



In some prayers the phrase “Blessed Mary Ever-Virgin” is used. What does that mean? There are references in the Gospels to Jesus’ brothers and sisters.

Like the Early Christian Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Churches, the Old Catholic Churches, and the Oriental Churches teach that Christ gave the power to “bind and loose”—i.e., the power to interpret authoritatively His once-for-all revelation and apply it to new situations—only to the Apostles *as a body* and that this authority is continued solely by the Bishops validly consecrated in the Apostolic Succession as a body.

A synod of all the Bishops in the Apostolic Succession world-wide is known as a General or Ecumenical Council. In addition to the Council of Jerusalem recorded in the Book of Acts, there have been seven General Councils of the undivided Catholic Church, the first held in Nicaea in A.D. 325 and the seventh again in Nicaea in A.D. 787. All the branches of the Catholic Church—including Anglicanism—teach that the decrees of these General Councils are, as Our Lord Himself put it, “binding.”

The Third General Council in A.D. 431—the Council of Ephesus—dogmatically defined the Blessed Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, a Greek word translated as “Mother of God,” that is, she who bore God. (This was part of the Dogma of the Incarnation, affirming that what Mary bore in her body was God, i.e. that Jesus from the moment of conception was both completely God and completely Man.)

The Fifth General Council in A.D. 553—the Second Council of Constantinople—dogmatically defined the Blessed Virgin Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, a Greek word translated “Ever-Virgin.” The renowned twentieth century Eastern Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky has written that the term refers to purity of heart and the absence of selfish erotic desires. “To be the ‘handmaid of the Lord’ is to be free from any fleshly preoccupations.”

The words of the original Gospel text, translated into English as Jesus’ “brothers” and “sisters,” in New Testament Greek mean any kind of male or female relatives respectively. They do not convey the same specific biological relationship that “brother” and “sister” do in Standard English. (Interestingly, like these New Testament Greek words, “brother” and “sister” have a much broader meaning in English slang.) Hence these terms have no bearing one way or the other on the existence of other biological children of Mary.

A third major attribute of the Blessed Virgin Mary found in the liturgy is *Panagia*, a Greek word translated as “all holy” or “most holy.” This title points to what the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission’s (ARCIC) *Agreed Statement on the Blessed Virgin Mary* speaks of as Mary being “marked out from the beginning as the one chosen, called, and graced by God through the Holy Spirit for the task that lay ahead of her. ... With the Early Church, we see in Mary’s acceptance of the divine will the fruit of her prior preparation, signified in Gabriel’s affirmation of her as ‘graced.’ It is not so much that Mary lacks something which other human beings ‘have,’ namely sin, but that the glorious graces of God filled her life from the beginning.”

The ARCIC *Agreed Statement* continues, “We join in praying and praising with Mary whom all generations have called blessed, in observing her festivals and according her honor in the communion of the Saints, and are agreed that Mary and the Saints pray for the whole Church.”