

The Image of Mary, Mother of Jesus, in Matthew and John
Mary: Jesus' Foster Mother

In the books of John and Matthew, Mary's role as a mother is discredited in both passages because she is not given any voice in any decision making process regarding the conception, birth, and life of her child. She also is not given any authoritative power to regulate her child's behavior within the text. Although there are differences in how she is presented in Matthew and John, she is not given respect or authority as Jesus' mother in either book. In Matthew, she is acknowledged as divinely yet potentially unwillingly impregnated with Jesus by God and in John she is mentioned casually in the text, diminishing the magnitude of a mother-child relationship.

In the book of Matthew, Mary can be viewed as victim of divine rape. We are told in Chapter 1:18 "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." The text does not say that *she* found out she was with child from the Holy Spirit, it just says she was found to be with child. This leaves the reader pondering the question, "who found out she was with child" and "how was it found out that she was with child?" Later in the text it says "...an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Joseph] in a dream and said 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 18:20). Only later does it say that the Angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph in a dream that she was with child from the holy spirit. We as readers can assume that because this is the first explanation of how Mary became pregnant within the text, this may very well be the first time she received information and an understanding of what was going on within her own body.

If this is true, the text tells us that the message, terms and guidelines of Mary's pregnancy were delivered through Joseph, who at that time had not become her husband. We do not know if Mary was aware of this prior to it being revealed to Joseph in the dream, but we can assume that she did not because this was the first mention of it in the text. Generally, a woman is the first person, with the exception of her medical doctor, to know that she is pregnant, and has the final decision in what to do with her child, unless she is a minor. This concept is made null and void because the text tells the reader that Joseph had more knowledge, and thus power, over her body than she does. This takes away from her role as mother because the text gives Joseph total dominion over her body. It sets readers up to look at Jesus' paternal figure as more knowledgeable than his maternal figure, both in divine (God) and in the flesh (Joseph).

Another silent spot within the text is how God planted the seed within Mary. As discussed in class, there are several different words for the English word "virgin," and each may have its own interpretation. The text references Isaiah when it says "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel." Depending on one's interpretation, we can assume that Mary had never had sexual intercourse. God may or may not have mated with Mary, but there is still a void within the text as to what exactly took place for her to become pregnant.

The text also does not say that God had made an arrangement with Mary, or why God had selected Mary to be the carrier of Jesus. Thus we can conclude that Mary's pregnancy may not have been consensual. The text also does not reveal what Mary's emotions were about this situation. It is possible that she was happy to be pregnant with the son of God, but she may have been very angry that she did not have a choice in the

situation. Because the text does not tell, we can assume that her opinion ultimately was viewed as unimportant or irrelevant to the story.

In the book of John, Mary's role as mother is discredited because the text opens up with an intense introduction of Jesus as the divine son of God. In John 1:1-5, it says

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

We are not explicitly told that this passage is referring to Jesus. However later in the book, chapter 14:6, Jesus clarifies this passage by saying “...I am the way, and the truth, and the life, No one comes to the Father except through me.” This tells us that the Jesus is the life being referenced, thus the passage puts a disclaimer on the magnitude of the relationship between God and Jesus. By saying “He was in the beginning with God” we can infer that God truly cherishes Jesus, leaving little room for Mary to be able to have a motherly bond with Jesus because he is already so close to his divine Father.

It is also evident that the book of John downplays Mary's role because the first introduction we have to her is in Chapter 2:1-5. In the very first verse, it says “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.” In this text, Jesus' mother never even receives a name. She is simply referred to as “the mother of Jesus.” In addition, Jesus' relationship with God as his father was announced in the beginning of the book, so that readers can clearly recognize how close they are. In comparison to this, the sentence that shows the reader who Jesus' mother is “...and the

mother of Jesus was there” sounds like an afterthought or a common courtesy as opposed to intense, pertinent information.

Her role as mother is further discredited when we see Jesus backtalk her in Chapter 2:4—“And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’” The footnotes in the text say that the word “woman” is “a term of respect and affection” and cross reference other chapters in the book of John. However, in Genesis 2:23 we are told “this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” This gives the reader the impression that because Jesus is referring to her as “Woman,” he views himself as her superior, rather than humbly acknowledging her as his mother. We know that he always refers to God as Father (example: “...The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me (John 5:36), but he does not refer to Mary as mother. Also, his response to his mother can be interpreted as selfish, arrogant and snappy toward his mother because he says “what concern is that to you and *me*” and “*my* hour has not yet come.” However, he never talks or responds to God in this tone. We can assume that Jesus respects his relationship with his Father, God, more than he does with Mary, discrediting her role as his mother.

In both Matthew and John, readers are made aware that Jesus had an earthly mother, yet the text does not give her the credit she deserves as mother. The text tells us that God is the ruler and father of Jesus, and ultimately there is no mutual common ground between Jesus’ relationship with his father God and his relationship with his

mother Mary. Mary is still perceived to have had a hand in Jesus good will, yet her authority will always be superseded by whatever male is available.