

Why did Jesus ask John just prior to His death to take care of His mother Mary?

Some have concluded that Jesus was Mary's only child, and that He therefore asked John to take care of His mother after His death, as there was nobody else in His immediate family who could have done so. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

We read in John 19:25-27:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother... When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."

Almost every biblical scholar agrees that the "disciple whom Christ loved" was the disciple John (Compare for additional references, John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7). Especially in John 21, John identifies himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (compare verses 20-24).

The fact that Jesus entrusted John, who was possibly one of His nephews [compare comments in the "People's New Testament"], with the care of His mother, does not mean, however, that Mary did not have other children. The Bible clearly reveals that Mary and Joseph had additional children, AFTER Jesus was born.

Our free booklet, "Jesus Christ--A Great Mystery," proves this fact in great detail in chapter 3, "Christ's Relatives," on pages 28-30. You might want to read the entire passage in the booklet, but here are just a few highlights:

"The 'Virgin Birth' is clearly taught in Scripture. However, the Bible does not teach that Mary stayed

a virgin for the rest of her life. We read in Matthew 1:25 that Joseph 'did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.' The word 'till' or 'until' signifies that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph DID 'know her,' that is, he did have a sexual relationship with her...

"Luke 2:6--7 confirms this: 'So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son...' The Greek word for 'firstborn' is, 'prototokon.' It means, 'first-born,' but it does not describe an only child. The word for 'only-born' is 'monogenes.' In Luke 7:12, the word 'monogenes' is used, when describing a person who was 'the only son of his mother.'

"The Jews knew that Jesus was not the only son of Mary. They knew very well that Jesus had brothers and sisters. We read the account in Matthew 13:53--56: 'Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's Son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?"'...

"Some teach that Christ's 'brothers' were in fact Christ's cousins. This is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, although this has recently been criticized by Catholic scholars who have concluded that the brothers were, in fact, Christ's real brothers and not His cousins. The word for brother is 'adelphos.' This Greek word is used in Matthew 1:2 and 4:21, clearly referring to literal brothers. The word for cousin is 'exadelphos,' meaning 'from brothers.' When the Jews pointed out in Matthew 13 that Christ's brothers were with them, they used the word 'adelphos,' not the word 'exadelphos.'

"Some propose that the brothers and sisters mentioned in Matthew 13 were Christ's spiritual brothers and sisters, not His physical siblings. But... the Bible makes a clear distinction between Christ's

physical brothers and His spiritual brothers. In addition... Christ's physical relatives did not believe in Him and so they could not possibly have been referred to as Christ's spiritual brothers and sisters."

Why, then, did Jesus ask John, rather than His brother James, to take care of Mary?

We need to realize that at the time of Jesus' death, none of His brothers believed in Him. Also, John was the ONLY disciple who stayed with Christ until He died--showing His dedication and bravery and the intimate relationship between Christ and His disciple whom He loved. Christ KNEW that John would take care of His mother--more than His half-brothers would have been able or willing to do--and that from the very moment (or the "same hour") of His death.

Even though the Bible does not specifically and expressly say why Jesus chose John, there are several important hints. Most commentaries which understand that Jesus HAD brothers and sisters, also give plausible explanations, based on Scripture, as to WHY Christ entrusted His mother to His beloved disciple who BELIEVED in Him--rather than to one of His brothers who did NOT believe in Him at that time of His death.

Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible points out, in John 19:26, that Jesus said, in effect:

"... take that disciple whom my power shall preserve from evil for thy son; and, while he considers thee as his mother, account him for thy child.' It is probable that it was because the keeping of [Mary] was entrusted to him that he was the only disciple of our Lord who died a natural death, God having preserved him for the sake of the person whom he gave him in charge. Many children are not only preserved alive, but abundantly prospered in temporal things, for the sake of the desolate parents whom God hast cast upon their care. It is very likely that Joseph was dead previously to this."

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible elaborates, as follows:

"This was an honour put upon John, and a

testimony both to his prudence and to his fidelity. If he who knows all things had not known that John loved him, he would not have made him his mother's guardian. It is a great honour to be employed for Christ, and to be entrusted with any of his interest in the world... It would be a care and some charge to John; but he cheerfully accepted it, and took her to his own home, not objecting the trouble nor expense, nor his obligations to his own family, nor the ill-will he might contract by it... [Some commentaries say] that she lived to remove with him to Ephesus."

Tradition and historical records report that John was later accompanied on his missionary travels by an elderly woman, who--it is felt--was none other than Mary, the mother of Jesus.

We might also add that John had more writing to do. At least five writings of his have been preserved and are part of the Holy Scriptures. He wrote the "gospel of John" (of which Mary was undoubtedly a good source of information), three letters (1 John; 2 John; and 3 John) and finally the last book of the Bible--the book of Revelation, while banished to the isle of Patmos.

It is true, that ultimately, as we explain in our aforementioned booklet, at least three of Christ's four brothers came to the faith (James, Simeon and Jude, who wrote the letter of Jude). Perhaps Jose or Joseph became converted, too. We are also informed that James became a very influential leader in the early Church, and that he wrote the letter of James. But that happened LATER. Before then, Christ's brothers were unbelieving and hostile toward Christ (compare John 7:5). They might have been envious and even perhaps hateful toward Him. He referred to them as enemies within His own household--being without honor in His own home.

At the time of the crucifixion, Christ did not think that Mary needed to experience further agonies from her own family. It was more than enough that she had to observe the brutal death of her beloved Son--feeling the sword piercing through her own soul also (Luke 2:35). Christ, in His wisdom and foresight, entrusted His mother to the care of John,

knowing that he would be able to provide for her the physical and spiritual needs which Mary needed the most at that difficult time in her life.

As explained in our afore-mentioned booklet, tradition tells us that James, after his conversion and leadership role in the early church in Jerusalem, experienced a violent death in his faithful service to Christ. IF Mary was still alive by that time, a further transition of care for her would have been necessary. Christ, foreseeing this, entrusted the care of His mother to John, knowing that John would die long AFTER the death of His mother.

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