Acts 8:26, 39-40). There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly when he placed her in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord's brother⁹⁶.

After John arrived, the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. The Greek version includes one or two of the Twelve that had already been martyred; one Latin version omits Thomas, saying that he didn't arrive until after the Virgin Mary's death. All versions refer to at least some of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-20) as being gathered also.

For almost 3 days, the Apostles watched and prayed with the Virgin Mary who seemed to be largely bedridden in all the descriptions of their prayers. Occasionally she got up, but most of the time she remained lying on her couch.

On the third day, a Sunday, the Lord Himself came with a great many angels. As Mary died, He received the soul of Mary and the room was filled with a perfume of sweetness while the Apostles could hear the angels singing. The Greek version and one of the Latin versions also relate that some spectacular displays occurred such that all of Jerusalem knew what was happening.

The Twelve Apostles then carried Mary's body in a procession through Jerusalem to her family's burial place near the Garden of Gethsemane. According to tradition, John's house where Mary lived was on Mt. Zion, which is the Southern part of the city or the lower city. To get to the Garden of Gethsemane, the procession had to go through the heart of Jerusalem, right past the Temple, since the Garden is just East of the Temple outside the city wall.

The Jewish leaders, who had tried to kill Mary, vowed to burn and desecrate her body. One of their number, named Jephonias, Reuben or Athonios in various versions, worked his way through the crowd and tried to overturn the bier carried by the Twelve. But as he touched the bier, something happened to his arms. The Greek version says that his arms were cut off at the elbows; the two Latin versions say that his arms dried up to the elbows. All versions say that his hands remained attached to the bier and that he was in great pain. The man began to beg the Apostles and Mary to have mercy on him. When he confessed his belief in Jesus as the Christ, Peter healed him. The man then began to glorify God along with everyone else in the procession.

When they reached Gethsemane, the Twelve laid Mary's body in a new tomb and sealed it with a large stone similar to the sealing of the Lord's tomb (Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46). Then, the Twelve began keeping watch over the tomb because of the threats of the Jewish leaders. The Greek version states that this went on for three days; the two Latin versions don't mention a time duration. The Greek version states that they could hear the angels singing during these three days; one of the Latin versions only mentions the singing and weeping of the people present.

After three days, all three versions state that Mary's body was taken to heaven, but each version gives a different account of how it happened. The Greek version states

that the angelic voices ceased after three days and the body was then gone. One Latin version states that the Apostle Thomas arrived late from India and asked to see the body -- which was gone. The other Latin version states that the Lord Himself came, accompanied by His angels, restored Mary to life and took her to heaven. Thus, we can say that Mary's body was taken to heaven, but the details are unclear.

A similar situation occurred with the body of Moses after he died. Moses was shown the Promised Land from Mt. Nebo opposite Jericho. Then "Moses died there in the land of Moab" and the Lord "buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor (across the Jordan from Jericho); but no man knows his burial place to this day. Although Moses was 120 years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his strength abated" (Deuteronomy 34:1, 5-7).

Yet controversy surrounded the death of Moses. The Apostle Jude refers to this when he said, "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said 'the Lord rebuke you!' " (Jude 1:9). Jude was apparently referring to the pseudepigraphal book, The Assumption of Moses. In the Transfiguration, we see the results of the assumption of Moses. Moses was transfigured along with Elijah and Jesus; they appeared in glory with Jesus and were discussing Jesus' departure, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31).

Other more indirect evidence of the assumption of the body of Mary is the lack of any claim to her relics over the centuries. Holy relics are a much bigger deal in the Eastern Churches than in Western Churches, especially the Protestant Churches. The relics (i.e. the bones) of the Twelve, the Seventy and many other saints that lived later are prominent in Orthodox Churches throughout the world. For a Church named after St. Peter, it is considered a tremendous honor to have within the church a fragment of St. Peter's relics. The fact that no one claims to have any of the Virgin Mary's relics is a silent testimony of 2,000 years of Church history that her relics don't exist on earth.

Many Western Christians are mystified at the use of "holy relics" in the East. The practice can be traced back to c. 800 BC. The Prophet Elisha had died and was buried in a tomb. As people were burying another man, a raiding band of Moabites came. In order to leave quickly, the burying party cast the man's body into the tomb of Elisha temporarily. When the man's body touched Elisha's bones (i.e. his relics), the dead man revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21). This had nothing to do with the faith of the burying party, and was simply a consequence of the "holy relics" being there.

The principle here is that one thing sanctifies another. Elisha's relics were sanctified by his life. In this regard, the Lord stated that the Temple in Jerusalem sanctified the gold in the treasury (Matthew 23:17) and the altar in the Temple sanctified

the gifts being offered (Matthew 23:19). Similarly with the Apostle Paul: “Even handkerchiefs and aprons were brought from his (Paul’s) body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out from them (Acts 19:12). Paul’s life had sanctified the articles of clothing.

One thing above all can be said of the life of the Virgin Mary: Her life was characterized by holiness, and all generations have called her blessed (Luke 1:48). If Mary’s relics existed on earth, they would be the most venerated things that exist on earth today.

THE LEGACY OF THE VIRGIN MARY

A tremendous legacy has been left to us by the life of the Virgin Mary, both in example, in personal godliness and in fulfillment of Scripture. Today, there are four major feast days in the Orthodox Church dedicated to some aspect of the Virgin Mary’s life:

The Nativity of Mary	September 8
The Presentation of Mary in the Temple	November 21
The Annunciation	March 25
The Dormition	August 15

To examine Mary’s legacy, let us look at the Scripture readings used by the Church, for these feast days over the centuries.

Old Testament Readings

These Old Testament readings are used for the Vespers preceding the feast day, and are often referred to as parables of the Feast.

Genesis 28:10-17: This reading is used for the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation and the Dormition, and is the account of Jacob’s Ladder. Jacob was enroute to Mesopotamia, where Abraham had come from, to seek a wife from among his kinsmen. One night, he had a dream of a ladder that was set on the earth but whose top reached to heaven. And the angels of God were ascending and descending on the ladder. When Jacob awoke, he cried, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

Many of the Church Fathers spoke of how this prefigured God Incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Just as the ladder connected heaven and earth, so did the Virgin Mary. And just as Jacob saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder, so there was a strong angelic presence around the Lord everywhere He went. Even Satan recognized this in quoting from the Psalms, “He shall give His angels charge over you (to guard You in all Your ways); in their hands they shall bear You up lest You dash

Your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12). Following this encounter with Satan, angels came and ministered to Jesus (Matthew 4:11).

Around the Throne of God in heaven, angels continually surround the Lord (Revelation 4). The Tabernacle in the wilderness pictured this: Cherubim were embroidered into the veil (Exodus 26:31, 36:35, 2 Chronicles 3:14) and the Presence of God dwelt between two Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-22, 37:6-9, 2 Chronicles 10:13). Just because the Lord took up residence on earth in the womb of the Virgin doesn’t mean the angels disappeared. For nine months, the House of God was the womb of the Virgin; and because heaven and earth met there, this can rightly be called the gate of heaven.

Proverbs 9:1-11: This reading is used for the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation and the Dormition, and speaks of Wisdom building her house. The reading begins with Wisdom building her house (v.1) and goes on to say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (v.10). Yet it wasn’t until after the Resurrection that it was revealed how extensive the house was that Wisdom built.

For example, Paul wrote that he was privileged to help to “make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages had been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:9, 10). Paul also said, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew. For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8). This Wisdom of God involved the Cross, and it became a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness for Greeks. For those who were called, however, the Wisdom of God was also the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-24). All this began with the Incarnation. From the history of the life of the Virgin Mary, we see that there is considerable wisdom also associated with the simple humility of the Lord’s mother. She was involved in everything the Lord did, even from before He was born (Luke 1:41); and she treasured these things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). Hers may have been a lowly, humble state, but she certainly has been called blessed over the centuries (Luke 1:48).

Ezekiel 43:27-44:4: This reading is used for the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, and the Dormition, and is a little more obtuse than the others. Ezekiel’s vision took place during the Babylonian captivity (Ezekiel 40:1). Ezekiel saw a vision of some future Temple and he described this Temple at length. This Temple was to be “the place of My Throne and the place of the soles of My feet where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever” (Ezekiel 43:7). Many of the dimensions given to Ezekiel were incorporated in the Temple rebuilt by Ezra and

Nehemiah after the captivity (Ezra 7:1-3) and reconstructed when Herod remodeled the Temple, but neither was constructed exactly as described by Ezekiel.

The parable used for the above feast days only addresses the East Gate of the Temple, which in Herod's Temple was the only gate to the Temple area. The East Gate opened onto the Garden of Gethsemane, the Kidron Valley, and the Mount of Olives. In Ezekiel's vision, the Glory of the Lord came into the house by the East Gate (Ezekiel 43:4). Ezekiel was told, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut" (Ezekiel 44:2). The question about this passage is when was the East Gate permanently shut? There is no record of this occurring before, during or after the time of Christ. And "the Glory of the Lord" is unlikely to refer to Anyone else.

Many of the Church Fathers spoke of this East Gate as prefiguring the Incarnation, where the East Gate represented the womb of the Virgin Mary. And as the East Gate was shut in Ezekiel's vision, so the Virgin Mary remained a virgin her entire life according to her vow and the vow of her parents.

A Model of Humility

The Epistle lesson used for the Nativity of Mary and the Dormition is Philippians 2:5-11. In this passage, Paul was encouraging the Philippians to be like Christ who, although exalted in heaven as God, "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a slave (in the Incarnation) and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Not just this, but then, "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (v.8). We see His humility aptly illustrated in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant trying to defend Jesus. Jesus rebuked Peter saying, "do you think I cannot now pray to My Father and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). This was truly humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross. He didn't have to do that, but chose to do so for our sake.

And as a result, God has highly exalted Him "that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" (v.10). Jesus spoke of the Cross as if it was His glorification; He compared it to a grain of wheat falling into the ground, dying and producing much grain (John 12:23-24).

The Matins Gospel for the Nativity, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, the Annunciation and the Dormition in Luke 1:39-49, 56, and describes Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, after the Annunciation. This reading and Gabriel's greeting to Mary illustrate Mary's deep humility also.

In the Annunciation, Gabriel's words: "Rejoice, highly graced one" (v.28) and "you have found grace with God" (v.30) indicate a very special honor to Mary. [The words "grace", and "graced" are the Greek word *charis*. This word is translated "grace" everywhere else in the New Testament, but it is often not translated so here.] If we compare this to Gabriel's announcement to Zachariah regarding the birth of John, Gabriel did not call Zachariah "highly graced." And yet it was quite an honor to be the father of John the Baptist -- whom Christ called the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28).

As Mary arrived at Elizabeth's house following the Annunciation, Elizabeth, in the Spirit, spoke with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (vv.42-43). Elizabeth recognized that Mary was pregnant with the Son of God and therefore "highly graced."

But Mary's reaction was one of great humility, both to Gabriel and to Elizabeth. To Gabriel, Mary merely replied, "Behold the maidservant (i.e. female slave) of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (v.38). An archangel had just given her accolades unprecedented in human history and she still referred to herself as a slave. To Elizabeth, Mary replied, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant (i.e. female slave); for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed (vv.46-48).

Even though she was so "highly graced" for bearing the Son of God, Mary never sought to exalt herself during her life. She was always content to stay in the background, praying, while the Twelve and others got all the recognition. This is a very good example for us. The only person who was ever called "highly graced" by God never sought recognition for herself. This is quite a contrast to attitudes today where it is fashionable to be arrogant and obnoxious and to revile anything that isn't easily understood.

Other Examples of Humility

The Gospel lesson of the Nativity of Mary, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple and the Dormition is Luke 10:38-42 and Luke 11:27-28. The first part is the account of Mary and Martha when Jesus was invited to their house for dinner. Both Mary and Martha were among the eight "Myrrh-Bearing Women" at the Cross and at the Tomb. They were quite wealthy and helped finance Jesus' public ministry along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna and the others (Luke 8:3). We see their wealth in (1) Mary's ability to afford oil of spikenard worth 300 denarii to pour on Jesus (Mark 14:3-5, John 12:1-3) and (2) Lazarus' funeral including a rich man's burial, a new tomb and prominent people in attendance (John 11:35-46).

The dinner at Mary and Martha's took place in late 29 AD, or just a few months before the Crucifixion. Mary and Martha had been traveling with Jesus and helping to finance His ministry for several years at this time. During that time, it would have been their role to work in the background providing meals and accommodations for Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy, etc. In this Gospel account, Martha was busy doing all the things she had been doing these last few years (Luke 10:40), but Mary took time out to sit at Jesus' feet and listen (v.39).

The work carried out by the Myrrh-Bearing Women was a humble but necessary work. Martha reminded Mary that she needed to do her part and she even asked Jesus to back her up (v.40). Jesus replied by saying, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (vv.41-42). Martha had become somewhat arrogant in her preoccupation with serving; Mary had maintained her humble focus on doing the Lord's Will. Their serving really didn't need to get done right away. The Lord could always have broken loaves and fish and fed the Seventy as He did the 5,000.

This Gospel lesson is used for feast days involving the Virgin Mary even though the person involved is Mary of Bethany. Mary of Bethany in this account illustrates the personality of the Virgin Mary: maintaining a quiet, cheerful devotion without getting overly concerned about material things. And this is also a good lesson for us: hearing the Lord's Word is the most important part of our lives and this won't be taken away from us. Positions of leadership may come to an end, but hearing the Lord's voice goes on forever.

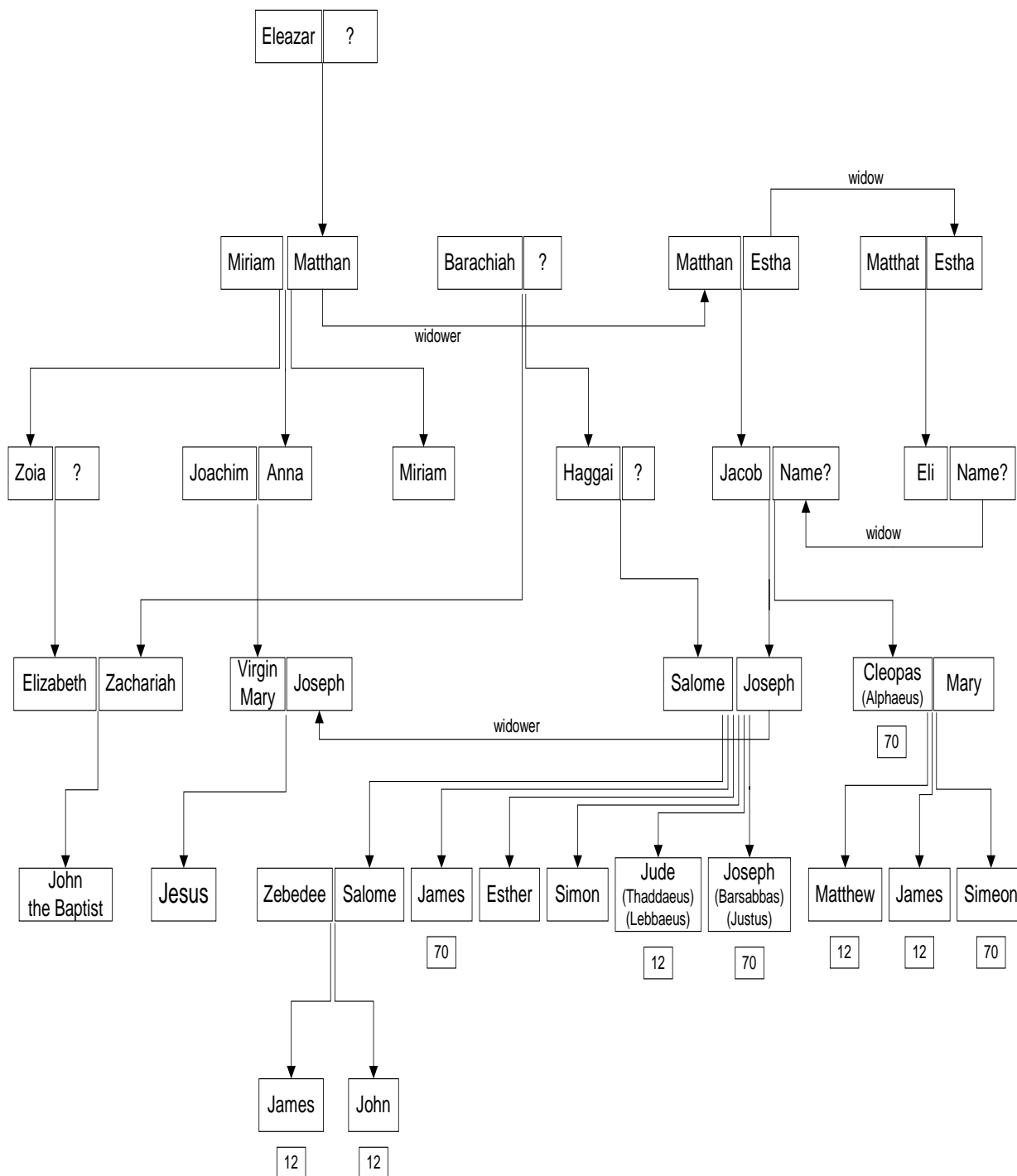
The second part of the Gospel lesson involves a brief answer Jesus made to a comment from someone in the crowd. Jesus had just taught His followers to pray using the Lord's Prayer, explaining how our Heavenly Father is a good father (Luke 11:2-13). Following this, Jesus cast a demon out of a person who was demon-possessed, blind and mute. When the formerly possessed person then saw and spoke, the multitudes marveled and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (Matthew 12:22-24, Luke 11:14-16). The Pharisees, however, ridiculed Jesus by saying that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Jesus then proceeded to debunk this claim by showing that Satan's kingdom would be divided against itself if it were true.

Following this debunking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, " 'Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts which nursed You!' Jesus replied, 'More than that; blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it' " (Luke 11:27-28).

Jesus had just been publicly acknowledged as the Messiah, the Son of David. The woman in the crowd was stating that every Jewish woman desired to be the mother of the Messiah. Such was to be a position of great honor: The Queen Mother.

In replying as He did, Jesus was not denying that His mother was blessed. He was merely pointing out that everyone else could be blessed also by hearing the Word of God and keeping it. The Virgin Mary did this very well all her life.

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56. John Chrysostom, Homily XXXVIII on 1 Corinthians 15
57. Eusebius, Church History, II, I, E
58. "The Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, p. 537
59. John Chrysostom, Homily III on Acts 1
60. Unger, Bible Dictionary, p 356
61. Eusebius, Church History, II, xxiii, 3-7
62. A month could have either 29 or 30 days. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 29 days, Pentecost fell on the 5th of Sivan. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 30 days, Pentecost was the 7th of Sivan. If one had 29, the other 30 days, Pentecost was the 6th of Sivan. See Unger, Bible Dictionary, p 356
63. Apollos, one of the Seventy, was absent since he didn't hear about the Holy Spirit until over 20 years later (Acts 18:25)

64. Rufinus, A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, v.3, p 542
65. John Chrysostom, Homily IV on Acts 2
66. John Chrysostom, Homily V on Acts 2
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68. John Chrysostom, Homily VII on Acts 2
69. The Life of the Virgin Mary, p 414
70. Velimirovic, Prologue, July 22
71. Eusebius, Church History, II, vii
72. Velimirovic, Prologue, July 13, June 4, October 17
73. Butler, Lives of the Saints, January 27, July 22, July 29
74. See the Spanish references cited in Butler, July 25, p 183
75. Velimirovic, Prologue, April 30
76. Butler, Lives of the Saints, July 25
77. Clement was a late 1st Century Bishop of Rome and one of the Seventy. His Hypotyposes (or Outlines) exists today only in scattered fragments
78. Eusebius, Church History, II, I. 2-4
79. These works of Hegesippus are lost; most of what we know about them come from Eusebius' quotes
80. This quote from Josephus is not in our copies of his Antiquities today. However Origin also quotes Josephus with the same statement in Contra Celsum I, 47. The prevailing opinion is that earlier copies of Josephus contained this statement but later copies (after the 4th Century) deleted it.
81. Eusebius, Church History, II, xxiii, 1-20
82. John Chrysostom, Homily XIV on Acts 6
83. Velimirovic, Prologue, December 27, July 28, October 11
84. Philo, cited in Unger, Bible Dictionary, p 660
85. Velimirovic, Prologue, December 27
86. Velimirovic, Prologue, July 28
87. Velimirovic, Prologue, August 2
88. Velimirovic, Prologue, October 6, October 9, November 30
89. Ignatius of Antioch, "Spurius Epistles", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1, pp 124-126
90. The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp 432-438
91. The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp 440-445
92. The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp 445-446
93. Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8
94. Roberts and Donaldson, "The Passing of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8
95. Roberts and Donaldson, "Introductory Notice for the Assumption of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8, p. 359
96. The Life of the Virgin Mary, p. 452
97. Eusebius, Church History III, xi, 1

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