

The Woman: Take-Home 7

Session 7: Theotokos

What We Found

'Mother of God' is a claim about Jesus before it is a claim about Mary. The logic: Mary is truly the mother of Jesus ('God sent forth his Son, born of woman,' Galatians 4:4); Jesus is truly God, one divine person ('the Word was God... the Word became flesh,' John 1:1, 14); and mothers are mothers of persons, not natures. Therefore Mary is the mother of a person who is God.

Elizabeth, 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' already says it: 'the mother of my Lord' (Luke 1:43), in a passage where the same word Lord names the God of Israel and the child in the womb within three verses. Around the year 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch writes of 'our God, Jesus Christ... conceived by Mary.'

The Council of Ephesus (431) defended the title Theotokos against the proposal 'Christotokos' because the substitute quietly split Christ into two subjects. The title makes Mary's greatness derivative by definition: she is honored precisely and only because of who her Son is.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

"For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan, of the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit."

Letter to the Ephesians 18:2 (c. 107)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

St. Cyril teaches, in substance, that there are not two sons, one of God and one of Mary, but one and the same Son; refuse her the title Theotokos and you refuse him the Incarnation.

Second Letter to Nestorius (summary)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

The third ecumenical council (431) confessed the holy virgin as Theotokos, since she bore according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh.

Council of Ephesus, 431 (summary)

Live It This Week

- Pray the first half of the Hail Mary daily and hold 'Mother of God' for ten seconds as a creed about Jesus.
- Read John 1:1–18 aloud once this week, on your feet.
- Put your Take-Home 1 where you cannot miss it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Galatians 4:4–5 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read John 2:1–12, and BRING YOUR TAKE-HOME 1 with the sealed My Guess box.
The guesses open next session.

Catechism references: CCC 495; 466; 509