



Actually, the attribution of the title of Theotokos was the only doctrinal decision made by the Church with regard to Mary. However, the New Testament, particularly Luke, had already proclaimed its eminent position in the mystery of salvation ("*therefore henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,*" (Luke 1:48)), and, since Irenaeus and Justin, theologians had discerned her role as the New Eve.

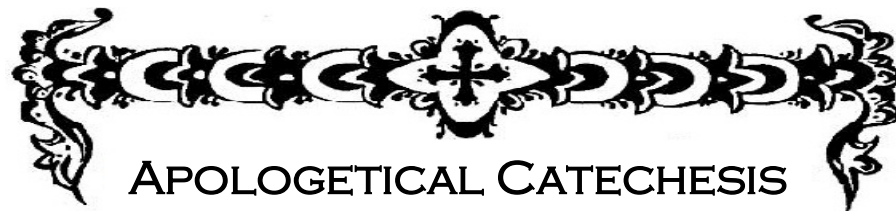


Truly, just as Eve in Paradise had freely accepted the serpent's offer and led Adam to the fall, so Mary freely accepted the Archangel's announcement, making possible a new "recapitulation" of humanity in the New Adam, Christ. The role of this simple woman, who conceived New Life in her womb (her virginity was a sign of this "newness"), was a reminder of the humanity of Jesus himself and gave in a new way the message that free fellowship and communion with God were the true expressions of authentic human nature. One of the biblical analogies of this fellowship — that of the family — was fulfilled in Mary's particular role as the mother not only of Christ but of all the members of his Body, the Church.

In the medieval West, the Augustinian understanding of original sin as inherited guilt made it inevitable that Mary would be seen in terms of an "immaculate conception," as the object of a special grace from God that made her in advance worthy of divine motherhood.

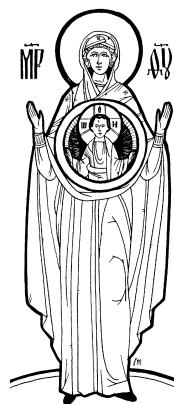
The Orthodox Church does not follow that trend, because the consequences of Adam's sin are seen as inherited mortality rather than guilt, so there is no need to see Mary isolated from the common lot of fallen humanity. The Orthodox see their eschatological glorification after death.

Anticipating the general resurrection, Her Son made her, as His mother, inseparable from His own resurrected body, above the angelic powers themselves.



APOLOGETICAL CATECHESIS

IS MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD?



Faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God is intimately linked to the designation of the Blessed Virgin as Theotokos (*Theotokos* = Mother of God). By this name the Church confirms her faith in the true, and not apparent, incarnation of the Word of God.

He sees also that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, God was united to Man from the very moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and that since He is *perfect Man*, He is also *perfect God*.

At the same time, the name Theotokos is the highest name for the exultation of the Virgin Mary, and for her glorification.

The name "Theotokos" *has a direct foundation in the Holy Scriptures*.

The Apostle Paul writes:

- ♦ "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman*" (Galatians 4:4). Here is expressed the Truth that a Woman begot the Son of God.
- ♦ "*He was manifested in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3:16): the flesh was given to the Word of God by the Blessed Virgin Mary.



After the annunciation, when the Virgin Mary visited the righteous Elizabeth, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb.' Why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord may

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come to me?... and blessed is she who believed, for what was spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled" (Luke 1:41-44).

Thus Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, calls Mary: Mother of the Lord, the Lord Heavenly God. Precisely, the Heavenly God she here called 'Lord' as is clearly seen in the words spoken later: *"she who believed, what was said from the Lord,"* the Lord God.



The birth of God from the Virgin is spoken of in the Old Testament scriptures.

The prophet Ezekiel writes of his vision, *"And the Lord said unto me, This gate shall be shut, and shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it: for the Lord God of Israel shall enter through it, and therefore it shall be shut"* (Ezekiel 44:1-3).

The prophet Isaiah prophesies: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel, that is, God with us... For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, Angel, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).

From the first centuries of Christ's Church, the Truth of the Incarnation and the Birth of the Word of God of the Virgin Mary represents the Catholic or Universal Faith.



It is the Orthodox Faith.

That is why apostolic men express themselves: *"Our God, Jesus Christ, was in Mary's womb," "God took flesh from the Virgin Mary"* (St. Ignatius and St. Irenaeus).

Saints Dionysius and Alexander of Alexandria (3rd and 4th centuries) also expressed themselves. The fourth-century fathers Athanasius, Ephrem the Syrian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, call the Blessed Virgin Theotokos.

In the fourth century, on account of the heresy of Nestorius, at the Third Ecumenical Council, the Church solemnly confessed the Blessed Virgin



Theotokos, accepting and affirming the following words of St. Cyril of Alexandria:



"Whoever does not confess that Emmanuel is the True God, and therefore the Holy Virgin — Theotokos, because she carnally begot the Word of God, becoming flesh, he will be accursed."

Blessed Theodoret, who was formerly on friendly terms with Nestorius, afterwards judging of his tenacity in heresy, wrote: "The first degree of Nestorius' innovation was opinion, as if the Blessed Virgin from whom the Word of God took flesh should not recognize herself as *Theotokos* (Mother of God), but only *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ), as then the ancient and most ancient predecessors of the doctrine of the faith, by apostolic tradition taught to proclaim and confess the Mother of the Lord, the Theotokos."

In 431 the Council of Ephesus, which marked the first and decisive victory of orthodox Christology over Nestorianism, expressed itself in a single doctrinal decision: The Mother of Jesus must be appropriately designated in the prayers of the Church, in preaching, and in theological theses as "Illuminator of God." (Theotokos) or "Mother of God" (*Meter Theou*). The decision had to do with Christology: it affirmed Christ's personal identity as the pre-existent and eternal Son of God who assumes human nature (not a mere human individual).



Since a mother is necessarily someone's mother (not of a "nature") and since this "someone" in Christ was God, her proper identity was truly that of "Mother of God." It was inevitable that the Christological decision of Ephesus would also add a decisive new emphasis to Christian spirituality: a renewed veneration of Mary, the woman through whom the incarnation occurred; the only human person who, by free concurrence with the greatest act of God's love, made possible the union of divinity and humanity.

