

Virgin Mother – Virgin Church

[1] Isaiah 54.1:

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord”.

[2] Galatians 4.22-31

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in travail; for the children of the desolate one are many more than the children of her that is married.” Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? “Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

[3] First Thessalonians 2.7-8, 11-12, 13

We were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become dear to us. ...

You know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

[4] First Corinthians 4.14.-15:

I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I begot you in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

[5] Galatians 4.19: My little children, with whom I am again in travail, until Christ be formed in you!

[6] Galatians 2.20

I have been crucified with Christ: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[7] Galatians 1.15-16:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me (ἐν ἐμοί, RSV “to me”)

[8] Galatians 4.14: you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

[9] Hermas, *Vision*, 2.4.1:

And a revelation was made to me, brethren, while I slept, by a very beautiful young man, who said to me, “Who do you think that the ancient lady was from whom you received the little book?” I said, “The Sibyl.” “You are wrong,” he said, “she is not.” “Who is she, then?” I said. “The Church,” he said. I said to him, “Why then is she old?” “Because,” he said, “she was created the first of all things. For this reason she is old; and for her sake the world was established.”

[10] Hermas, *Vision*, 3.9:

Listen to me, my children! It is I who have brought you up in all simplicity, innocence and holiness by the mercy of the Lord; it is I who have caused justice to fall on you, drop by drop .. Listen to me and make peace among yourselves... so that, standing joyfully before the Father, I can render him a favorable account of you.

[11] Second Epistle of Clement, 14:

Brethren, if we do the will of our Father God, we shall belong to the first Church, the spiritual one which was created before the sun and moon.

Now I imagine that you are not ignorant that the living Church is the body of Christ. For the scripture says “God made man male and female”: the male is Christ and the female is the Church. And moreover, the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but has existed from the beginning; for she was spiritual, as also was our Jesus, but was made manifest in the last days that he might save us; and the Church, which is spiritual, was made manifest in the flesh of Christ, showing us that if any one of us guard her in the flesh without corruption, he shall receive back again in the Holy Spirit.

[12]: Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons (Eusebius, H.e. 5.1.45-6):

Through their continued life the dead were made alive, and the martyrs showed favor to those who had failed to witness. And there was great joy for the Virgin Mother in receiving back alive those who she had miscarried as dead. For through them the majority of those who had denied were again brought to birth and again conceived and again brought to life and learned to confess; and now living and strengthened, they went to the judgment seat.

[13] St Irenaeus of Lyons, Against the Heresies, 4.33.4:

How can they be saved, unless it was God who wrought out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall man arrive at God, unless God has first come to man? And how shall he escape from the generation subject to death, if not by means of a new generation, given in a wonderful manner by God as a sign of salvation – that regeneration which flows from the Virgin through faith.

[14] St Irenaeus of Lyons, Against the Heresies, 4.33.11:

There are those who say that “He is a man, and who shall know him?” [Jer 17.9]; and, “I came unto the prophetess, and she bore a son, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God” [Is 8.3, 9.6]; and those who proclaimed the Immanuel, born of the Virgin [Is 7.14]: declaring the union of the Word of God with his own handiwork, that the Word would become flesh, and the Son of God the Son of man – the pure one opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God and which he himself made pure, having become that which we are, he is “God Almighty” and has a generation which cannot be declared.

[15] Clement of Alexandria, Pedagogus 1.6:

The Lord Jesus, fruit of the Virgin, did not proclaim women’s breasts to be blessed, nor did he choose them to give nourishment. But when the Father, full of goodness and love for men, rained down his Word upon the earth, this same Word became the spiritual nourishment for virtuous men. O mysterious marvel!

There is one Father of all, there is one Word of all, and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere. There is also one Virgin Mother, whom I love to call the Church. Alone, this mother had no milk because she alone did not become a woman. She is virgin and mother simultaneously, a virgin undefiled and a mother full of love. She draws her children to herself and nurses them with holy milk, that is, the Word for infants. She had not milk because the milk was this child, beautiful and familiar, the body of Christ.

[16] Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 7.16:

It appears that even today many hold that Mary, after the birth of her Son, was found to be in the state of a woman who has given birth, while in fact she was not so. For some say that, after giving birth, she was examined by a midwife, who found her to be a virgin [cf. *Protoevangelium of James* 19.1-20.1]. Now such to us are the Scriptures of the Lord, which gave birth to the truth and remain virgin, in the hiddenness of the mysteries of truth. “She gave birth and did not give birth,” Scripture says [*Pseudo-Ezekiel*], since she conceives by herself, not by conjunction.

[17] St Cyprian of Carthage, On the Church, 5-6:

She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the Mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation; of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, from her Spirit our souls draw their life-breath. The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled, she is inviolate and chaste; she knows one home alone, in all modesty she keeps faithfully to one chamber. It is she who seals for the kingdom the sons who she has borne. Whoever breaks with the Church and enters on an adulterous union, cuts himself off from the promises made to the Church. ... You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother.

[18] Troparion of the Resurrection, Tone Six:

Angelic Powers were at your tomb; and those guarding it became as dead men. Mary stood by the grave, seeking thy most pure Body. You despoiled hell, not being tempted by it. You came to the Virgin, granting life. O Lord, risen from the dead, glory to You!

[19] Luke 11.27-28:

As he spoke these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said to him: blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked. But he said, Blessed rather are those that hear the Word of God and keep it.

[20] Luke 8.21:

“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it.”

[21] Origen, *Commentary on John 1.23*:

We might dare say, then, that the Gospels are the firstfruits of all Scriptures, but that the firstfruits of the Gospels is that according to John, whose meaning no one can understand who has not leaned on Jesus’ breast nor received Mary from Jesus to be his mother also. But he who would be another John must also become such as John, to be shown to be Jesus, so to speak. For if Mary had no son except Jesus, in accordance with those who hold a sound opinion of her, and Jesus says to his mother, “Behold your son,” and not, “Behold, this man also is your son,” he has said equally, “Behold, this is Jesus whom you bore.” For indeed everyone who has been perfected “no longer lives, but Christ lives in him,” and since “Christ lives” in him, it is said of him to Mary, “Behold your son,” the Christ.

[22] St John Chrysostom *Commentary on Matthew 44*:

We learn here that even to have borne Christ in the womb, and to have brought forth that marvelous birth, has no profit, if there is not virtue. . . . [Christ] has pointed out a spacious road: and it is granted not only to women but also to men, to be of this rank, or rather of one yet higher. For this makes one his mother much more than those pangs did.

[23] St Ephrem, *sermo ad noct. Resurr.* ed. Lamy, 1:534, cited in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers*, p.115:

The Virgin Mary is a symbol of the Church, when she receives the first announcement of the Gospel. And, it is in the name of the Church that Mary sees the risen Jesus. Blessed be God, who filled Mary and the Church with joy. We call the Church by the name of Mary, for she deserves a double name.

[24] St Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 12.5:

He walked upon the sea (cf. Mat 14.25-31); he appeared in the cloud (cf. Mt 17.5); he liberated his Church from the circumcision; he replaced Joshua, a son of Nun, with the virgin John, and to him he entrusted Mary (cf. Jn 19.25-7), his Church, as Moses consigned his flock to Joshua.

[25] St Ephrem, *Hymns on the Crucifixion* 4.17:

Three angels were seen at the tomb:
these three announced that he was risen on the third day.
Mary, who saw him, is the symbol of the Church
which will be the first to recognize the signs of his second coming.

[26] St Ephrem, *Hymns for the Unleavened Bread*, 6.6-7:

The Church gave us the living Bread,
in place of the unleavened bread that Egypt had given.
Mary gave us the refreshing bread,
in place of the fatiguing bread that Eve had procured for us.

[27] St Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 10.6-8:

By your resurrection you convinced them
about your birth, for the den was sealed
and the grave was secured – the pure one on [in?] the den
and the living one in the grave. Your witnesses were the sealed den and the grave.
The womb and Sheol shouted with joy and cried out
about your resurrection. The womb that was sealed
conceived you; Sheol that was secured,
brought you forth. Against nature

the womb conceived and Sheol yielded.
Sealed was the grave which they entrusted
with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb
that no man knew. The virginal womb
and the sealed grave like trumpets
for a deaf people, shouted in its ear.

[28] St Augustine, *On the Trinity* 4.2.9:

He is believed to have been conceived on 25 March, and also to have suffered on that day. Thus to the new tomb he was buried in, where no mortal body was laid before or after, there corresponds the womb he was conceived in, where no mortal body was sown before or after.

[29] Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 4:

For the Word of God, being fleshless, put on the holy flesh from the holy virgin, as a bridegroom a garment, having woven it for himself in the sufferings of the cross, so that having mixed our mortal body with his own power, and having mingled the corruptible into the incorruptible, and the weak with the strong, he might save perishing man.

The web-beam, therefore, is the passion of the Lord upon the cross,
and the warp on it is the power of the Holy Spirit,
and the woof is the holy flesh woven by the Spirit,
and the thread is the grace which by the love of Christ binds and unites the two in one,
and the rods are the Word;
and the workers are the patriarchs and prophets who weave the fair, long, perfect tunic for Christ;
and the Word passing through these, like the combs (or rods), completes through them that which his Father wills.

[30] Hippolytus *On the Christ and the Antichrist* 61:

[The Church will never cease] “bearing from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving in the world,” [while the male child she bears is Christ, God and man, announced by the prophets,] “whom the Church continually bears as she teaches all nations (ὄν ἀεὶ τίκουσα ἡ ἐκκλησία διδάσκει πάντα τὰ ἔθνη)

[31] St John of Damascus *On the Orthodox Faith* 56 (=3.12)

It is proper and true that we call the holy Mary the Theotokos, for this name expresses the entire mystery of the economy.