

December 10, 2006

SERIES: Advent 2006

SERMON: **Holy Mary, Mother of God?**

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-56

SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus

The cover story for *Life* magazine a few years ago was entitled *The Mystery of Mary*. The story begins: “Two thousand years after the Nativity, the mother of Jesus is more beloved, powerful and controversial than ever.” I may be adding to the controversy this morning.

Before we get started, I would like to know how many of you grew up Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, or perhaps even now belong to a Catholic or Orthodox Church. I had a dear pastoral colleague in St. Louis who grew up in St. Elizabeth and St. Clement parishes, attended Catholic grade school, was a graduate of DeSmet Jesuit High School, and even once considered the priesthood. After a life-changing conversion in 1985 he attended Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and joined our pastoral staff. Ten years ago I asked him to preach a sermon about the Virgin Mary. He did so, and I am indebted to him for some of the research I share with you today. Paul Stolwyk said in that sermon,

*While I consider myself an evangelical Protestant, I do not hate the Catholic Church. I am very appreciative of my Catholic heritage. In 1985, when I personally trusted Christ, my ability to understand the gospel of grace was built upon a foundation of understanding that I had gained by being taught in Catholic schools and attending the Catholic Mass. But that understanding left me with some large holes. . . .*

*My task this morning is to speak the plain truth about the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. Please know that as I do, I do so with respect for the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has been the leader of Christendom in important moral areas like the rights of the unborn, care for the poor and a focus on the family.*

I, too, respect the Catholic Church (and the Orthodox Church even more)—for some of the same reasons. We have a lot in common with them in terms of the major doctrines of the faith, but our differences are nevertheless significant, and nowhere are they more stark than in regard to the Virgin Mary. Thus I have decided to preach two messages—today and next week—on the Mother of Jesus. Today I will be telling you why I believe Mary is not quite what Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox claim she is; next week I will tell you why she is more than most evangelicals think she is. I will give more attention to Catholic views than Orthodox this morning because they are more widely held, but I will draw attention to some distinctions between them.

The reason I’m taking the unusual step of preaching two sermons on Mary is because the issues at stake are critical but widely misunderstood. If we’re going to reject certain widely-held views of Mary, particularly those that have ancient roots, we should have good reasons for doing so. We should know the facts. Yet I discover that most Protestants think the Immaculate Conception is the Virgin Birth, which it is not, and most Protestants think Catholics worship Mary, which they vigorously protest they do not. As we examine what the Catholic church officially teaches about Mary I suspect some of it will be surprising to you. In some cases you

will probably be more troubled than before, but in other cases you may actually be more sympathetic with your Catholic friends. Either way, intelligent people should want the facts, and that is what I will try to give you this morning. (I will not cite footnotes this morning, but you are welcome to check my sources from the website copy of the sermon).

When dealing with controversy a sermon is not necessarily the best vehicle. The information is all going one way, from pulpit to pew, and you may have important questions that don't get answered this morning. So next Sunday evening we will have an Open Forum on these two sermons at 6:00 pm in Room A-5. Everyone is welcome, but you will get more out of it if you read a new book just released by Dr. Scot McKnight, formerly of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and now a Professor at North Park University. I have read Dr. McKnight's book and ordered 40 copies for anyone who might want to read it. It's entitled "The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus." By the way, one of Scot McKnight's faculty colleagues there is Dr. Brad Nassif, who also helped me a great deal with this sermon. Brad and his wife Barb were both part of our church when I pastored here the first time.

I will warn you in advance that today's sermon will probably be more informative and educational than inspirational. But I hope that's OK with you; inspiration is good, but if it's not based on truth, it's not worth the tingling feeling you get up and down your spine.

### **What the Catholic Church teaches about Mary<sup>i</sup>**

**Mary experienced an "immaculate conception."** You all have heard the term "immaculate conception," but most Protestants have no idea what it refers to. The Immaculate Conception does not refer to the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb; it refers to the conception of *Mary* in *her* mother's womb. What the doctrine asserts is that Mary was free from the stain of original sin from the moment of her own conception to the end of her life. It includes the notion that Mary was sinless.

It was in 1854 that Pope Pius IX pronounced the Immaculate Conception as an infallible doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. That is not to say he dreamed it up in 1854; for centuries it had been believed by many Christians, including St. Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and even Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But Pius declared it official dogma. Here is the statement from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Mary benefitted first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life." (Schreck, Catholic: 177; Catechism: 123)

The Eastern Orthodox Church does not agree with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, because they have a different view of original sin, but many Orthodox affirm that she committed no actual sins, though this is not an official position of the Orthodox Church.

Now as we try to understand how doctrines like the Immaculate Conception or the sinlessness of

Mary developed, we must start with the most fundamental difference between evangelicals and Catholics: Catholics have two sources of truth, while evangelicals claim only one. We believe in *sola Scriptura*, which means that Scripture alone is an adequate source for truth and doctrine. Catholics believe in the Bible *plus* the ancient, sacred Tradition of the Church. This is huge. A knowledgeable Catholic is neither troubled nor intimidated when you tell him that the Immaculate Conception, or any of these other doctrines we'll look at this morning, is not found in the Bible. He may simply respond, "So what? It is found very early in the history of the Church, and since Christ promised to build His church and to preserve it, if the early church believed it, that's good enough for me. Besides, not everything taught in the Bible is explicit; some of it is implicit and must be read 'between the lines.'"

Now the high opinion Catholics have of Tradition is based on their belief that God has preserved His truth through the believing community. In a sense the church gave us the Bible (by evaluating the various religious writings and approving the canon), so our understanding of the Bible's truth cannot be separated from the Church's historic, developing teaching. While both Catholics and Orthodox have a high opinion of Tradition, the Roman Church appeals more to the notion of "continuous revelation," while the Orthodox believe doctrine must be rooted in the Bible as interpreted in the early centuries of the Church.

While we evangelicals do not agree that ancient tradition deserves such a high status, we must not dismiss the history of doctrine as irrelevant. I have often said that a doctrine's absence in church history prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is almost certain proof that it is false. Yet a doctrine's presence in ancient Tradition is no proof that it is true, for heresy can also be ancient, and indeed was present even in the NT church!

Furthermore, we evangelicals should not pretend that tradition plays no part in our own doctrinal views. All you have to do is look at the Nativity story and you can find all sorts of "supposed facts" we accept as truth that are not even hinted at in the Bible. For example, in our Christmas pageant tonight there will be three wise men who met with the infant Jesus in the stable of an inn on the night of His birth, none of which is taught in the Bible. Not that any of those traditions is as serious as affirming the sinlessness of Mary, but we do need to be honest on this issue of traditions. We all have them.

My main challenge is to remember that when your Catholic friends come to different conclusions on certain doctrinal issues, it is not necessarily because they are misinterpreting Scripture so much as because they are not *limited* to Scripture.<sup>ii</sup>

I have been trying to explain how a doctrine like the Immaculate Conception of Mary, or her sinlessness could arise. One factor is that it has roots in early Church Tradition; it also has a sort of logical basis in Catholic thinking. They ask, "How could a perfect child, namely Jesus, have been born to someone who was herself sinful?" Perfect can't come from imperfect. (Schreck, *Catholic*: 176). If, however, God preserved Mary from original sin from the very moment *she* was conceived, *voila*, the dilemma disappears and she could bear the perfect Son of God.

Now lest you think that Catholics are the only ones who wrestle with this logical dilemma, I assure you that is not the case. I know of evangelical teachers who have argued that the only way Jesus could be sinless is for the sin nature to be passed down from one generation to the next only through the father, and of course, since He had no human father, He could be sinless.<sup>iii</sup>

They're making the same sort of logical argument Catholics make, only instead of appealing to Mary's sinlessness as the explanation of Jesus' sinlessness, they appeal to the notion that the sin nature is passed only through sperm. Well, I don't know of any biblical or scientific reason to think the sin nature comes through the father rather than the mother ("*all* have sinned," you know). That is just a fiction conceived (if you will pardon the pun) to solve a logical dilemma.

I personally don't believe the Virgin Birth *is* the explanation of the sinlessness of Jesus; rather it is the explanation of His incarnation. He was sinless because He was God and therefore pre-existed His conception and birth. Since the Holy Spirit performed a miracle in His conception, He did not partake of the sin that is normally passed on from parent to child. I don't pretend that's easy to understand; I'm just saying we should accept it and not make up fanciful arguments to explain it.

If I can take a quick aside here, I do think it is helpful to compare the Living Word of God and the Written Word of God in regard to this question of how something perfect could possibly come from something imperfect. Just as the Holy Spirit *superintended* the 40 authors of Scripture so that they could produce a perfect product, namely the Written Word of God, so also the Holy Spirit *overshadowed* the Virgin Mary so that she could produce a perfect product, namely the Living Word of God. If an inerrant Scripture can be mediated through errant people, then a perfect Jesus could also be mediated through an imperfect mother.

So, the logical argument for the sinlessness of Mary is not compelling, in my estimation. Besides, why stop with Mary? If a sinless Jesus requires a sinless Mary, how can you have a sinless Mary unless her parents were also sinless. And if you keep backing up, pretty soon you will have a sinless Adam and Eve and the whole doctrine of Original Sin goes out the window. The question remains, however, "What does the Scripture teach regarding the Immaculate Conception or the sinlessness of Mary?"

When I first started working on this message I was planning to go through all the Catholic views of Mary and then come back and compare them with what the Bible teaches. But instead I will offer the biblical response to each of these doctrines as we go through them. I think it might be easier for you to track with me that way. So, in response to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, I would say that the Bible teaches that . . .

**Mary herself needed a Savior.** The evidence for this is found, first of all, in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There's no indication of any exceptions to that save one, of course, as four times in the NT we are told that Jesus Himself committed no sin. Furthermore, I believe Mary's own words in her Magnificat, as recorded for us in Luke 1:46, 47, indicate that she was a sinner: "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God *my Savior*.'" As far as I know, only sinners need a Savior.

In addition, there are at least three occasions when the Scriptures at least hint that Mary may have erred. Once was in Luke 2 when she rebuked her 12-year-old son as He remained at the Temple after the family headed back to Nazareth; a second time was in John 2 at the Wedding Feast of Cana when she lobbied Jesus to do something about the shortage of wine; and a third time was in Mark 3 when she showed up with Jesus' brothers apparently trying to influence him, only to be rebuffed by Him. One of the greatest of the Eastern Church fathers, John Chrysostom ascribed to her "agitation," "trouble," and even "love of honor." My purpose here is not to demean her at all; in fact, next week I will try to demonstrate that she was incredibly godly, faithful, and honored by God. But I do not believe she was sinless; I do not believe in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

The Catholic Church teaches secondly that . . .

**Mary lived in a state of "perpetual virginity,"** remaining a virgin even after Jesus' birth. The virginity of Mary prior to the birth of Jesus is an indisputable teaching of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testament. But in addition the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church both teach that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. She freely chose this virginity in order to honor God, just as she freely accepted God's invitation to be the mother of Jesus. (Schreck, *Catholic*: 175) Joseph also accepted this choice that Mary made. He saw that her task was so holy and her womb so sanctified by the grace of God that he concluded, out of reverence for what God had done, that he simply would not "invade" what was holy.<sup>iv</sup>

This doctrine is also very ancient, going back at least to the third century. Origen and St. Jerome both taught that Mary was a perpetual virgin, and you may be surprised that Luther and Calvin both had a firm belief in the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. Nevertheless this doctrine is clearly a theological deduction rather than a biblical teaching. Furthermore, it is very closely connected to the Catholic notion that celibacy is a higher calling than marriage. If celibacy was not only modeled by Jesus but even required of His apostolic successors (as Catholics believe it is), then it's not surprising that they would expect His mother to choose it for her own life.

But I believe it not only lacks biblical support; it probably contradicts biblical teaching.

Well, what does the Scripture say?

**Mary was a Virgin when Jesus was conceived and remained so until after He was born.** Matthew 1:24, 25 says, "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her *until* she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." If Mary remained a Virgin throughout her life, why doesn't Matthew simply say, "He had no union with her *ever*."?<sup>v</sup>

But an even stronger argument against Mary's perpetual virginity lies in the specific statements in the Bible that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters. They are mentioned in three passages in the NT. In Matthew 13 Jesus had been ministering in some other towns and villages when He returned home to Nazareth. In verse 54 it says,

*“Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” And they took offense at him.”*

It should be obvious that Jesus came from a large Catholic family—at least seven kids! (Smile!)

In John 7:5 we are given the additional information that “his own brothers did not believe in him.” But by Acts 1:14, following His death and resurrection, they have apparently come to faith, for His brothers are with their mother and the other disciples in the Upper Room following His ascension. Now, of course, these who are called Jesus’ brothers were actually His step-brothers, because they did not share the same two biological parents. Catholic and Orthodox scholars argue that if they are step-siblings, why couldn’t they have been Joseph’s children by a previous marriage? Some suggest they were cousins of Jesus, since the Greek word for brother can occasionally mean close relative. But again there is no hint in the Bible of a previous marriage for Joseph, and the normal meaning of “brother” is “brother.”

I also have a theological problem with the idea that Mary was a perpetual virgin. To abstain entirely from sexual intercourse within the marriage relationship is not part of God’s design for marriage. If Mary remained a virgin, she could do so only by disobeying the Apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 to the effect that “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.” In fact, to say that Joseph and Mary never had any sexual relationship would be grounds (on Catholic teaching) for their marriage to be annulled.

Third, the Catholic Church also teaches about Mary that . . .

**She was the mother of God.** The argument is really quite simple and quite logical: Since Mary was the Mother of Jesus, and since Jesus is God, Mary was the mother of God. The Orthodox Church strongly agrees, appealing to the ancient description of Mary as *theotokos*, or “God-bearer.”<sup>vi</sup>

Please understand that while both Catholics and Orthodox use the term “Mother of God,” they do not mean that Mary existed before God and gave birth to Him; rather they mean that she is the one who carried God in her womb. The infant who nursed at Mary’s breast was Immanuel, “God with us.” A general church council held in Ephesus in 431 qualified the notion that Mary was the Mother of God by adding the phrase, “according to the flesh.” (Schreck, *Catholic*: 176) While there is nothing heretical about any of this, and while I agree with the notion that Mary was *theotokos*, the God-bearer, I personally do not think “Mother of God” is the wisest of terms to use.

The second part of the Hail Mary begins, “Holy Mary, Mother of God . . .” Does everyone who hears that statement recognize instinctively that what is meant is “Mother of God Incarnate”? Probably not. Without further explanation, it leaves wide open the possibility for some people to assume that Mary may somehow be divine. Even more persuasive to me is the fact that the Bible itself never uses the term, “Mother of God.”

What does the Bible say?

**She is the mother of Jesus, or the mother of our Lord.** In Luke 1:43 Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, blesses Mary and declares her to be “mother of our Lord” (Luke 1:43). Wouldn’t it be better to use the biblical phraseology? Scot McKnight writes cogently,

*The question we ask is this: Does addressing Mary as ‘Mother of God’ involve veneration, adoration, and devotion of Mary as well? Does it get mixed up with ‘Wife of God’ or even ‘Mother of the Trinity’? Does it result in giving attention to Mary or does it . . . give attention to Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human as the God-man?*

A fourth key teaching of the Catholic Church regarding Mary is that . . .

**She was received into heaven without dying (“the bodily assumption”).** On November 1, 1950 (this is within the lifetime of many of us in this room), Pope Pius XII declared as an infallible statement the belief that at the end of her life Mary was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory without the experience of physical death. So, according to Catholic teaching, Mary never died. She just went to heaven. (*Catechism*: 252; Schreck, *Catholic*: 180)

This doctrine, of course, follows logically from the belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception, for since Mary was conceived without original sin, she was able to lead a sinless life. And since physical death is a consequence of sin, a sinless life could not have resulted in death. Therefore, Mary did not die. Instead, her soul and body were assumed into heaven.

While the notion that Mary never died is relatively recent, the bodily assumption is quite an ancient view. St. John of Damascus, a seventh-century theologian, quotes an earlier Bishop as saying that “Mary died in the presence of all the Apostles, but that her tomb, when opened, upon the request of St. Thomas, was found empty; wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven.” The Orthodox Church generally accepts the Bodily Assumption of Mary after her death, but it is not considered a dogma in Orthodoxy as it is in Roman Catholicism.

Once again, what does the Bible say?

**Nothing unique is recorded in Scripture regarding Mary’s death or entrance into heaven.** There is, of course, biblical warrant for individuals to be taken up into heaven without death, like Enoch and Elijah, for example. But the Bible says nothing about this in Mary’s case. Granted, that is an argument from silence. But it is not, therefore, an argument without merit. Some arguments from silence are really quite strong. Should I argue, “There must not be an elephant in this room,” that’s not a worthless argument, for an elephant is of such a large size that if it *were* in this room I should be able to see it. Likewise, if Mary were taken directly to heaven rather than awaiting the Great Resurrection, why would God not tell us in His Word? Why would we be told about Enoch, Elijah, and Jesus, but not Mary?

Finally, the last doctrinal issue we will consider this morning is that . . .

**She is Co-redemptrix, Mother of the Church and Mediatrix.** I put these together, not because they are all identical, but because they are related. According to the Catholic Catechism, through her obedience, faith, and charity Mary became a partner in the work that Jesus would do to redeem people from their sin (*Catechism*: 254). This is the origin of the idea that Mary is a Co-redemptrix.

In addition it is taught that she is the Mother of the Church. Like Eve is the mother to all who perish through sin, Mary is the new Eve, the mother of all those who are in Christ. (*Catechism*: 192) Catholics find this idea in John 19:25-27, where Jesus places Mary into the care of his beloved disciple, John. They see John being representative of the whole church, so that when Jesus says to John, “Behold, your Mother,” Jesus is telling the church that she is now the spiritual mother of the body of Christ on earth. (Schreck, *History*: 148).

As Mother of the church, it is taught that Mary has a very important ministry of intercession, praying on behalf of the church she loves. Because of this role, she is also given the title Mediatrix. This is why Catholics pray, “Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” It is taught that, like other saints both living and dead, Mary is interceding before God’s throne on behalf of the Church, but always united in the intercession that Jesus does on our behalf before the Father. (Schreck, *History*, p. 148).

The Orthodox Church rejects the notion that Mary is a Co-redeemer or a Mediator, but they do accept her as Mother of the Church, and they do pray to her, or at least ask for her prayers in their behalf.

What does the Scripture say?

**There is one mediator between God and man and one Lord of the Church—Jesus Christ.** In 1 Timothy 2 Paul writes,

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*

Interestingly, this passage is found in the Catholic Bible, too, but they seem not to see any inherent contradiction when they call Mary a Co-Redemptrix or Mediatrix or when they pray to her. Changing the suffix to “trix” instead of “er” or “or” does not seem to justify using such terms of Mary. The fact is the Bible uses “Redeemer” and “Mediator” only in reference to Jesus.

It is important to acknowledge that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, at least at the teaching level, stress that Mary in no way diminishes the *unique* mediation that Jesus brings to people and for which He alone should be worshiped. Icons of the Virgin Mary are, of course, very prominent in Catholic and Orthodox churches. People will kiss them or bow before them. They vigorously protest that they are not worshiping the Virgin but rather venerating her. The problem, of course, is that in practice what goes on in the hearts of many ordinary Catholics often looks a lot like worship, lordship and submission to Mary rather than Jesus. McKnight writes,

*When we see at multitudes of junctions in Italy a small picture, a shrine, or a small statue of Maria e bambino (“Mary and the baby”), we are led to think of Mary as the dominating figure and Jesus as the dependent figure. When we enter Roman Catholic cathedrals and basilicas and find pictures or statues of Mary over the altar and only on the back wall, in ways less accessible, pictures or statues of Jesus, we are led to think that Mary is more prominent than her son.<sup>vii</sup>*

Please understand there is no mention of any prayers by the dead or for the dead anywhere in Scripture. Once again, this seems like a fairly powerful argument from silence. If God wanted us to pray for the dead or to pray to the dead, wouldn't you think at least once in the whole Bible we would find an example of that happening?

**Conclusion:** There is so much more that could be said this morning, but let me close with this admonition: If you are going through Mary to get to the Father, it is unnecessary. Mary is a good woman, a great woman, I would even say the greatest of women, but she is not a mediator. The Mediator is the Son of Mary, Jesus. We don't need to ask Mary to pray for us now or at the hour of our death. We simply need to ask Mary's Son, the Son of God, Jesus, to forgive our sins. And if we ask in true faith, He will, once and for all time. That is what He died on the cross to do; that is what He promises.

We have probably talked more today about what we don't believe about Mary than what we do believe. And for that reason I beg you to come back next week. You have not received the full picture of this amazing woman, but I want you to have that picture. The Scriptures do a wonderful job *by themselves*, even without the Traditions of the Church, of showing the greatness of Jesus' mother.

Prayer: Father, we approach your holy presence in the name of your Son, Jesus. Thank You that You have provided the way to have our sins forgiven so that we can approach you confidently and boldly. Let us have minds that seek You and understand truth through the lens of Your Word. All glory be to Your Son we pray. Amen.

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i. Sources for Roman Catholic doctrines about Mary were taken from Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian: An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs*, (Servant Books:

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1984), Alan Schreck, *The Compact History of the Catholic Church* (Servant Books:1987) and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana : 1994) . References are made within the text by noting the author, the book and the page number.

ii. Another point I would like to suggest is that when Scripture and Church tradition collide, tradition usually wins in Catholicism. Of course, they will claim that these doctrines about Mary do not contradict Scripture but rather allow Tradition to reveal what Scripture is really saying. But in my opinion the divergence from Scripture is so great on some of these issues that they can maintain that only by a serious stretch of the imagination.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Tradition *always* wins over Scripture in Catholicism. St. Christopher lost his status at the time of Vatican II, even though he was well entrenched in tradition (those of you who are at least 50 years old remember the little St. Christopher statues on the dashboard of virtually every Catholic's car).

iii. This view, interestingly, is also ancient, having been taught by St. Augustine, among others.

iv. Scot McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*, 127.

v. The argument has been made that the same Greek word, "until," is used in Matt. 28:19-20 where Jesus promises that He will be with His disciples always, even "until" the end of the age. Does that mean that "after" the end of the world Jesus would no longer be with them? Of course not, so likewise Matt. 1:24, 25 may not be claiming that after Jesus' birth Mary would abandon her virginity. I am not persuaded by this argument, because "the end of the age" is perhaps just another way of saying "forever."

vi. I am indebted to Dr. Brad Nassif for the following observations: There was a vigorous debate in church history over whether Mary was *theotokos* or *christotokos*, the God-bearer or merely the Christ-bearer. At the Council of Ephesus A.D. 431 Nestorius was condemned for not being willing to call Mary *theotokos*. Instead he wanted to call her *christotokos* or *anthropotokos* to stress her human nature. But he confused "nature" and "person" in so doing so that by denying Mary as the "God-bearer" he ended up juxtaposing the two natures of Christ. He thought Cyril of Alexandria wanted to defend Mary as providing Jesus with His divinity, but what Cyril was saying was that the One whom Mary bore was none other than the Word of God Incarnate. All of the Reformers were happy calling her *theotokos*.

vii. McKnight, 135, 136.