
Translation of René Laurentin, *Marie, source directe de l'Évangile de l'Enfance* (Mary, Direct Source of the Infancy Gospel), Chapter III ("Mary during the Infancy of Jesus"), section 2 ("The Announcement to Mary"), pp. 64-66 ("Mary's Objection").

Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High...(Lk 1:31-33)

At these words, Mary is astonished; she does not understand. She reacts: "*How will this come about, for I know not man?*" "*The virgin married to a man*" (Lk. 1:27 and 2:5) had been inspired by God not to know man in the biblical and sexual sense of the word.

The Bibles inexactly translate "engaged," while Mary is really married to Joseph in keeping with the two phases of Hebrew marriage: the consent (*qidushin*) before the Annunciation, and the second phase, the introduction of the wife into the house of the husband (*nissuin*), in accord with Joseph's agreement to a virginal marriage (non-consummated).

"*The man knew Eve his wife.*" (Gen. 4:1)
"*Adam knew his wife and she bore Seth.*" (Gen. 4:25)
"*Cain knew his wife and she bore Enoch.*" (Gen. 4:27)

From her youth, Mary had been inspired by God not to belong to any man but to God alone. But her family was obliged not to leave her a virgin, since this was an inferior condition of a lack of fulfillment as a woman and as a mother; not to have to mourn her virginity like the daughter of Jephthah, victim of her father's vow: "*I will immolate the first person that I meet on the return from my victory.*" And it is his daughter who goes to meet him first. She accepted the father's vow, but asked for a month to "*mourn her virginity*" with her companions in the mountains. (Jdg 11:37-38) She mourns not her integrity but her lack of fulfillment.

Mary's objection, founded on the inspiration of God, does not merit her either reproach or punishment, in contrast to Zachariah struck by dumbness (Lk. 1:20); rather, she receives the unimaginable confirmation which she did not dare to guess. In making to God alone the sacrifice of her virginity, she believed that she was renouncing (without regret) being the mother

of the Messiah. But this vow brought about, on the contrary, the only means of achieving this unique privilege. Such are the paradoxes of the Most High. She receives, then, the response which makes new and clarifies everything.

Let us understand well the *Sitz im Leben*: the situation in life in which Mary found herself. Inspired by God, she had made from her youth, around six or seven years of age, the inspired promise "not to know man," to live for God alone.

Impossible in that era, it is said today. Indeed not! And the case was foreseen at Qumran in a little-known text in the process of publication by Stéfano de Fiores.

This casuistic text examines the case in which a girl makes from her youth the vow of virginity. It resolves the case in a perfectly clear juridical and canonical manner. If the husband is in agreement with this resolve of virginity, it is confirmed; if he is not in agreement, since the marriage contract foresees the contrary, the vow is invalidated.

What happened for Mary and Joseph? It is easy to understand it by analogy with many current cases in which a young man meets among his friends the ideal girl, but understands that she is not a woman for him, that she is for God and is preparing perhaps her entry into the convent. He does not dare to reveal to her his admiration and his love. She [Mary] is the new Ark of the Covenant. She fulfills, no longer in figure but in material and fleshly reality, the immanent coming of God on the earth (Ex. 40: 34-35 and Lk. 1:35). The presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant is realized in her. The angel no longer addresses her as daughter of Sion, personal representative of the community of the people, but as the new Ark of the Covenant, where God will reside through His created Humanity to gather and save all men, according to His name of Jesus which means Savior. In her, a living and bodily person, the figure of the Ark of the Covenant is fulfilled.

The Marriage of Saint Joseph and Our Lady
Presentation by Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke

Marian Catechist Apostolate
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