



VIRGINITY AND HOLY VIRGINS

ACCORDING TO
ST. JACOB OF SERUGH

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
One God, Amen

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THE BELIEVER AND THE LIFE OF EVANGELICAL VIRGINITY

In September 2010 His Grace Bishop Serapion, Bishop of Los Angeles and its precincts, called for a study cycle on '*Virginity and Ministry.*' This brought back memories of the late forties and early fifties. At that time I was focused on my readings about the early Fathers, on the "Paradise of the monks" and the "Ladder to Heaven" written by St. John Clemacos, the Memres (homilies) of St. Isaac the Syrian, as well as on the lives of various ascetic Fathers. My concept of virginity was confined, to a large extent, to monastic life in its different aspects.

Although I greatly enjoyed the writings of the Fathers - starting from the Apostolic Fathers (the disciples of the Apostles) and continuing all the way through the golden age of the Fathers in the East and West - yet I was drawn to the sublime virginity of the inner life further past that of the physical. In other words, the virginity of the soul since it denotes the glory of the King's daughter, and which is found within her and 'within the palace' (Ps 45:13). This virginity shines more brightly when it is coexistent with the virginity of the body as well. In fact, if the believer is content with achieving virginity of the body only and feels proud of that, he/she would lack the radiance of virginity. In such a condition, virginity becomes a heavy burden on the soul.

Every child of God experiences the virginity of the soul, heart, and thought. He /she could be married, or be consecrated to minister and serve, or devoted to research and study, or committed to the priesthood and shepherding. In essence, virginity is the fellowship, union, and adherence to the heavenly Groom, the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ who is the object of God's pleasure. Moreover, virginity denotes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every sincere and earnest believer who enjoys the work of the Holy Trinity in his/her life.

Since becoming preoccupied with the writings of St. Jacob of Serugh, I have decided to present to myself and to my fellow brothers the topic of '*Virginity according to St. Jacob of Serugh*'

VIRGINITY AND ST. JACOB OF SERUGH

The writings of St. Jacob of Serugh, and his Homilies in particular, reveal the extent to which his thoughts, feelings, and his entire energy are occupied with the subject of virginity. This is not limited merely to the remarkable multiple repetition of the word 'virginity' and its synonyms; for you sense - as you read - that his depths are fired up by love of virginity; especially the virginity of the soul.

The following points indicate the drive behind his interest in virginity:

1. Virginity of the soul is associated with a life of holy purity. It is as though the soul, being sanctified in the holy God, carries the icon of the holy One and testifies for Him by her (the soul's) inner life. This is also evident by her thoughts, dreams, and words; as well as by her outward behavior. We can say that the person who is confident of his faithfulness and of the commitment to enjoy the virginity of his soul is being prepared to be the mirror carrying the reflection of the brilliance of God upon him.
2. His writings reveal his vision of the believer's life here on earth. He thinks of it as being a most enjoyable journey in spite its problems. He shares the vision of Origen concerning this temporary life in which the soul is on a journey on the road to holiness, accompanied by the Holy One, and crossing over from the corrupt country into the heavens.
3. Holy virginity is the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of a believer. He/she is being prepared with the wise virgins for the coming of the Groom in the middle of the night. Inner holy virginity is the oil inside the lamp and which the soul lights up and carries to enter with her heavenly Groom to inherit eternal glory.





A JOYFUL VIRGINAL ATMOSPHERE!

Whenever St. Jacob of Serugh mentions virginity, the believer does not feel that this involves a burdensome recommendation or training. Indeed, it entails a sweet and practical enjoyment of a holy and joyful life that is constantly glad. This glad course is evident in the person's inner life as well as in all the surroundings and those with whom he/she interacts.

Therefore do not be astonished when St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the following matters:

1. The true believer enjoys the inner virginity of the soul. He is also able to enjoy physical virginity through the work of divine grace.
2. The believer finds joy by being a member of the Virgin Church who is the holy Bride of the Virgin Son.
3. The life of virginity leads to union with the heavenly hosts, who do not practice holy matrimonial life, since they are sublime and enjoy virginity.
4. The Word of God became incarnated in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
5. Adam was not created through the marriage of parents of his. He was created from the earth which St. Jacob of Serugh considers to be virgin.
6. Eve was created from the side of Adam the virgin. Similarly, the Church has been created from the side of the second Adam the Virgin.
7. St. Jacob of Serugh presents to us many examples of virginity found in both Testaments: the Old and the New.

THE LIFE OF VIRGINITY

OH HOW SUBLIME IS VIRGINITY!

When St. Jacob of Serugh writes about the sublimity and greatness of virginity, he looks out at the heaven and the earth and finds that virginity is the companion of the angels. Besides, he



finds that she is a constant sister of the heavenly hosts. No marriage exists between any of them for they are all partakers together of their joy in the all glorious God.

He finds that our first parents lived in Paradise as two virgin angels. However, Satan tempted them to become gods; and therefore corrupted their joyful nature.

St. Jacob invites us to follow the example of the angels, which he refers to as the household of Archangel Michael, Gabriel, etc. He states that virginity is not an impossible matter, and he quotes from the Old Testament when Elijah was taken up into heaven by a fiery chariot. In the New Testament, he quotes St. Mary who was qualified to have the Son of God incarnated in her without marriage. Simon Peter also realized the sublimity of virginity and the favor it receives from God. Therefore he requested from the young virgin John to ask the Lord Jesus Christ about the disciple who would betray Him (Jn 13:23-24).

Every time St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the sublimity of virginity, **he underlines the goodness and beauty of marriage on condition that it is associated with a holy life; even though it does not attain the sublimity of virginity.** This is also confirmed by the Fathers of the Church. St. Ambrose says: [Chastity has three forms: chastity of marital life; chastity of widowhood; and chastity of virginity. We do not glorify any one to the detriment of the other.] **St. Augustine** speaks about God who grants the chastity of virginity and of marriage and says:

[We have to state and confirm that chastity is a gift from God (Gen 8:21). In the Book of Wisdom of Solomon (8:21), he states that no one can be chaste unless it has been granted from God. This is particularly true in the context of the great and glorified form of chastity in which the soul is controlled and refrains from marital ties. The Lord says: **'All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given'** (Matt 19:11).

The same applies to marital chastity, which cannot be preserved unless a person abstains from illegal relationships.



Therefore when the apostle speaks about the two ways of life - marriage and virginity - he states that chastity in both cases is a gift from God. He says: 'For I wish that all men were even as I myself. **But each one has his own gift from God**, one in this manner and another in that' (1 Cor 7:7)¹.]

St. Jerome states: [The person who has been married just once teaches us that a woman should marry once only (as long as her husband is alive). However, this statement could be taken as an opposition to virginity if we fail to give marriage its proper place... the heretics are the only ones who despise marriage, and in doing so they step over God's command with their feet. Concerning ourselves, we joyfully listen to the words of the Lord in His praise of marriage. Indeed, the Church does not discourage marriage. Rather it subjugates it².]

In his memre on Sodom, St. Jacob of Serugh makes a comparison between virginity in its amazing sublimity and marriage through the Lord and between the falling into adultery. He considers virginity as a brilliant sun rising as with heavenly rays that reflect upon us its divine brilliance. We are therefore enrobed with clothes that are woven with heavenly light. At the same time, he labels marriage as 'holiness' as long as it is a marital relationship in the Lord and whose clothes are those of glory. As for adultery, it is covered with utter darkness.

If a believer finds it hard to enjoy virginity, then let him/her enjoy the sanctity of marriage. However, that person should avoid even uttering anything about adultery or sodomite behavior [committing sin with one of his/her parents, as the daughters of Lot did (Gen 19:31-38)].

Marriage is holy as it is the way a person, by nature, is inclined to take; whereas virginity is an angelic act that transcends nature.

Virginity is a vigorously gleaming brilliant sun; and holiness is similar to the gorgeous aspect of the moon.

¹ St Augustine: Contenance, 1.

² Letter 48:11



Marriage is the morning light which prepares the road; adultery is darkness therefore do not go there and trip, my son.

The glimmering clothes of virginity are woven with light; and the inviting clothes of holiness are the clothes of glory.

Marriage is completely covered with favorable colors; and the head of adultery is covered with blackness...

The evil that took root in Sodom is exceedingly great; it would be a smaller pit if a thought crosses its path (compared to its punishment).

If possible, be steady in the degree of virginity; and if you depart from that, you will find another degree which is that of holiness.

If that is hard, then there is marriage which is easy and safe; be vigilant and aware of the maze of adultery.

Do not ever think, or mention with your tongue the crime of Sodom and its contradictions...

O you, who have promised (to live in) virginity, she is great; and you are walking on a beaten road that greatly transcends the (road) of the world¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

It seems that **St. Jacob of Serugh** believes that Adam's family which consisted of himself and Eve, were naturally ruled by virginity. They lived as though on a high and sublime peak. Most probably he believed, like many of the Church Fathers, that had the first family not fallen into sin, they would have had children without any passionate physical lusts. They were naked and unashamed for they did not carry within them any physical lust.

The household of Adam descended from the peak of virginity down to marriage, which is also beautiful.

Like angels, those who had been united without a marriage, entered into Eden through the road of sublime virginity.

While they lived on the sublime peak, the envious snake came in and vomited poison to kill them.

¹ Memre 154, the fourth on Sodom (Gen 19). (الميمر 154 الرابع على سدوم (تك 19))



When it promised them deity, the beautiful ones fell down and they lost the beautiful aspect which they naturally possessed.

After their fall, they proceeded to marry. It is not that marriage is distasteful; but it is marked by humility and filled with pain (Gen 3:16).

Therefore the road of a pure marriage is beautiful. It is filled with beauty when it is far removed from adultery.

While it is beautiful, sanctity is more sublime than it, since without holiness no one can come close to God.

Virginity is sublime and resplendent and filled with light. It ranks more sublime from the beauty of partnership (marriage).

The household of Gabriel are the companions of virginity; and due to her beauty they do not descend to marriage.

The household of Gabriel live in her sublime place; and they never take the road of marital partnership.

Virginity is the companion of angels, and the beloved sister of the heavenly ones. Elijah, who is there, testifies with us.

The Virgin Mary, from whom the Son of God shone without marriage, testifies to the beauty of virginity¹.

The angel Gabriel and his rank are virgins. The angel Michael and his company are also pure as they do not get touched (by the earth or dust) of marriage.

Virginity is purity and goodness. Elijah testifies to that, and the Virgin Mary is a testimony of the beauty of virginity.

She gave birth to the Son of God without marriage, and she remained a virgin. Peter, the apostle, knew the value of virginity and embraced it.

1 Memre 53 B On the Cross. Part B: Tuesday Night (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony); Memre 52: On the Sufferings of our Savior, His Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection; Coptic, Elkhoury Bolos Elfehaly p. 41-42 (Arabic).

الميمر ٥٣ ب على الصلب، الفصل ب: ليل الثلاثاء (راجع نص بول بيجان ترجمة الدكتور بهنام سوني)، الميمر ٥٢، على آلام مخلصنا وصلبه ودفنه وقيامته، قبطي: الخوري بولس الفغالي، ص ٤١-٤٢.



He asked John to move closer and to ask the Lord for the name of the one who would betray Him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

In his use of the words ‘touched by the dust of marriage,’ St. Jacob could be referring to the hardships of marriage in spite of its sanctity. **St. John Chrysostom** confirms the sanctity of marriage; while he clearly indicates that the virgin enters into a battle with the passions of the body. Through divine grace, a virgin enjoys the heavenly crown for his/her whole being, that is, for his/her soul and body; for both have cooperated in the spiritual struggle. As for those who are married, the struggle is an inner one between the spiritual and the physical passions of their own bodies and those of their partners. Thus the struggle is twofold since each is obligated to satisfy the other person and his/her devotional needs in the Lord.

St. Gregory of Nyssa also complains of the hardship of marriage. His article on ‘Virginity’ indicates that he was married since we find him apologetic for not having attained this virtue².

In the letter of his friend, **St. Gregory of Nazianzus**³, there is mention of Theosebia in words that clearly indicate that she is the wife of Gregory of Nyssa. Some consider that she was just a deacon who was greatly loved and known for her wisdom.

St. Gregory of Nyssa praised her later when he wrote on the topic of virginity; and **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** called her his saintly friend and blessed sister. Indeed, when she passed away he said in her eulogy: “the pride of the Church and blessing to our generation.” That is how the saint considered her with admiration and honor.

This is what **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says in his discourse on Virginity:

‘It seems that the splendor of virginity is useless and unprofitable to me. It is like what wheat is for the buffalo that is muzzled to plow it. Or it is like water which springs out of a deep pit for a thirsty person who cannot reach it.

1 Mar Melitius Barnaba: Excerpts from the poems by St Jacob, Bishop of Serugh, Elmelfan, Homs, 1991 (Arabic). ١٩٩١، حمص، سروج الملفان، حمص.

2 Virginity, Chapter 3. P. 46:32 A.B.

3 Ep. 197. P. 37:324



There could still be a chance for those who have the freedom to choose the better path and who have not yet become caught up in the concerns of a worldly life. This is unlike those of us who have wandered away from the glorious life of virginity. It is impossible to climb up the mountain of virginity once a person has stepped into the worldly life and has become married. Thus we have become mere onlookers of the joy of others; or witnesses of the happiness of a certain set to which we are unrelated. As we present some ideas about virginity, we feel no happier than those cooks and table waiters who bring all that is delicious and appetizing to the tables of the rich without receiving any share of the food which they have prepared... We are similar to those who compare their poverty with the wealth of the rich¹.

CHRIST, THE SON OF THE VIRGIN PROCLAIMING CHRIST TO BE THE SON OF THE VIRGIN

St. Jacob of Serugh often uses the title of 'Son of the Virgin' to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ without directly using His name. This shows the extent to which he honored virginity. In his memre on the martyrdom of the children of Bethlehem, he refers to them as the virgin friends of the Child in the stable, the Son of the Virgin. He also considers that the Blood shed on the Cross for our salvation is virgin Blood. Besides, in numerous instances, he loves using this title and its synonyms.

He came to bring the wedding of the Blood in the land of Judah, yet the children were called to be slain there.

The blood of the beloved ones came to the wedding instead of the wedding balms so the Groom gleamed with the blood of the virgins.

¹ *De Virginitate*, ch 3. Translated by a father at the Syrian Monastery: Published by the Church's Bookstore for Sunday School in Giza- 1966- p. 62-63 (Arabic).

ترجمة أحد الآباء بدير السريان: الناشر مكتبة مدارس التربية الكنسية بالجيزة، ١٩٦٦، ص ٦٢-٦٣.



From the beginning, the massacre was a signal of the mystery of the wedding; for everyone who would come as a friend would shed his blood.

The Mystery appeared and the firstborn grapes were picked; and new wine was made from it for the King who is the Groom.

The **Virgin Son** invited His **virgin friends**, so that they would record His slaughter and the sacrifice of the virgin Blood.

The pure were killed for the sake of the Pure One even though they were blameless. They were to prepare the path for the chaste Blood which would be abundantly spilled.

The king ordered their sword's to be drawn from its sheath to slaughter one to two year old children.

The sword was drawn to slay the children, they were killed without questioning and wherever they could be found.

The order and the sword were issued by Herod the king, so that the children of the land would be attacked and killed.

The murderers questioned and searched for male infants, and they mercilessly slaughtered them while they were in the arms of their mothers.

Herod's soldiers went out into the land and tainted it with the blood of the innocent which was spilled upon it.

They waged the war over the shoulders of the mothers and they stripped them of their fruit.

They wasted the blood and filled the embrace of the mothers with it. These were mothers who died of fear, for they had watched the death of their beloved ones¹.

The Son is in the Father, and (who can) measure the sublimity of the Father? This is because the Son is in Him and in His bosom; and He is hidden in His essence (Jn 17:21).

¹ *Memres of St Jacob of Serugh*. Egypt Publishing Press, Elfagallah. 1621 Coptic Calendar-Memre 22 -p. 279 etc. Monastery of St Macarius. Cf. *Memre on the Lord Incarnate and Negating the Deception of Evil Spirits*; (transcribed by Fr. Botros of Syria). Memre 6 speaks about the star that appeared to the Wise men and about the slaughter of the children- (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).

ميماز أي مواظ السروجي، مطبعة مصر بالفجالة، ١٦٢١ ش، ميمر ٢٢، ص ٢٧٩ الخ؛ دير القديس مقاريوس: راجع ميمر: «على رينا بالجسد وإبطال ضلالة الشياطين» (قام بنسخه القمص بطرس السرياني)؛ الميمر ٦ على النجم الذي ظهر للمجوس وعلى قتل الأطفال (راجع نص بول بيجان ترجمة الدكتور بهنام سوني).



Who is the one who speaks about the One concealed in the bosom of His Father, while **He has entered the wonder-filled virgin** without moving from His place!

He is hidden in the Father, and He is the true Son within the virgin mother; and the interpreter has only to keep silent and wonder¹.

O Son of the Virgin, You have fractured the head of the serpent by Your crucifixion. Save me from it for it puffs breathes lust and weakens me².

The serpent lies on the ground and has been killed with the sword aimed at Golgotha, therefore it no longer lives with love of the world around me³.

The Place of the Word is in the Father's bosom and in the young girl's embrace (Isa 7:14). The virgin's womb is filled with Him while the Father's bosom has not been emptied of Him. He is completely present in both of them! In the Father He has no beginning; yet He has made a beginning in the mother ever since the angel's announcement. He is totally and perfectly present in the virgin's womb. Besides, He is undivided and wholly present in the Father's bosom⁴.

The vomit of the serpent corrupted the waters of the world. O Son of the virgin, be the medicine and heal them.

The stick of Moses sweetened the bitter waters of Marah (Ex 15:22-27). May Your Cross turn all our bitterness into sweetness.

The Son of the virgin mixed the contents of the cup on

1 Memre 19 On the problem of Adultery and On the Vision which Simon received from the Father. (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).

الميمر ١٩ على سؤال ربنا وعلى التجلي الذي قبله سمعان من الآب (راجع نص بول بيجان ترجمة الدكتور بهنام سوني).

2 Memre 30. (Cf. the text by Dr. Behnam Sony). Author: Divine Love, 2010, p. 630.

الميمر ٣٠ (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني): للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، ٢٠١٠، ص ٦٣٠.

3 Fourth Epistle

4 Memre 136: The One who Witnesses that the Dictator of the Law (both Testaments) is One and the Same (James 4:12)

الميمر ١٣٦ الذي يبرهن بأن واضع ناموس (العهدين) القديم والجديد هو واحد له (يع ٤: ١٢).



Golgotha, and made us get drunken by it; and here we are now accepting His crucifixion.

That dragon attacked Adam and killed him. The Son of God mixed the cup and gave us to drink.

Adam drank of the wine of the Cross and this negated the serpent's poison which had killed him¹.

O Son of the virgin, who was not recognized by the dead, grant wisdom to my tongue so that I may effectively be an attorney defending Your hymns².

The truly pure ones came carrying their offerings, the Lamb to the high priest; and the milk for the Child, and praises for the King.

The simple hurried and elbowed their way among the angels into the cave. They entered and saw Him and they worshipped before Him with their offerings....

The praises of the heavenly ones intermixed with the songs of mankind and a colorful hymn ascended to the Son from all mouths....

The Child was silent, the (heavenly) hosts grew and the voices were loud. The angels gave praise and the people sang and confessed.

The cave was crowded, and the stable was poor; the virgin mother and Joseph were terrified while the Son slept³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE WONDERFUL MESSIAH!

The prophecy indicates that He is the 'Wonderful' (Isa 9:6)

The Wonderful, for He is inexplicable.

The Wonderful, for the virgin gave birth to Him without marriage.

The Wonderful, for He entered the bosom of the virgin

1 Memre144. Sixth On Giving Praise at the Table.

الميمر ١٤٤ السادس على التسييح (على المائدة).

2 Memre 165 On the Entry of the Lord into the Temple and On Simon's reception of Him (Lk 2:22-35). Memre 24 On the Entry of the Lord into the Temple and On Simon's reception of Him – Coptic.

الميمر ١٦٥ على دخول ربنا إلى الهيكل وعلى استقباله من قبل سمعان (لو ٢: ٢٢-٣٥); الميمر ٢٤، على دخول ربنا الهيكل وقبوله

3 Monastery of St Macarius: Memre 'On the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ' (Copied by Fr. Botros of Syria)

دير القديس مقاريوس: ميمر "على ميلاد ربنا يسوع" (قام بنسخه القمص بطرس السرياني).



mother, while He did not leave the holy embrace of the Father.

The Wonderful for He descended into the depths, while He remained in the heights.

The Wonderful for He descended and ascended. He is sublime for descending; and He is humble in His ascension.

Now He who descended is the same One who ascended. He did not leave Heaven when He descended, and He did not leave the earth when He ascended. 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' (Matt 28:20)¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE MESSIAH IS THE WATER IN THE WELL, I.E, THE SON OF THE VIRGIN (2 SAM 23:13-17)

In the Second Book of Samuel this amazing story is related; and it appears hard to interpret. This is what it relates:

“Then three of the thirty chief men went down at harvest time, and came to David at the cave of Adullam. And the troop of Philistines encamped in the Valley of Rephaim.

David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

And David said with longing, ‘Oh, that someone would give me a drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!’

So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord.

And he said, ‘Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this! Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?’ Therefore, he would not drink it. These things were done by the three mighty men.’ (2 Sam 23:13-17).

1. St. Jacob of Serugh considers that what is indicated here about **‘water from the well of Bethlehem’** is a reference to the water accumulated from rain formed from clouds in the sky and not a reference to water coming from a source in

the earth’s depths. David yearned for water from the **well** of Bethlehem. The Saint considers that the water coming from this well is a **reference to the Son of the virgin** who is the water of eternal life. He descended from heaven to enter into Bethlehem so that we might enjoy Him.

2. He also considers that the water of wells and springs are formed from marriage as it is earthly. On the other hand, water from rain comes from heaven and is a reference to the virgin who gave birth to the One who was not formed by a human seed.
3. David specified that his yearning was for water from Bethlehem. He was looking with a prophetic eye at the Word, God incarnate, born as a child in Bethlehem.
4. The Lord Jesus Christ was making a reference to this incident and similar ones when He said: **‘...for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it’ (Matt 13:17).**
5. David the Psalmist did not drink of it so that the men would not think that he had asked for ordinary water in order to quench his thirst by the water of the world and so putting the three men’s lives at risk. He offered the water to the Lord for these reasons:

First: To proclaim the desire of his heart. It was not for this water, but for what it symbolized, that is, his desire was for the Child of Bethlehem.

Second: He offered it to the Lord as the Word of God came to offer Himself a sacrifice for the sake of mankind.

Third: The price of this water was paid by these three heroes; while no person can pay the price of the coming Water, that is, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ crucified. It was paid by the Lord Himself and by His precious Blood.

David yearned for water that did not come from springs or sources. He yearned for the water of love. It was a symbol for our Savior.



He did not ask for water running from a spring, but for that One which runs from the house of God.

That Prophet did not ask for water from the well for the Son of God is not the (fruit) of marriage.

The water of love runs from the peak of the heights; just as the Messiah came from the heights to become our drink.

The virgin is the well where the Drink descended from the heights. A source did not arise from the earth and water ran into it.

In the prophets, a woman is called a well also, and a man is called a mountain. He who has experience understands.

This explains why David called the King and Lord Jesus Christ ‘the Water of Love’; and he yearned to see His day.

He did not simply ask for water from the well; but he specified his yearning for (water) from the famous well of Bethlehem.

He wanted to testify that this water, which he yearned to drink, came from Bethlehem so that all the earth would drink of it.

Who could give me water from the well of Bethlehem?! Those who heard him insisted on fulfilling his (request).

Three men went out to fetch the water he requested. They went and brought it. However, he did not drink of it.

He offered the water and did not taste it in order to testify that his passion was unsatisfied.

Had he drank it, they would have believed that he had yearned for it. Since he did not drink it, it became clear that his desire was to enjoy the Son of God.

He requested water and it was brought to him. But he did not drink it. He clearly claimed that he yearned for the Messiah, the Son.

The water was there for him to fulfill his desire, and he said: I did not ask for this water as you thought I had.



This water which you brought has been paid for by the blood of people, and I do not drink of water bought by the blood of men.

Who would give me to drink in my thirst from the water from Bethlehem which is mixed with the Blood of the Son of God?

I do not wish to drink water bought by people’s blood, for there is no life to those who drink water paid by human blood.

The Blood of (the Incarnate) God grants life to mankind and that was what David yearned for.

As it is written: ‘...many prophets and kings have desired blessed is He who came as foretold in the prophecy’¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

A VIRGIN TOMB FOR A VIRGIN SON

The Homilies of St. Jacob of Serugh reveal the amazing pleasure God finds in a human being as He loves and seeks him. Our wonderful God offers everything to man regardless of the cost, in order to acquire him and bring him into His embrace. This is what St. Jacob of Serugh communicates in most of his Homilies!

We have already mentioned how David sighed and yearned for a cup of water from the well of Bethlehem. This reveals the yearning of the believer to acquire the One born in Bethlehem. To show God’s yearning for man, He descended as water which accumulates in a well in order to satisfy man with the water of eternal life. In this manner the Word of God began His life on earth among mankind: He became incarnate in the womb of the virgin. With that same yearning for us, He concluded His life on earth by being buried in a virgin tomb.

By His virgin birth, the Word came and lived among us and shared life with us. However, all the children of Adam walked, as though in a procession, to the resting place of the dead (Hades). The Word of God did not wish to ascend into heaven without embracing Adam and his children who had gone off course. He wanted to carry them with Him into His eternal glory.

¹ Memre 43 on The Lord is known in the Books as food and drink; Memre 80 on the mystery and aspects of Jesus Christ (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).



The Lord Jesus Christ, the great One who had planted the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8); descended to seek Adam His servant. He did not find him among the trees for Adam had died and had been buried in a grave. Therefore, His Lord descended into the grave after him. The Lord searched for him in the earth, and did not consider it a shame to die for the sake of His beloved Adam who had died and had turned into earth!

Adam lost eternal life and acquired death for himself and his children; whereas Joseph of Arimathea came to pick the fruit of the Tree of Life. This is how man can regain and enjoy the fruit of the good life.

The word 'Joseph' means 'an increase' or 'an addition.' St. Jacob of Serugh therefore considers that Joseph is the one who carried the Lord to be buried in the virgin tomb in order to bring back the first Adam to the Paradise he had lost, that is, to the life he had lost. Dr. Sony states that St. Jacob of Serugh juggled with the name 'Joseph' which means 'addition' because life was added to Adam.

Joseph buried Him in the new tomb which was in a garden. It is like the Lord who planted the paradise in Eden (Gen 2:8). Joseph, who had requested to carry and bury the Body of the Lord, rejoiced for life was added to Adam who was restored to his place.

He saw the Tree of life on the Cross and he yearned for Him. He requested, obtained, and picked Him; and he brought Him down in order to enjoy Him.

He wrapped the Body and placed Him in a new tomb (Matt 27: 57-60), in a virgin tomb for the glorified Virgin Son.

In the name of Joseph, Adam who came out of the tomb, preached because his God had blessed and received him into Eden which he had left.

(Adam was in the grave). Therefore, his Lord descended to search for that lost one among the trees in Paradise.

He was lost in Paradise, and the Lord searched for him in the garden, while knowing that He would first suffer and then would find him.



Joseph possessed a Paradise (Jn 19:41) near the Golgotha. It had a new tomb. So the search for the lost one would be in the garden.

The great Planter descended into the garden, after his servant, and did not find him there among the trees (Gen 3:8-11).

When Adam descended into the grave, the Lord descended after him and turned over the earth of the dead, and searched for him among those who had perished.

The search led Him to the place of the dead. He did not consider it a shame to die for the sake of His beloved servant¹. He wrapped the holy Body and placed Him in a new tomb: **a virgin tomb for the firstborn Son of a virgin.**

Joseph was known for his righteousness, honesty, and faith; and the new tomb was in a garden.

The tomb of the Redeemer was shut and the gates of the Merciful were opened up. Adam hid among the wicked as he was ashamed of his disobedience.

And from the tomb of Joseph, the Lord restored him with pride. He led Adam from darkness into the light.

Without an apostle or angel, the Lord Himself saved him from perishing².

Our Lord came out of the tomb though it was secured by the seal (Matt 27:66). When the guards saw Him, they were greatly troubled.

They wondered as they saw Him coming out of the tomb, and they looked and the seal was still there and undamaged.

They saw the Resurrection and they saw the tomb; and they were troubled by both matters. Consequently, the winds of doubt began to affect their thoughts.

Is this a vision? Is it a symbol? Is it a dream or are we seeing a shadow?

We have seen Him coming out, and here we are finding

¹ Memre (7) 53: *On the Mother of our Savior, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. (night of Bright Saturday... Cf. text by Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony) (The coptic text- Memre 52); Al Khoury Bolos Elghafaly, p. 183-184.*

² *Mar Melitius Barnabus: Selections from Memres by St Jacob of Serugh, bishop of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs, 1991*



the tomb sealed. Which are we to believe... for both matters are facts indeed?

He is truly risen, and the tomb is truly sealed. But the news will be hard to receive though no untruth is involved.

The guards were disturbed, as they were confronted by these fears. Therefore, the angel came and rolled the stone away to confirm in their minds what they had seen...

The Lord did not need to open a door when He came out, for it is easy for Him to penetrate concrete nature.

This is how He entered the upper room while the doors were closed (Jn 20:19-26). In the same manner, He came out though the seal of the tomb was still there.

When He came out, the heavenly vigilant (angel) opened the tomb to reveal to the guards the beauty of the Resurrected.

When the Almighty arose, the One who found it right to lie down in the hollow pit willingly, He did not need anyone to open for Him.

When He suffered on the Cross, the rocks were shattered and the stones rattled; and they did not impede Him from coming out when He arose.

When He was born, the cover of virginity was intact; and when He arose the seal of the tomb was unbroken.

When He entered the upper room, the doors were unshaken. Indeed, His ways are sublime, and have not fallen to the ways of (mankind).

When He came out, the seal of the tomb was undamaged. After He came out, the vigilant (angel) opened the tomb to reveal the event.

When He came out, He was not obliged to open the door; but He opened it when it was necessary for others to see the tomb.

The angel waited for the mourners of the slaughtered Groom. He was there to reveal to them the place where He had been laid and to give them joy...

It was necessary to reveal the miracle to the guards for they saw the unbroken seal after the Son of God had come out.

They saw Him coming out, and they saw the intact seal. After that the tomb was opened so that they would believe that He had risen.

Before His faithful followers came, He opened the tomb in order to reveal the place where He had been laid¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE LORD HAS THREE DWELLING PLACES

St. Jacob of Serugh defines three dwelling places which the Lord visited in His path as the Incarnate Word of God:

1. **The first dwelling place is the womb of the holy virgin Mary.** He would be incarnated in her without a human seed. He would become the second Adam who would cure what happened to the first Adam who had lost the divine image.
2. **The second dwelling is the River Jordan** where He descended in order to destroy the monster, who had destroyed the first Adam. In this manner, He would grant the first Adam and all his children the spirit of adoption to the Father. This is possible since the Word incarnate is the Only Begotten Son of God. Through His baptism and divine grace, He is able to grant the joy of adoption to those baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.
3. **The third dwelling is the place of the dead.** He descended into Hades to destroy its locks, release the prisoners, and carry them into paradise.

This is what the Word of God, first born Son of the virgin, has done. In the beginning of the path, He descended into the womb of the virgin and came into the world in order to embrace us with His divine love.

In the middle of the path, He descended into the Jordan in order to sanctify it. Through this act, we would be sanctified as

¹ Memre 53 (8) On the Mother of our Savior, His burial, and Resurrection (Z- Sunday eve of the resurrection- Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Behnam Sony) (Coptic Version- Memre 52: Al Khoury Bolos Elghafaly, p. 198-200)



Adam and all his descendants were granted the robe of heavenly glory, which had been lost.

At the end of the path, He descended into Hades in order to release us from the grip of Satan, to crush death, and grant us the power of His resurrection.

In this manner, the heavenly virgin starts on the path to accompany us in our journey. He grants us virginity of the heart, mind, and our whole inner being. Thus He carries us into the heavens where the virgins dwell.

In order to enjoy the true life of virginity, it is fitting for the believer to accept the Lord as his/her companion throughout the journey of life.

In His **birth**, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes as a baby. Therefore, let us not escape and be terrified of meeting Him.

In His **baptism**, He bowed before John, in order to grant us adoption to the Father, so that in Him we can lift up our heads.

In **death**, we should not be terrified for we will meet Him since He is the Resurrection, the Conqueror of death.

He walked in our world, with us and like us and for our sake. He visited three places: the Virgin's womb, the guts of the Jordan, and the city of the dead. He did so as He was determined to go to that place where Adam was imprisoned. The beautiful picture had been damaged by corruption. However, no one could enter that place unless he had died; and it was hard for Him to die without having a body. Therefore, He first came into the Virgin's womb and became incarnated of her. This would facilitate the process of His death while preserving the nature of His Being. This would also indicate clearly and unmistakably that though He has died, He is alive...

Had He not died, He could not have entered the place of death. Had He not been alive, He could not have released the chained Adam¹.

He came into the world by the same path by which mankind enter. He desired to enter into all the houses that were in it.



He came into the womb which was the first home, and through conception He came out in the body to visit the world.

In mid-way, He came across baptism, and He was baptized in order to sanctify it too by descending into it.

The road ended in the place of death, in that place where Adam was bound. Therefore He came in order to release him.

In His divinity, the Almighty entered the place of the dead; and it was possible for Him to enter as He was incarnated.

He came in the body and therefore the tomb received Him. He abolished the hollow pit as he entered in His divinity.

Baptism, Mary, and Hades became as houses on the way, and He desired to enter into all three of them.

The Word was conceived in Mary because He desired to become flesh. Therefore He became incarnated in her blessed body.

He came to baptism and descended, and became clothed there with the robe of glory in order to restore to Adam the glory he had lost.

He entered Hades to release the captives there; and He fulfilled His entire intended walk in the three houses.

He entered the virgin and was born while being God; and baptism received Him while also being God.

He descended into Hades and the world recognized that He was God. Indeed, it did not recognize Him until He reached the gates of Hades.

In birth, He was wrapped in clothes in the manner of babes; and He came to John to be baptized in the manner of men.

And when He arrived to enter into Hades, the world was shaken, and the dead arose. So the world recognized that He was God¹.

He preserved the virginity of His mother when she gave birth to Him. He destroyed the gates of hell when He entered there. He preserved the virginity of Mary... it was fit to preserve the



virginity of the virgin when He was conceived in her. It was also fit to turn Hades into a wilderness through the new (deeds) He had performed¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE CHURCH: THE VIRGIN BRIDE

As the Lord Jesus Christ is called the ‘Son of the Virgin,’ so His Church is also considered the perpetual ‘bride.’ She is constantly united with Him on an eternal heavenly level. She will never suffer from depletion or old age. At the same time, she will be **called a virgin and her virginity will be retained forever.**

The heavenly ones stand in awe before this Church who participates in their angelic lives and heavenly praises. They see such wonder in Her!

The holy virgin Mary is the first ideal member of the Church. She is a mother and a virgin at the same time. She gave birth to the Word of God who was incarnated of her; while at the same time her virginity was preserved. In the same way the Church as a whole is the eternally young Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. She is a virgin because all her members become as God’s angels who eternally neither marry nor get married. The Church is the mother who has conceived many children through baptism.

This is the name St. Paul gives to the Church whom the Savior has restored from the captivity of sin. The Lord has liberated her from the rule of Satan through the Virgin. **‘For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to One Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ’** (2 Cor 11:2).

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [What an amazing mystery! One is the Father of us all; one is the Word to all; and one is the Holy Spirit everywhere also. Similarly, there is one virgin mother whom I like to call the Church.]

St. Augustine says the following:

[Today the virgin Church celebrates the virgin Birth... For the Lord Jesus Christ has confirmed the virginity of the heart which



He desires first for the Church through the virgin body of St. Mary. Indeed, the Church can be virgin only when she is united with the Groom, that is with the virgin Son, and as she offers Herself totally to Him¹.]

[The One who is fairer than the sons of men, the Son of St. Mary, the Bridegroom of the holy Church whom He has established in the likeness of His mother. He has presented her to us to be our mother; while He preserved her to remain a Virgin for Him².]

[Listen to what the Apostle tells to the whole Church and not only to religious women: **‘I have betrothed you to One Husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ’.** And because Satan corrupts virginity, he adds: **‘But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ’.** Those who possess physical virginity and have also observed it in their hearts are truly rare³.]

Would you like to know how the Church could be a virgin? Listen to St. Paul the apostle. He is the jealous friend of the Bridegroom who is watchful for his Friend rather than for himself... He speaks about the Church, but which church? To every place where his message could be sent... He says: **‘But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness’.** Has the serpent done physical harm?... Actually, she destroyed the virginity of Eve’s heart.

You may ask me: ‘If the Church is virgin, how could she conceive children? Or, if she could not bear children, how could she present the names (for baptism) of those whom she would conceive?’

Our answer: ‘She is a virgin and also bears children. She is like the virgin Mary who conceived the Lord’.

Did not St. Mary give birth to her Child while she retained her virginity? In the same manner, the Church gives birth to children while she is a virgin. By giving special consideration to the matter,

¹ Ser 178:4. PL 38:1005

² Sermons for Christmas and the Epiphany (ACW), 13:2

³ Sermons on the New Testament Lessons, 43:4



she actually gives birth to the Lord Jesus Christ, since those who get baptized are members of His Body¹,]

Fr. Peter Chrisologos comments as follows on the events reported in the parable of the returning prodigal son: [He put a ring on his finger (Lk 15:22). The ring indicates honor, a sign of freedom, and a clear spiritual warranty. It is the seal of faith, the **dowry of heavenly marriage**. Listen to the Apostle's words: '**I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin** ².] **Fr. Peter** also adds: [She is described as a betrothed to refer to the **Church as the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ...** She is truly a Bride, that one who through a virgin conception grants a new life to the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ³.]

St. Jacob of Serugh expresses his astonishment in his Memer on the Church. At one point, he calls her children 'heavenly angels,' participating with the heavenly hosts and soaring above the heights of worldly wisdom. Therefore they neither know pride nor alienation. They sit at the right hand of the King of kings while they wear crowns of purity. They hold lightened lamps filled with the shining oil of virginity. They are at a heavenly wedding and in holy matrimony with the holy Bridegroom.

He makes your plants to bear fruit, and multiplies the grain; while the weeds are thrown into the fire. And all the nations join together, saying: How great is the Church!

May the Lord bless your praying children, so that they become transformed into heavenly angels.

The streams of praise flow from your lips; and the world offers praise which it draws from your overflowing holiness in the Lord.

The hymns of the Seraphim flow out of your sides; and through your hands the barren streams get purified.

¹ *Converts and the Creed*:213:7

² *Selected Sermons (Frs of the Church)* 5.

³ *Selected Sermons (Frs of the Church)* 146.



The wise are silenced and depart from pride. They speak humbly to gladden your gatherings.

The Spirit brings in all the deacons ministering within your walls; and they carefully distribute the mystery celebrated within you.

Your head is adorned with the pure crown; and the oil gets multiplied in the vessels of your chaste virginity.

Marriage is purified through you, and the family of the Groom rejoice in you so that great heights of holiness are achieved in You¹.

Who is this Bride around whom the nations gather in order to get covered and clothed in the robes of the Light?

Who is this Bride who has risen out of the water? She is similar to sweet smelling incense, and the pride of all perfumes.

Who is she who so embarrassed the Jordan by her beauty that it provided a course of water with whom to wed her?

Who is this glamorous one staying in the womb of the waters so that she might conceive children who would become brothers to the Son of God?

Who is she who is honored by the priests and leaders of the world, so that their beings tremble as they sanctify her?

Who is she before whom the light and the snow appear as darkness; so that at her appearance her light overwhelms the light of the day?

Who is she who is leaning on the Only Begotten Son, covered with His Blood, and embracing and rejoicing to be with Him?

Who is she who is drawing people to the Source, mixing the Light with the Spirit in the Water and giving them to drink?

Who is she who appears to be as a cloud of light and so fascinates everyone who comes near her purity by her beauty?

Who is she who has opened the gates of heaven and so closed the gates of Hades which seemed appealing to the tribes?

Who is this new mother who restores to the aged their youth?

¹ *Mar Meletius Barnaba: Selections from the poems by St Jacob of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs, 1991.*

مار ملاطيوس برنابا: مختارات من قصائد مار يعقوب أسقف سروج الملقان، حمص، ١٩٩١.



Who is this educator who grants to every living being coming to her a garment of light?

Who is this owner of shining glory for whom the whole creation yearns to rejoice with her?

She is the daughter of the day who has spread her wings so that darkness would retreat before her and withdraw in defeat?

She is the baptism font, the Bride of the King who conceives to give birth; and who is supported by the Only Begotten Son through the Spirit of His Father.

Through Her, the creation - the shining sun and the betrothed of the Lord Jesus Christ - has been enlightened; and the world enjoys the circle of her light as she embraces it in love¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Briefly, we consider that it is appropriate for the believer to experience virginity within his inner man. This would grant him the characteristics of the Church, who is the praising and joyful Bride, participating with the heavenly hosts and illuminated by the holy oil. Indeed, it is fit for the believer to enjoy a virginal, holy, and heavenly marriage.

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY AND THE ENJOYMENT OF A RENEWABLE VIRGINITY

St. Jacob of Serugh believes that every soul, who believes in the Virgin Savior, rejoices as someone who has been released from captivity with all its bitterness. That soul flies to the joyful wedding and is renewed by the virgin Groom. He brings the soul to a blessed life that is eternally renewable.

St. Gregory of Nyssa comments as follows:

[Those who expect the return of the Lord Jesus Christ stand eagerly and vigilantly by the gates of heaven. They wait for the King of glory to come into His kingdom in a manner which exceeds all imagination. His coming (Psalm 19:5) **'is like a bridegroom coming out of his course.'**

In spite of our sins and our worship of idols; and although God

had banished us; He has betrothed us through His new Birth. He has washed away all our corruption and we have become newly born. Consequently, all the rituals of marriage have been performed and the Word of God has become united with the Church. St. John accordingly states: **'He who has the bride is the Bridegroom'** (Jn 3:29).

The Church welcomed the Bridegroom in the holy course of marriage; and the angels waited in expectation for the return of the King leading the Church as His Bride. He has touched her nature so that she is ready to receive such grace. He has said that our life should be free of evil and deceit in order to be ready to receive the Lord at His Second Coming.

When we watch the gates of our dwellings, we get ready for the arrival of the King. He will call and knock at the door and He has said: **'Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching'** (Lk 12:37). Blessed is the person who obeys the One who knocks at the door.

The soul is eager to receive this blessing of welcoming her Groom who stands at the door.

She vigilantly watches the door of her house and says: **'It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks'** (Song of Song 5:2). How do we fulfill the right of the Bride when she has become elevated to the One who is far more holy?^{1]}

Behold the virgin Church whom You have prepared of the down beaten, and who cheerfully call You. She gets enriched and rejoices to have You.

Everyone thanks You for everyone gets renewed by Your coming. You are blessed by all! Praise is offered to You in all tongues!²

Behold the virgin Church whom You have restored from captivity is rejoicing. She is cheering and offering praise through Your instruments.

¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa: *The Song of Songs, Sermon 11.*

² Memre 18 On Palm Sunday (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Memre 45 On Palm Sunday. Cairo Press- Elfagallah. Supervision of Youssef Bey Mancarious.



The faithful followers in all countries and regions sing the song of triumph, of love, of gratitude, and of loyalty for Your blessings and Your redeeming sacrifice, O Son of God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE CHURCH, THE VIRGIN BRIDE, CAME FROM DIVORCED HUMANITY

Mankind became so corrupt that they became like a young divorced girl or woman who is not worthy to live in the marital home. Yet the Savior works in her to form her into a chaste and eternally young bride, into a spotless and untainted virgin.

St. Jacob of Serugh considers that the Incarnation of the Word is an indication of a definite desire to accept humanity as a virgin Bride for Himself. His divinity united with His humanity in order that mankind would be united and become one with Him. 'Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, He says, shall become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:16-17).

Fr. Peter Chrisologos says: [The Word became flesh, and the body of humanity was elevated to the glory of God².] **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Union creates one out of the two so that they are no longer two³.]

Humanity - according to **St. John Chrysostom** - was plagued with defects, atrocities, and guilt. Nevertheless, the Lord did not get disgusted or reject her. Indeed, He delivered Himself for her sake. The apostle says: 'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). [In spite of her condition, He clothed her with beauty, and washed her, and did not reject to deliver Himself for her sake⁴.]

He betrothed humanity while He was in the unknown virgin mother's womb. By His birth, He took her (humanity) because she was divorced.

This is the Groom about whom the great Moses has written;

¹ Mar Meletius Barnaba: *Selections from the poems by St Jacob of Serugh Elmelfan*, 1991.

² *Selected Sermons (Frs. Of the Church)*, 145

³ In 1 Corinth, hom 18:1

⁴ *Ibid*



then Paul came and interpreted the mystery which was hidden.

The Lord was raised by human beings in order to establish the union, as it is written, between Himself and the people.

It is a great mystery that is too sublime to explain: the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church are one, existing as one Spirit, just as it has been proclaimed (Eph 5:32)

St. Paul engaged the chaste virgin in order to present her to the true Bridegroom who sacrificed Himself to redeem her (Eph 5:25)

Behold the feast of the Groom and the Bride now that they are one. It is not a temporal wedding which does not last.

The Son of the King has come and betrothed her. He has ascended into His sublime heaven; and she is waiting for Him to return in glory and to rejoice with Him (Acts 1:9-11)¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE FERTILE VIRGIN BRIDE YEARNS FOR HIS BEAUTY AND SOARS AFTER HIM

St. Jacob of Serugh follows the Church of the New Testament and finds that she is travelling from the bitter captivity of Satan to the glorious freedom which belongs to the children of God where there is constant renewal. She soars from a state of divorce, because of her rejection of the divine Groom, to the joy of a marriage that does not destroy virginity. Indeed, it is a marriage which fulfills and secures her.

This virgin Bride is characterized by the following features:

1. She is the great Church of whom the Psalmist foretold saying: 'I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly. Indeed, I do not restrain my lips' (Ps 40:9). Who is the one whose righteousness has been prophesied? It is no other than the Crucified Groom who opened His arms to embrace all Gentiles and all the nations so that all become the one assembly of the great Lord.

¹ Memre 194-the fourth: *On the End of Days* (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



2. The virgin Groom descended to our world which had become corrupt through sin and which had become waste and barren. By His descent among us and His presence as one of us, He has transformed the wilderness into paradise, and the earth into heaven, and human beings into the likeness of angels.
3. Our journey in the wilderness of this world has become beloved for we are accompanied by the Virgin Lord. He has become our sweet Companion, the Lover of mankind.
4. The love of the Virgin One led Him to take us as His virgin Bride. Being united with Him, He pours His love within us so that our love for Him may be set on fire. Consequently, we will run after Him and yearn to smell His sweet fragrance. This dispels the smell of corruption and decay which has come upon us.
5. Our love for Him is so ignited that we have become sick and we will not recover unless we are in His embrace!
6. Briefly, the Gentiles and peoples enjoy the fertile Virgin who converts the suffering wilderness into a joyful shelter.

The great Church has gone to the wilderness with our Lord, and He has opened the wide gates of righteousness for her to serve within.

Her righteous Groom left for the wilderness alone; so the virgin Bride yearned for His beauty and flew after Him.

The Bride of the Light keeps telling Him: 'Draw me away! I kneel at Your feet because of the fragrance of your good ointments (Song of Songs 1:3-4).

Your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you (Song of Songs 1:3).

O Daughters of Jerusalem, where is the Groom to whom I have been wed? He left for the wilderness, and I will follow and rejoice with Him (Song of Songs 1:5).

Do not look at me for I am lovesick. He takes my sickness and I go to Him for He heals me (Song of Songs 2:5).

In His company the wilderness is pleasant. It is secure for those who look up to Him.

I have despised security since it is a wilderness when He is not there. Indeed, who can provide security other than Him?¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE DESIGN OF THE VIRGIN BRIDE, THE FERTILE LIGHT, THE LOVING AND THE UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENT

St. Jacob of Serugh proclaims the Church as the 'Virgin of the Light' for she has been wed to the divine Light and therefore has become eternally lit and shining.

The opponents attack her as they believe it is a victory for them to arouse suspicions in the virgin heavenly Groom, the Lover of mankind. They stand against her and desire to condemn her. However, she wins over multitudes as she is armed with the spirit of love, gentleness, and wisdom.

At times, her opponents even mingle with the Church's congregation and claim they belong to her though they are foreigners and opponents of the truth. With their worldly wisdom, they attack the wise and gentle virgin in order to torment her. How does the virgin deal with those opponents?

The Virgin wraps herself with wisdom and gentleness. They shout and scream, while she proclaims her sweetness in the middle of their terrible noise.

She distances herself and does not seek their protection. Even if they claim to be knowledgeable and to have attained great education, she tells them: 'What do I have to do with you?'

She neither loses the tranquility and joy that colors her face, nor her joyful cheers among the crowds. In a spirit of joy and power, she proclaims: 'I am the betrothed, and I love my Groom. Therefore do not be concerned about me, and do not spoil my time! The Virgin steadfastly holds onto His death on the Cross which is an uncontestable and unchallengeable sign of His overwhelming love.

¹ Memre 87 On the Five Loaves and the Two Fishes (Matt 14:14-21); Memre 6:34-44; Lk 9: 11-17; Jn 6:1-15)





Rather than entering into arguments and detestable debates, she humbly worships her Savior.

However hard the opponents work to arouse doubts in the divine Love, the virgin of the Light will not rebel against her heavenly Groom.

The opponents do their best to plant the spirit of doubt and dissatisfaction. As for the virgin of the Light, she constantly continues to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.

The wicked spare no effort to arouse doubt in the divinity of the Savior. As for the virgin of the Light, she does not react to their claims, and says: **‘I do not need you to reveal to them the origin of my Groom, for He is truly the Son of God.’**

The Savior became incarnated while no one was aware of the event. When the angel proclaimed to St. Mary the news of the conception and virgin birth, her virginity was not destroyed.

His birth was fulfilled as He truly became man. Astonishingly, He was born while the seal of virginity was preserved.

The young Church entered the courts to face her opponents. Watch and hear her beloved wisdom.

The Bride of the King has an exposition for the researchers. Come, O chosen ones and serve as intermediaries between her and them.

The virgin of the Light has prepared an attack on the wise men so that each would hear how her gentleness guides her.

Your elected One, O Lord, has let out a shout due to the learned men who have persecuted her, She shook off her silence before the teachers saying: ‘What do I have to do with you?’

Her face is cheerful, and she proclaims, among the crowds, with a loud voice saying: ‘I am betrothed. Do not strive for my sake for I love my Groom.’

I love Him unconditionally for He has died for my sake. I worship Him without questioning for He has saved me.

Do not teach me to be rebellious as a result of your questions. I will not argue. Rather, I will adore the One who has died on my behalf.



Do not train me in divisive contradictions; for I have not been betrothed to Him by way of those who proclaimed Him.

Do not strive for my sake, for I will purify my tongue from questions. Indeed, I will not cease to offer songs of thanksgiving with my Lips.

I do not need you to reveal to me the origin of my Groom; for I truly know that He is the Son of God...

He became a physical image within the young virgin in order to be born in the physical manner of earthly people.

When He was born, He preserved the virginity of His mother so that the seal of the womb that has carried Him would not be damaged.

The marital door was unaware of His entry, and the seal of virginity was untouched when He came out.

He came out of the womb with pains and a cord similar to human beings, and He preserved the virginity, and displayed wonders since He was God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGINITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE OINTMENT OF SANCTIFICATION

The mystery behind the greatness of the Church lies in holiness which is considered a crown of glory on her head. It is the oil (ointment) in the lanterns of the wise virgins. It is as though holiness possesses glory and divine Light.

Usually when there is mention of the hosts that are led by the Church, the reference is to all the members: the married and the virgins; the priests and the whole congregation, the young and the old, men and women. They all look up to the Church and their lives are constantly renewed and healed from the wounds of corrupting sin.

It seems fit for the Church, being the one and only Bride, as

¹ Memre 134 On Research and the Sanctification of the Kingdom Days (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



well as all her members, to carry the image of the holy virgin in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ!

May your promise of chastity be a crown on the top of your head; and may the oil increase in the vessel of your guarded virginity.

May marriage rejoice by its purity, and may you enjoy heights of holiness and honor.

May you be a model for all the ranks, and may the world, which has been corrupted by its wounds, be renewed through you¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

ST. MARY, A VIRGIN THROUGH THE BIRTH OF CHRIST; AND THE CHURCH, A VIRGIN THROUGH HER WEDDING WITH HIM

The designation of St. Mary as a virgin, as well as the designation of the virgin Church who has embraced all nations, indicates that this characteristic is a divine gift from the Lord Jesus Christ. The ideal church member, St. Mary, has received this gift at the incarnation of the Word in her womb. The Church has accepted this gift by choosing Him to be Her Bridegroom.

No one can boast of his/her virginity based on the refusal to get married; or for not being disturbed by any temporal matters. Rather, a person could boast for enjoying fellowship with the Holy One Who pours within him His Holy Spirit and the features of the Master. In essence, virginity is the partaking of the divine Nature (2 Peter 1:4).

How wonderful! St. Mary did not lose her virginity when she gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, the adulterous nations, by accepting to be married to the Lord, became transformed from being adulterous into being a chaste virgin!

The incarnation of our Savior Jesus Christ has changed our understanding of virginity as well as of adultery! We can briefly state what St. Jacob says: ‘He who adheres to Satan becomes spiritually adulterous, even though he has not committed adultery



physically. And he who adheres to the Lord Jesus Christ becomes spiritually virgin even though he gets married and conceives children!’

Come! Enter and behold a great and wonderful event! Nothing like it has ever taken place, neither before nor will it ever happen again.

The virgin gave birth to a Son while remaining perpetually virgin. Which adulteress preserves her virginity after marriage?

The Son of God was conceived of the Virgin, and made Her His Mother. When He betrothed the adulteress from among the nations, He turned Her into a virgin.

Behold the virgin has a Son and milk without marriage; and the adulteress has regained virginity through marriage.

Since then, the status of the virgins and the adulterers has changed...

The virgins possess the power of virginity until it is time for them to get married...

Then the Son of the King did something wonderful for the Bride He had taken. He brought an adulteress from the market, and turned her into a virgin.

During the wedding ceremony, he sought for the virginity of those to be wed; whereas the daughter of the nations had carried it to her wedding.

Up to the day of her wedding, she had been an adulteress; and at her wedding she became a virgin. This is the amazing wonder.

She committed adultery through the idols... and she became corrupt. Yet when the Cross made a banquet for her, she became a virgin.

The idols made her unclean, and she became the bride of gods. She sat in front of images and lovingly married the sculptures.

The daughter of the Aram was shamefully filled and satiated. She committed adultery through the devils and the foul devils became her friends.



The Groom took the adulteress from the market, and carried her into the water. He turned her into a virgin. Now she is with Him.

Who is He who has turned the adulteress into a virgin, other than the One who has turned a virgin into a Mother?...

As He has made the virgin into a Mother, so He has made the adulteress into a virgin, and now she lives with Him.

The whole of nature is perplexed: she has committed so much adultery, she has been so obscene and so shameful, and how great she has become.

Her adultery has been dispersed and with it her foul name has vanished. The Groom gives her a good and new name as well as His Father's house.

Behold her as she boasts of the virginity which the groom has granted to her; and the white clothes which she received as she descended and wore them in the water.

Moreover, she was granted virginity through the Cross of the Light which she wears as a necklace¹ around her neck; and through the jewelry of pain of the beloved Son whom she holds so dear,

It is through the Blood and water that flow from Him, and around whom all gather as if it were the River Gihon that is filled with life.

She is nourished by Him, as He desired to be her Food; and drinks of Him as He desired to be her Drink.

She breaks His Body and offers and places It into the mouths of her children. She mixes His Blood which grants life to all who drink of It.

She eats and places It daily on her table, distributes It to the people and to all the nations of the world in order to live through Him².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ The Cross is not worn only as a crown on the head, for it is also worn around the neck as we is the custom nowadays.

² Memre 43 On Our Lord is defined as food and drink in the Holy Book.



THE VIRGIN CHURCH TAKES PRIDE IN HER VIRGIN CHILDREN

As St. Jacob lifts up his heart, ignited with love for the Church, he prays that she might be filled with virgins.

He realizes that the sole joy of the Church is to give birth children to God. The Church desires them to carry the features of the Incarnate and Only Begotten Son. In other words, she desires them to enjoy virginity according to the example set by the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head and the Groom. We could say, if that is proper, that they are filled with joy due to their spiritual and sacred virginity in the Lord, and the Church is gladdened by them. Her horn (power) is lifted up because her children are spiritually valiant giants. Therefore, the Church considers them her glory and her crown.

The Church finds pleasure in her sincere virgin children; and the heavenly ones rejoice because they have come to share heavenly fellowship with them,

May her gates be secure; may her assembly thunder; may her children rejoice. May her horn be lifted up; her glory honored, and her crowns be praised.

May her stronghold be filled and may she trample her fallen enemies and haters. May her mouth be opened and may her voice be raised as she rejoices in the righteous and is gladdened by her priests¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE CHURCH THE BRIDE, AND THE PRAISING VIRGINS

A believer's desire to practice virginity might be confined to merely abstaining from marriage and sexual relationships. In such

¹ Memres of St. Jacob of Serugh. Egypt Press, Fagallah.; 1621; Memre 22::279 etc.; St. Macarius Monastery. Cf. Memre: 'On The Lord in the Flesh and Negating the deceptions of the Devils' (transliterated by Fr. Botros the Syrian).

ميامر أي مواظ السروجي، مطبعة مصر بالفجالة، ١٦٢١ ش، ميمر ٢٢، ص ٢٧٩ الخ؛ دير القديس مقاريوس: راجع ميمر: «على ربنا بالجسد وإبطال ضلالة الشياطين» (قام بنسخه القمص بطرس السرياني).



a condition, virginity produces inner discontent due to the feeling of deprivation and restraint. Therefore physical virginity deprives such a believer of joy and gladness in the Lord. On the other hand, when the believer's desire- whether he/she is a priest or a married person-is associated with spiritual virginity, then the experience will be one of such glorious joy that the believer will consider himself to be the happiest being on earth.

The first kind of believer (practicing physical virginity) often suffers from a sense of grievance so that his life's journey on earth seems like a prison and his view of life becomes dark and desperate. The second kind of believer (practicing spiritual virginity) finds his/her life to be a constant progress towards the heavenly virgin ones. He is in the company of the sacred virgin One who is the Source of inner joy, holiness and true glory. Such a believer passes through this world vested in the reflection of the brilliance of the heavenly Groom shining upon him. His life is transformed into unending praise: he offers praise and thanksgiving, not only with his mouth, lips, and tongue; but with his whole being.

Behold Your name is the ointment of Chrismation that scents the assemblies. The youth have loved your sweet smell, and have offered praise to You (Song of Songs 1:3).

Behold the offerings of the congregations, that are well pleasing to You, are carried on their tongues expressing gratitude and thanks.

Your sweet wine moves the mouths of virgins so that Your praise increases in all churches in all places¹.

No one should look at this woman filled with corruption. Purify your lives by the beauty of the Church, O chosen ones. No one should imitate the daughter of Gamorrah. Imitate the Bride of the Light.

The congregation of the Church is unlike the people of Sodom. Blessed is the person who has chosen the one (church) who is crowned and her ministers.

¹ Memre 23: On the Parable of the vineyard (Isa5:1-5; Matt21:33-41; Mk12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19) Memre 48: On the Parable of the Vineyard- read in Coptic on Wednesday morning of the Holy Pascha.

الميمر ١٣٣ على مثل الكرم (إش ٥: ٧-١: ٥: مت ٢١-٣٣: ٤١: مر ١٢-١: ١٢: لو ٢٠: ٩-١٩: الميمر ٤٨ على مثل الكرم، يُقرأ باكر يوم الأربعاء من البصخة المقدسة، قبطي.



Instead of adultery and troubled corruption of the peoples living **there, in our gatherings there are saints and virgins¹.**

He made the sun to shine from the essence into a dark world. Therefore the whole world was lit up and became beautiful through the Son of God.

O daughter of the day, **wake up and praise your betrothed,** for your Groom has adorned you with clothes woven of fire.

You have become the firstborn: behold, your image is present in the course of the Light. It is gloriously included with the chaste daughters of the Light.

Behold, how all the nations have gathered: they have come clapping for they are all devoted to the only One.

The young maidens from the distant islands worship. And the chaste ones from all over the sea worship Him².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE CHURCH, THE VIRGIN BRIDE, REJOICES IN HER MARTYRS

The language of the chaste ones is constant praise and uninterrupted rejoicing as they feel peaceful and secure. How does the chaste Church consider the martyrs who suffer and die for the sake of the heavenly Groom? She takes pride in them and blesses them.

The mystery of the joy of the Church, who is the virgin Bride, lies in her children who share in the Cross and the sufferings of her Groom. These therefore enjoy the glorious virginity. In other words, they enjoy the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His glory.

Origen believes that the **Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Lord of the martyrs, is the true Martyr who works in the lives of those who believe in Him.** He considers that the virgin Lord allows His martyrs to suffer for He suffers in His martyrs. Indeed, He grants each martyr victory, crowns him/her, and receives this crown for Himself. In this context, **Origen** says: [Truly the angels in heaven rejoice on our account, and the waters clap their

¹ Memre 151- The first on Sodom

² Memre 180 On Edessa and on Jerusalem. Eve of Palm Sunday.



hands together... but the armies from the lower regions which are gladdened by evil do not rejoice¹.]

Ambrossiaster writes the following: [The Lord Himself participates in the death of martyrs. Their agony is His and His life purifies their bodies. Their pain is the true testimony of their readiness to receive eternal life which the Lord has promised².]

The virgin Bride is greatly gladdened by the martyrs, and she dearly loves the sight of their terrifying sufferings.

The one is lashed, the other stoned, another beaten, another mutilated, another dragged, and another captured and imprisoned.

There are some who are bound and some whose flesh was torn by their oppressors. One is mutilated and the other devoured by wild beasts.

Some are sacrifices of fire which ascend as perfume; and some carry the torched marks in their bodies as though on crystal.

Some are laid by the unjust upon tracks of steel; and some have to walk on burning coal as though they were flowers.

One is bound to a wheel on fire, and the other is smashed by the evil ones.

This one is violently abused, the other is mutilated, and all have accepted to go through it all with love³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 18.

² CSEL 81:225]

³ *Memre S6 on The Confessors and Martyrs* (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



VIRGINITY AND FAITH

St. Jacob of Serugh considers that the person whose mind is sanctified in the Lord, and who humbly accepts the teaching of the Holy Bible without questioning or doubt, is similar to a virgin. Such a person refuses to let his mind be married to disturbing research or coldness. As a virgin, he is filled with the wonder which the holy St. Virgin Mary experienced as she carried the amazing Lord Jesus Christ.

CAST AWAY USELESS ARGUMENTS IN ORDER TO BE IN THE IMAGE OF THE VIRGIN!

Cast away, O soul, all disturbing thoughts. Throw them off, as well as all doubtful opinions.

Open the gates of your amazing mind so that He would enter into you, just as the wonderful One entered into her.

The wise soul is not disturbed by arguments. If coldness invades her, she would no longer be worthy of the Wonderful One.

The soul that possesses wonderment and freedom from arguments is the virgin carrying the Wonderful without marriage. If she decides to research, she submits to marriage. Then, if she marries research, her virginity is torn away, and the Wonderful would no longer be in Her¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

VIRGINITY AND REPENTANCE

Repentance is essentially like physical and spiritual virginity. In a person, these constitute the meeting between man and God. Both enable man to enjoy fellowship with Him as He is the Savior of the soul as well as the body. Repentance drives our soul to live in virginity. Some, in their amazing love for the Savior, yearn so much for the virginity of the body to interact with the virginity of the soul.

¹ *The Third Epistle*



In the same manner of repentance, the believer is sanctified. This is especially true about believer's will which is in harmony with the divine will.

Virginity is adherence to the Holy Savior so that His image is reflected eternally within us. Consequently, we become living icons of Him. Deviating into wickedness is estrangement to God, and the loss of His image within us. This leads to a state in which the soul, heart, mind, etc. is deprived of virginity. Repentance is essentially the retrieval of inner virginity and the adherence to the Holy Virgin One.

Speaking about virginity, **St. Augustine** addresses virgins and reveals his fear of their falling into pride and consequently be deprived for the Lord Jesus Christ. He urges then to walk with fear and trembling in the path of their salvation. These are some of his words to them: [I say that I have great fear that you boast of following the Lamb wherever He goes; and yet, because of your pride, you are unable to follow in the upright path. It is better for you, O virgin soul, that while being virgin... you continue to fear the Lord and conceive the spirit of salvation. Indeed, 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear' (1 Jn 4:18). It states that it casts out fear of people but not the fear of God; the fear of temporal evil and not the fear of divine judgment at the end of time: 'Do not be haughty, but fear' (Rom 11:20). Love the goodness of God, and fear His severity, and do not be haughty. In Love, be fearful so that you do not rebel against the loving God in a dangerous manner. What resistance could be more dangerous than disregarding Him through pride. It is for your sake that He is displeased with the proud!... If you have no love, then fear lest you perish; and if you have love, then fear lest you sadden Him¹!]

THE DIVINE COMMANDMENTS

God's commandments are chastity, constant unchanging peace, rich in mercy, and other beautiful virtues that are crowned with blessings.



Struggle to observe these spiritual commandments which grant life to the soul. Through them you receive God within your soul, These constitute the safe path...

Indeed, without chastity of the heart and body, no one can be perfect before God. The holy Bible accordingly states: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt 5:8).

Perfection stems from purity of the soul which is the center of natural goodness as well as that of unnatural wickedness. Wickedness is the source of the pain of the soul which suffers of slander, hate, vain glory, etc....Whereas goodness produces knowledge of God, holiness, and total cleanliness from all pain in the soul.

If a person seeks to correct his ways and arms himself with struggle as he evades evil: through tears, humility of the heart, fasts, vigils, and (optional) poverty besides prayers, then the Lord helps him/her. He grants him divine grace and liberates him of all the pain of his soul.

St. Anthony the Great says the following:

[Many have lived for long periods as monks and virgins yet have been unable to attain chastity. This is because they have not obeyed the teachings of their Fathers and have listened to the inclinations of their own hearts. Consequently, evil spirits which corrupt the soul dominated and wounded them night and day with their unseen arrows. They could not find peace anywhere. At times, their hearts were preoccupied with pride; at other times with vain glory and wicked envy, slander, anger, hatred, multiple quarrels, and many such sufferings. The share of such people is similar to that of the five unwise virgins who spent their time ignorantly. They neither controlled their tongues nor guarded the purity of their eyes. They neither preserved the purity of their bodies from lust nor their hearts from impurity and other sins. These arouse pity due to their impurity. They were satisfied merely by wearing the linen garb which belongs to virginity, yet they were deprived of the heavenly oil which lights the lamps. Consequently, the Groom



would not open for one day the gates of His chambers. Indeed, He would only tell them the words He tells to the unwise virgins: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ (Matt 25:12).

I write this because I yearn for your salvation. Through it you will be liberated and faithful. You will be the chaste Bride of Christ, the Groom of the souls. St. Paul the Apostle accordingly says: For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2)1.]

Through Baptism we are purified; through tears of repentance we wash away the filth of sin.

The soul is in need of purity when the heart is crushed with sadness; and when all the waters of the seas are incapable of washing away all that is clinging to her (the soul).

If the tears of repentance do not wash her, pray and beg the Lord saying:

‘O Almighty and powerful God, O most Merciful, have mercy on me. You have redeemed me with the Blood and Water that ran out of Your side.

May Your holy Body and Blood be food for my soul. Grant me the capacity to preserve this soul in chastity and purity².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE PRODIGAL SON AND THE LOSS OF THE VIRGINITY OF THE WILL

St. Augustine believes that God allowed the scandal of the religious nuns when the barbarians forced their way into the city of Rome because they had been stricken with pride. God stripped them of the praise of people, and allowed them to lose their virginity in order to make them bow down in repentance and to weep with tears. In this manner, their coldness would disappear and they could powerfully regain intangible heavenly praise³.

1 Epistle 20.

2 Mar Melitius Barnaba: *Selections from the poems of St Jacob, Bishop of Serugh, Homs, 1991.*

3 *The City of God*:1:28



In speaking about the son who wasted his money in a distant land (Lk 15:11-32), St. Jacob of Serugh believes that the reason for the deviation of this son is his wicked will, that is so distant from God. He therefore **lost the virginity of his will and heart as well as the chastity of his body.**

In studying the prodigal son who abandoned his father and travelled to a distant land, St. Jacob of Serugh was driven to conclude that this is a reference to every person who rejects the holy will of God and holds on to his own devious will. In other words, he loses the holiness and virginity of the will and lives with a corrupt and degenerate will!

He went out and left in order to go far away from his father’s land; and he lived there a life of pleasure and reckless spending among harlots.

That acquirer, whose father gave him the means when he departed from him, spent the money badly and became needy as he led an evil life.

The distant land to which that sinner went represents **the wicked will that is far removed from God.**

When a person’s heart is distant from God, he sins. It is like he has gone to another land in order to commit sin.

It is as though God would not be there, therefore He does not see him and he can sin. God does not live in his conscience.

That explains why it is reported that he went to a distant land where he spent his money and lived recklessly.

He removed himself away from God when he sinned and surrendered his freedom to sinful behavior.

He corrupted his virginity, the treasure he naturally possessed, through adultery and delinquency.

Moreover, he despised the second rank of holiness (holy matrimony) and did not make any provisions that would enable him to lead a holy life.



He surrendered to greed and gluttony, and he lost all his freedom while being madly engaged in adultery¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

IF THE ADULTERESS HAD COME NEAR HIM, HE WOULD HAVE TRANSFORMED HER INTO A VIRGIN

From a negative perspective, the saint considers that the deviation of the prodigal son resulted in the loss of his virginity. On the other hand and from a positive perspective, the repentance of the adulteress elevates her to the rank of the wise virgins. St. John Saba says: [[Repentance enters into the bedrooms of the adulteresses, attracts them, and conceives and delivers them as virgins for the Lord... she restores the apostates into apostles.]

Who has approached Him and did not get all his needs satisfied, whether it be strength, forgiveness, or purification?

When the tax-collector approached Him, he was justified; when He found the sinner, He forgave him. (Lk 19:1-10)

When the unclean approached Him, he was sanctified; and if the adulteress approaches Him He would elevate her to the rank of virgins².

St. Jacob of Serugh

VIRGINITY AND BAPTISM

We have seen how virginity affects the holiness of the whole human being: the soul, body, and spirit with all his/her energy, talents, and potential. But how can a person achieve virginity? This involves a new birth and the possession of excessive capability! Virginity is not the fruit of mere human effort unrelated to the grace of God. Rather, it is a gift granted to believers who are

¹ Memre 12: On that Son who Squandered his money (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Memre 37: On the Prodigal Son. Press of Egypt- Elfaqallah.

² Memre 87: On the Five Loaves and Two Fishes (Matt 14:14-21; Lk 9:11-17; Jn 6:1-15)



committed to interact with the grace of God. We enjoy this grace through baptism, and it is nourished through receiving the Body and Blood sacrificed on our behalf for our constant redemption and growth in the Lord. This ensures our enjoyment of a sanctified life that is constantly renewed.

St. Jacob of Serugh draws a **link between virginity, and the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist**: Through the waters of Baptism the Spirit of God grants the feature of spiritual virginity to the baptized as long as he/she follows the Spirit, that means as long as the person interacts with the Spirit of God Who lives within him/her. Through the mystery of the Eucharist, the believer receives the Body and Blood of the Virgin Lord Jesus Christ and therefore enjoys eternal life as he/she eternally lives as the virgin angel of God.

HOLY BAPTISM IS A VIRGIN MOTHER WHO GIVES BIRTH TO A VIRGIN CHURCH

St. Jacob stands before the baptismal font in awe at the wonderful and supreme love of God for mankind. There (in the baptismal font) a new birth is granted through the Church of Christ. As a result, a person becomes the child of God, through the work of His Holy Spirit.

St. Jacob of Serugh sees in the baptismal font **the image of the holy virgin Mary, the mother and the virgin at the same time**. He calls her the daughter of the Light, the bride of the King, the betrothed of the Sun of Righteousness, the gate and the way to the Kingdom, and the new boat that carries the dead into life. He also calls her the guardian of both worlds: beneath her is Hades where the children of God can crush the evil and deceptive acts of Satan; and above her is Paradise with its open gates where they can experience the promise of Heaven. Thus she is like Jacob's ladder: a bridge that links us with Heaven through the Cross. She is as a womb conceiving living beings and granting a robe of glory to Adam; and the treasures of the House of God are within Her.

The Lord Jesus Christ got baptized and granted mankind



Baptism to be a new Mother who gives birth to a virgin Church.
 Now we shall give St. Jacob of Serugh the opportunity to speak about his own practical experience of this wonderful mystery with this virgin Mother:

In virginity, baptism is the mother who gives birth to us while retaining her virginity.

Baptism writes your name in Heaven above, in the **Church of the First-born**, and as a child of the Father seated in all His might.

O you who hear, get baptized and pray to the 'Father who is in heaven,' for He has become your true Father, through the water. He is in heaven, His country, where He is praised and glorified above all the mountain peaks.

He replaced the Mother who originated from below with one He has brought down with Him from above: from His Father's dwelling place! Baptism is the pure womb filled with light. Daily, **she gives birth to living virgins**. She transforms mankind and turns them into children of God.

O great Sun whose light has entered the waters of baptism, shine in me so that I might have light; and describe Your beauty while I am astonished.

O Son of the Virgin who also has granted us a virgin (baptism) mother...

She is the baptism **that daily gives birth though a virgin**. She is a mother and a virgin that surpasses understanding...

She is the baptism that has become a mother to us. Moreover, we have become children of the Father so that we can call Him 'our Father...'

The wealthy One has sent His Son to the poor; and He chose a virgin and made her a mother to His Only Begotten.

Through the womb, He became a brother to mankind; and He was counted in the census of the living on earth.

During His life, He was known as the Son of Man so that mankind might become with Him the sons of God.

Instead of the mother He had taken from among those living on earth, He gave the earthly ones a mother who had descended with Him from His Father's house.



Baptism is a chaste womb, filled with light, and which gives birth daily to divine and virgin ones.

She transforms mankind, changing them into children of God. She receives those made of the flesh and grants them to be spiritual as well.

Through her, flesh is mixed with flesh in holiness, and elevates the ones from below into heavenly beings....

O come you adulteress and surrender to the Only Begotten, and He will transform you into a virgin through the holy water¹.

The Lord explained, to those who questioned Him so that they would learn from Him that this (matter) is the work of the water and of the Spirit.

Just as His virgin mother had given birth to Him in the flesh, so does the Grantor of life give birth to the spiritually old.

Baptism is our second Mary: she is our mother in the fullness of the true birth.

The Virgin gave our Lord flesh to become Man; and baptism has marked us with the Spirit to transform us into gods².

There are two new mothers for us and for the Lord: for the Lord there is Mary; and for us there is baptism.

The One who is spiritual made the earthly His mother; and He granted to us, who are earthly a spiritual mother, to give us birth.

He took on the flesh, while we took the Spirit from our mothers. Thus each mother would clothe her child according to her image³.

O come, O adulteress and extend your hand to the Only Son, and **He will transform you into a virgin through the holy waters**

O come O black one who has been struck by the sun and

¹ Memre 9: On Holy Baptism, (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).;

Memre 28: On Holy Baptism, Press of Egypt- Elfagallah- Supervisor: Youssef Bey Mankarios

² That is, we become sharers of the Divine Nature. Divine grace works in us to grant us holy features

³ Memre 6: On the Star which Appeared to the Wise men, and On the Slaughter of the Children (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



whose color has consequently been changed... come and put on the Glory and obtain the Light through the pure waters...

Come and descend, and wear the clothes which God has woven for you. And come up and show us your eternal beauty so that we might rejoice for you.

Come and adorn yourself with the sash of life, and with the jewelry of the Holy Spirit, so that the world might behold you.

The braids of gold belong to the bride who has ascended from the waters. The sheets of silver add to the beauty of the lustrous lady.

They extract rubies from Chemosh for her uplifted head, and rows of precious stones from India...

The mountains offer you precious sapphire... and the depths deliver their pearls from their storages. They bring the stones of glory from the seas of darkness, From Ophir, they bring the gold and the beautiful beads. They bring jade which is offered to kings and other tribute...

Her Groom is wealthy, and He increases her beauty through so many means...

The Bride said: The Cross is my adornment instead of jewelry...

Instead of braids of gold and coral, He has shone His light on my face...

Instead of sheets of silver, He has sanctified me.

Instead of rubies and rings, He has granted me His nails out of which I will make all the adornments of the wedding.

How beautiful is the daughter of the Gentiles!¹ Moses clothed the daughter of Jacob in white which is the symbol of purity, and **the Lord Jesus Christ clothed the pure soul with the baptismal waters.**

Moses sanctified his people for three days, and sanctity became eternal through the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Memre On Holy Baptism



Indeed, the sweet offering of His Blood and His holy Body continue to represent Him to the end of time¹.

Baptism is the banner of the King, and you are His subjects

You have been sealed by baptism, and anointed with oil, and your faces have been marked with the sign of the Cross.

For you are the brothers of Christ and children of His heavenly Father. That is why when you pray you say: Our Father.

And since you truly believe, you are entitled to call on God and say: our Father.

Therefore do not abandon the house of God as strangers do, leaving with those who have not been baptized².

O Son, who has desired to be a brother to the wicked slaves, enable me to know You better so that I might proclaim daily Your rich blessings.

O Almighty Sunrise whose light has filled the waters, shine upon me to enlighten me so that I might be astonished as I speak of Your beauty.

O Son of the Virgin who has given us a virgin mother, enrich me so that I become empowered by You, and raise my voice in wonder and understanding.

Then my tongue will proclaim loudly and confidently Your glorious ways.

I had written my praise as a story about baptism; and now it has become my means to praise You O Only Begotten Son of God.

This mother who gives birth daily to children who do not die; empower my words so that they deliver this truth to the world.

The daughter of truth who conceives children for the Light has invited me today; so let us enjoy her banquet.

The mother of Life, whose children are far above the

¹ Mar Meletius Barnaba: Selections from St Jacob of Serugh, Bishop of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs 1991

² Mar Meletius Barnaba: Selections from St Jacob of Serugh, Bishop of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs 1991



darkness, has invited me and asked me to speak; therefore I will not be silent.

The King's Bride has prepared a banquet for the whole world, so come O nations to the holy banquet.

The water of life has exploded from the Father for the whole world, so all of you who are thirsty come, and take your fill of hope from her source¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

BAPTISM AND THE NEW EVE

Baptism is the new Eve. The first Eve is no longer the mother of all the living, for she has given birth to children who have become corrupted by sin. Through baptism, the Church conceives children of God who are characterized by holiness; and they are entitled to the inheritance for they bear the image of the Only begotten Son.

Although virginity of the body is not granted to every believer, yet they are all qualified, through this birth in baptism, to enjoy the virginity of the spirit. Through baptism they become members in the eternal Church: the Church of the firstborn, the virgin Bride!

The exiled Adam has been granted a new mother instead of the old (one), so that he would find life when he is born of her.

Instead of Eve, baptism has been introduced and established in order to conceive the immortal through her spirituality.

Instead of this mother who gave birth to dead and dysfunctional beings, baptism gives birth to immortals and intelligent beings.

The young virgin has come and established herself instead of this old mother; and as a result of her birth an incorruptible world has been set up.

Instead of that physical fort, the womb of water has begun to bear spiritually intelligent images².

¹ Mar Meletius Barnaba: *Selections from St Jacob of Serugh, Bishop of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs 1991*

² Memre 131 *On the Lord's Healing of the the Man Paralyzed for Thirty Eight years (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).*



The wedding has taken place, and the Bride has entered into the chamber; therefore there was no need for the veil to separate her from the Groom any longer.

See, the side of the Groom is wounded, and the Bride has come out of it; therefore the designed image for Adam and Eve has been achieved.

Indeed, since the very beginning it was decided and designed that Adam and Eve would be in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten Son (Rom 8:28-29).

He slept on the Cross just as Adam's sleep was exceedingly deeply; His side was stabbed and out of it the daughter of the Light came forth (Gen 2:12; Jn 19:34)

Water and fire were designed for the image of God's children, so that they could become heirs of the Father who loves His Only Son.

In the prophecy, Eve is the mother of every living being; and who could she be other than **Baptism the mother of life (Gen 3:20)?**

Adam's wife gave birth to human bodies that were subject to death; while **the Lord's side gave birth to the Church who gives birth to immortal ones** (Gen 3:21-22; Jn 19:34)

Through the Cross all the designs that had been planned were accomplished: the hidden mystery which had been covered revealed himself.

They crucified Him on a peak so that all the nations of the earth would behold Him and be healed from the stings of the impetuous devils.

They placed Him like that serpent which Moses had mounted and held high up: the symbol of the serpent which had been hidden became explicable (Numbers 21:4-9; Jn 3:14)¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Fr. Mina Elmakary: *Memre 79: published by S.Brock, the scholar specialized in the fathers of the Syrian Church. Cf. the Magazine Sobornost, Vol 3, no 1, 1981. Memre 79: On the Veil on the Face of Moses (Ex. 34:33-35) (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).*

Sebastian P Brock: *Jacob of Serugh's Memre on the Veil on Moses' Face, Gorgias Press, 2009.*



BAPTISM, A VIRGIN MOTHER WHO GIVES BIRTH TO ELDERS AND TRANSFORMS THEM INTO YOUTH

From a standpoint filled with joyous hope and a living faith that the work of the Cross will never fail, St. Jacob of Serugh believes that baptism is a fertile virgin mother. She constantly gives birth to children because God wishes the whole world, which has been tainted by sin, to enjoy a virgin life.

The symbol has become a reality. What was practiced in the light of the Law concerning the purification of the leper is now performed as a true reality in the baptismal waters through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The custom was to present a slain bird in an earthen vessel over running water (Lev 14:5), and to release a living bird into the desert. Instead of the infirmity of old age, our spirit is now granted virginity and youth through the Holy Spirit of God. Thus we take flight into the heaven itself!

From the same Source, Water and Blood flowed into the world in order to purge powerfully and single-handedly all the impure who have been tainted.

This is the **heavenly Well** that has descended to the earth, and has released her floods onto all the unclean in order to purify them.

The virgin Helper is the One who daily gives birth in His virginity. And all through conception, His embrace is holy and His children are pure.

The Virgin Son has opened baptism with the suffering of His crucifixion, and it will not be shut before the whole world is renewed.

Behold the old descend into it and they become children, for this is a chaste embrace that brings to life all the beautiful ones.

Behold all the leprosy of the world is washed and purified by Him, and the bodies ascend from Him purified and cleared of their wounds.

Moses has depicted the picture of this purification; yet



the Levites could not achieve perfection with the blood of a bird.

When they sprinkled blood and water on his wounds, this sprinkling would cleanse him as we have noted.

Moses carried out these proceedings through peace offerings; therefore the pictures he depicted of the Truth were successful.

The Blood of our Lord grants forgiveness, provisions for life, and purity to the unclean. It has granted forgiveness and healing to all sickness.

He had pity on the poor, and justified the tax-collectors. He ended the sacrifices and toppled the idols. He smashed the symbols and stifled guilt.

Through Him, sins are erased, evil is dead, security reigns, peace is multiplied, and love is strengthened.

Through Him and His mysteries, the world has been cleaned of impurity... blessed is He who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Unchanging¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

VIRGINITY AND THE RITE OF THE RED HEIFER

St Jacob presents another example of the Mosaic rites to reveal the gift granted us in the baptismal waters through the work of the sacrificed Christ. In baptism, the Lord pours over us His Blood that grants life and not the ashes of a red heifer (Lev 19:1-10) used to purify the body. The Lord pours the beauty of His holiness and the virginity of His spirit so that we carry His image in us!

Behold O Jew, and notice the sprinkling of the Church today. She does not purify the unclean with the ashes of the heifer.

She carries the Cross instead of the crimson wool, and she seals the unclean, who have been purified from their wounds.

She carries the Body and Blood to sprinkle the wounds, and uses them to whiten the wounds of all sinners.

She sprinkles of them on the unholy adulteresses who **become virgins through sanctification and water.**

¹ Memre 76: *On the Two Birds in the Law: one was slain on running water and the other was released towards the fields (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).*



This sprinkling has covered the tax-collector and he was justified; and placed the sinful woman in the ranks of the apostles.

Some of its spray fell on the fierce foxy thief and He transformed him into a lamb grazing in the Kingdom

This spray, **when sprinkled on an old person, it transforms him into a child through the second and spiritual birth.**

This spray purifies the soul of impurity. O you, who have become unclean, come and clean all your sins with it.

Through the mystery of this spray, Moses purified the children of Israel: the heifer had no power to clean anything.

The image of God poured His beauty on the Hebrews; and it is truly through Him that the unclean of His people were purified,

With the color of the heifer and the dye of crimson, the Law clearly symbolized the Blood of the Life Giver¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

VIRGINITY AND THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

VIRGINITY AND THE PARABLE OF THE FIVE WISE VIRGINS AND THE FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS

St. Jacob of Serugh has recorded for us a Memre on the Parable of the Ten Virgins told by our Lord (Matt 25:1-13; Lk 12:35-40), when He was speaking about the kingdom of heaven.

What takes place with the virgins on the last day is nothing new; for it is a continuation of what is practiced on earth. The wise ones enjoy an inner new life for it is spent in fellowship and union with the Groom. They have followed this way of life here on earth. The foolish ones, however, have not had any experience with the Groom. Even when they were on earth, and even though

¹ Memre 77: On the Red Heifer (Num 19:1-10).



they appeared to be ministers and pious people, they lived outside the gates. Those who have chosen, while living on earth, to enter with the Lord and live for the Kingdom, are entitled to see Him face to face in eternal life. Those who have chosen for themselves to life outside while they lived on the earth, can neither see the Lord nor enter with Him in an eternal marriage since they are so far removed from the Kingdom.

St. John Chrysostom speaks about the virgins who enjoy virginity in every part of their bodies and says: [When your tongue is like the Lord's and your mouth becomes your Father's instrument; and when you become a temple for the Holy Spirit, then what kind of glory is that?! If your mouth is made of gold and precious stones, it would not shine as much as a mouth adorned with humility. What could be more loving than a mouth that does not know insults, for it is used solely to bless and to utter good words¹]

St. Jacob of Serugh believes that all humanity is invited to be a heavenly Bride. That is why all have been called virgins. Some bought oil for their lamps as they enjoy the light and have earned the right to be united with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the divine Light.

This light is the virgin soul who is ready for her Groom. The foolish virgins, being virgins, see the heavenly union, however, they have ignorantly loved the darkness rather than the light. Therefore they are unprepared for the heavenly wedding with the One who does not tolerate darkness.

The Son of God has given a great example while teaching. Through that parable, He has spoken to us about His coming and informed us how it would be.

The Lord presented the ten virgins with their lamps as an image of the Kingdom of God.

They all went to meet the expected arrival of the Groom and the Bride, so that they would enter with them into the great wedding banquet prepared by the Groom.

¹ In Matt. hom. 78:3



Five of them were wise virgins, and they had taken oil to lighten their lamps.

The other five were foolish, and did not carry oil for their lamps...

Those wise virgins who had their lamps lit entered with Him, and the foolish ones were left outside.

And they came, knocked, and begged while weeping: Lord, Lord, open for us so that we too might rejoice with You.

The Groom said: 'I do not know who you are.' And these miserable ones remained outside the door and in the utter darkness...

Every person's lamp will reveal if he/she is one of us: those who carry lit lamps will go in, and those which are dark are not of us...

Weeping and gnashing of teeth will proceed from those singled out: they have willingly brought darkness over themselves.

They did not attend to the preparation of oil for the light. Therefore, they were in the darkness when the Groom arrived.

They were careless in their preparation of their lamps. That is why the Holy Bible calls them 'foolish'.

They left their lamps dark by their own will. Consequently they were despised by the Groom who loves the light.

Through laziness and sloppy ways they made no effort to take oil for their lamps...

Why does the Word call them virgins? Because the whole of creation is betrothed to Him through the Blood of His Son...

He likened the whole of creation to the ten virgins: if the whole creation wanted the Light, it could all be covered with It in the new world.

He presented Himself as the glorious Groom who is coming, and humanity as the Bride the daughter of the luminaries....



The oil is named love and chastity of the soul within which all those walking righteously are gathered¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

NO ONE CAN BORROW THE BEAUTY OF A RELATIVE OR HIS/HER INNER VIRGINITY

Some might wonder why the wise virgins refused to lend oil to the foolish ones? St. Jacob of Serugh offers the following explanation: The true virginity of the wise virgins lay in their inner shining glory. This is the oil they have acquired while they lived in the world. This inner glory, which is the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ within them, cannot be borrowed from others on their wedding day and it cannot be taken forcefully. Moreover, those who have acquired it cannot offer it to others.

Moses, the prophet whose facial skin shone (Ex 34:29-30) could lend it neither to his brother Aaron; nor to the leaders; nor to the people. He could not do so even while he was still living in the world, how much harder it would be to do so on judgment day?!

St. Jacob of Serugh presents a practical example of Jacob who loved Rachel for her beauty and shape of her eyes. His uncle tried to cheat him by holding the wedding celebration in the darkness of the night rather than in the morning. It was impossible for his uncle to ask Rachel to lend her beautiful face and her big eyes to her sister Leah. Even if she had accepted, it could not be done practically.

We have never heard of any young girl offering her relatives or friends her beautiful face or her big eyes to them on their wedding day!

What are the beautiful face and big eyes other than the virginity of the heart and the whole inner being and inner insight? These are

¹ Memre 50: On the Ten Virgins mentioned in the Gospel of the Lord (Matt 25:1-13; Lk 12:35-40), Memre 47: On the Ten virgins: read in the matins on Pascha Wednesday. Press of Egypt, Elfagallah, supervised by Youssef Bey Mankarios



acquired through divine grace while we take the journey through this world, and while we are being crucified with the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, enjoying the power of His resurrection with its glory and brilliance.

The evil ones begin by pleading with the righteous and saying, 'We pray you to ask and pray for us.

The Judge is fearful, and our deeds are unrighteous, pray for us so that He might approve of us ...

The righteous brother looks at his unrighteous brother and sees him suffering, and fears to plead for him.

The great Adam is unable to help his first born, Cain, in his suffering; and he cannot own him before the Judge.

The righteous Isaac cannot approach the greedy Esau and answer for him during his indictment or defend his ignorance.

David, with all the beauty of his faith cannot help Solomon when he is judged for his idolatry.

The soul that sins is the one that is condemned before the Judge, and there is no chance for anyone to intercede for a relative ...

Why did the five wise virgins refuse to give oil from their lamps?

They said: No one has enough except for himself before that Throne.

The deeds of each person are marked on one's face, and no one can be adorned by the works of friends.

There, no one can give oil to a friend to illumine his/her lamp, if he is beautiful then he is so because of the path he took in life.

Even here in our world, no one is favored and no one offers his beauty to a friend for adornment.

Rachel's brilliant beauty and her wide eyes could not adorn ugly Leah to please those looking at her.

The sick eyes of Leah could not benefit of the brilliant beauty of Rachel's eyes.

She did not give of her brilliance even though she was



her sister; for every face preserves what is his and remains unchanged.

If it were possible for a person to borrow beauty, then all the brides would have bought all beauty for their wedding day.

Besides, they would have borrowed beauty from their sisters, companions, and neighbors.

And since the Bride cannot borrow a face from anyone, if she is ugly, her Groom would reveal that and blame her.

Usually, virgins do not offer their personal beauty to their companions.

Nature, too, with her regulations, does not allow the ugly to borrow beauty from the beautiful!¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN SOUL IS BETROTHED TO THE CROSS

St. Jacob of Serugh presents the practical way to enjoy virginity of thought and heart. It begins by a positive aspect where the focus is on meditation on the Crucified Virgin. This is accompanied by a negative aspect where there is a rejection of all wicked and hateful thought.

It is appropriate for the soul to meditate on the One who has been crucified on account of her sins. This would leave no place for sin in her heart or mind.

Prayer to the Groom is necessary to ask Him to sow His divine word in the heart, and to plant it so that the heart is transformed into a fertile and fruitful heart.

Indeed, inner virginity demands union with the Holy Crucified Lord, and the liberation from Satan and all the hosts of darkness. These dark spirits - that are like military units made up of thousands of devils, attempt to attack the heart and corrupt it. However, our Groom is the Holy One who expelled Legion from one person (Mk 9:5; Lk 8:30). He grants His people power to tread on

1 Memre 50: On the Ten Virgins mentioned in the Gospel of the Lord (Matt 25:1-13; Lk 12:35-40) (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Memre 47: On the Ten virgins: read in the matins on Pascha Wednesday. Press of Egypt, Elfaqallah, supervised by Youssef Bey Mankarios



serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy.

Caesarius, bishop of Arles, comments as follows: [All the souls of both men and women know that they are the Bride of the Lord if they desire to preserve their physical chastity and the virginity of their soul. This springs from their understanding that the Lord is the Groom of their souls and not of their human bodies.¹]

The virgin soul betrothed to You meditates in remembrance of You; while the evil and hateful thought are not her thoughts (Rom 7:15-24).

The soul which the Cross has engaged through His Blood and which He claims as His own is not defiled through evil thoughts.

Bring down Your fire and burn the corrupt thorns; and may the fertile plant of Your Word flourish².

You just have to learn from the two thousand who entered and lived in one man how much they are intent on destruction.

Many foxes have torn one sheep, but then the shepherd came and snatched the weak lamb away.

A thousand wild birds attacked one weak pigeon, but then the hunter came and spread his net and took her from them.

The virgin soul is full of beauty in the image of the King, the devils snatched her in order to corrupt her, and there she is transpiring.

The devils kidnapped that human being and lived in him; and they tortured him with their madness³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

VIRGINITY AND ROBES OF GLORY

Virginity implies the pure and holy enjoyment of the union with the Crucified One while crushing the opposing human

¹ Homily 155:4; On the Ten Virgins.

² Memre 85: On the Words of the Lord: Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head (Matt 8:26).

³ Memre 130: On the Man possessed by a Legion of Devils (Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-29; Matt 8:28-34)



powers resisting this union. Besides, it includes the glorious robes worn by those enjoying the heavenly banquet so that the virgins are not banished from the wedding.

Virginity is integrated with the rest of the virtues: purity, love, thankfulness, daily praise, fasts and prayers, simplicity of heart, chastity etc., and they combine to form the glorious clothes, without which no one will enjoy the heavenly banquet.

The clothes of the glorious banquet are the following: holiness, virginity, self-denying.

And the pure body; a God-loving soul; a mouth filled with daily praise for the Lord.

And a hand filled with charity to all the needy; humility, and spirit that embraces poverty.

And Great Lent, holy prayers, and repents that daily knocks at the King's door.

And love of mankind; goodness of the eye; and undeceiving simplicity.

And all the spiritual and divine ways; and all the sweet and pure thoughts.

And all the ideas which are the source of blessings; and all the good opportunities in their myriad forms.

These are the robes of the glorious banquet; and whoever is not dressed in these is not allowed to enter¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE CHURCH, THE VIRGIN OF THE LIGHT, PRESENTS THE RELICS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AS VESSELS TO THE KING OF KINGS

The virginity of the heart and of the will reflect a heavenly glow even on the body. St. Paul accordingly says: 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!' (1Cor 6:15).

¹ Memre 171: On the Parable Told by the Lord: The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,, (Matt 22:1-14; Lk 14:15-22)



The world desires to get rid of the bones of the dead. However, the virgin Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is His Bride, has erased the word 'death' from her dictionary. Even the dry bones have become a temple for the Spirit of the Lord, and holy vessels to be presented before the King of kings. They are strongholds which Satan and all his army are incapable of invading as they attempt to destroy her eternal honor and fellowship in the Lord's glory.

St. Macarius the Great writes the following: [He has used Moses to explain how the bodies of the deserving ones will be glorified on the Day of Resurrection. The glory of the Spirit shone on the face of Moses so brilliantly that no one could look at his face. This glory is attained by those souls that are loyal and holy right now as they are considered qualified to receive it inwardly in their inner person¹.]

St. Jerome writes: [We pray that the body is not despised in any way. Rather, we reject all its deeds. We do not despise the body that will possess the heavens with the Lord. It is impossible for body and blood to inherit the kingdom of God. We are not referring to the Body and Blood in this manner for we are referring to the deeds of the body².]

Tertullian states: [Plato considers that the body is a prison, whereas Peter considers it to be the temple of God for the body exists in and through Jesus Christ³.]

St. John Chrysostom writes: [Such an expression is fearful for he did not say: 'Shall I then take the members of Christ and link them to a harlot'; but he said: 'Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?'] This is a topic which he presents tactfully!⁴.]

He also says: [Everything is subject to God: the body, the soul, and the spirit... notice how he brings them all together to meditate on the Lord Jesus Christ! How we have been lifted up to the heavens! His words are: 'You are the members of Christ'; 'You

¹ Memre 5:10

² On Psalm 143, hom. 34.

³ On the Soul 54:5

⁴ In 1 Corinth. hom.18:3



are the temple of God'. Therefore do not revert and be members of an adulteress; for this is not your body since it is the personal belonging of the Lord Jesus Christ.^{1]}

The Virgin of the Light whom The Sun of Righteousness has engaged (Malachi 4:2), wisely honors the bones of all the righteous.

The Church recognizes that all the bodies of the children of the Light are vessels presented to serve the King.

They are temples inhabited by holiness, and holiness and faith serve there.

They are strongholds that fiercely protect the congregation in difficult times from thieves and looters.

They (the righteous) are a city built on a high mountain (Matt 5:14; Ps 87: 1). Such a city is not fearful of the armies besieging her.

From their bones life flows plentifully; and if you desired, you could hear clearly about Elijah's bones (2 Kings 13:21²).

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN DEFIES EVEN DEATH

Human beings fear death because it strips a person of life, power, and authority. Indeed, it strips him of everything he has acquired. The virgin, on the other hand, is armed with the Spirit of God, and rests in his death. He/She is justified and works in Paradise where death cannot cheat him out of his love for God and for the salvation of mankind. God works even through the dry bones of the righteous. This is what happened through the bones of Elijah the prophet after his death.

When he lived in the world (Elisha the prophet) was guided by the Lord just as the light of a lamp. That explains why death was not dark in the grave.

¹ In 1 Corinth. hom.18:3

² Memre 35: On Elijah: when a dead man laid on his bones was restored to life (2 Kings 13:21)- (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Cf. Elkhoury Bolos Elfaghaly: Memre on Elijah the Prophet, p. 165-166



That flame took hold in him, so that after his death the Light revealed the Power vigilant within him.

Virginity and holiness produced fruit in his body so that his bones divinely brought life to the dead.

What an amazing thing to say: the dead was imprisoned and silenced in the grave; and a power came out of it to give life to the dead in the pit¹.

This dead one who was alive clearly taught them that the life of the dead is hidden in the bones of all the saints.

He has become a teacher to all who need to be taught: the servants of the Lord are alive even in their death.

The prophet lived to form armies powerfully, and he had power in him to experience the resurrection.

The spirit which he received from Elijah on his ascension (2 Kings 2) did not abandon that saint after his death.

The source of life flowed from the body that was reared in **purity and virginity** to the dead one so that he came to life.

Everyone who depends on the living God is alive even in his death, and he can easily form armies like a mighty person.

God is not a God of the dead but of the living who remain alive in their death (Matt. 22:32; Mk 12:27).

The great prophet, as you have been told, was laid in a grave; and he gave life to the person who was laid, later on, next to him².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE DECEASED CHILD AND VIRGINITY

There is no doubt that the passing away of a child causes a lot of grief for relatives, friends, and especially for the parents. St. Jacob

¹ Memre 35: On Elijah: when a dead man laid on his bones was restored to life (2 Kings 13:21)- (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Cf. Elkhoury Bolos Elfaghaly: Memre on Elijah the Prophet, p. 167-168

² Memre 35: On Elijah: when a dead man laid on his bones was restored to life (2 Kings 13:21)- (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam). Cf. Elkhoury Bolos Elfaghaly: Memre on Elijah the Prophet, p. 168-168



of Serugh however considers that the death of the child does not constitute a deprivation from enjoying life, forming a family, etc. Rather, he considers this to be an admission into the rank of virgin saints without having to go through the struggle with the lusts of the body and other evils which the believer faces.

When a child passes away from this world, he/she leaps on the way as he has overcome the traps and stumbling blocks aligned in it.

He will not be exposed by the obstacles present on the road, or counter a trap, or be faced by a noose...

He has entered and left the world without sinning, without toil, and without filth all along his path.

He has conquered all creatures without fighting with the wicked; and he has become victorious without the heroism of the righteous.

He/she is counted among the virgins without having fought with lust, and among the saints without the struggle of the righteous¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 189: On the Children who Die.



THE SEALED VIRGINITY AND THE OPEN PROPHECY

PROPHECY AND VIRGINITY ARE GLADDENED BY THE SON

St. Jacob of Serugh presents an amazing analogy between the virginity St. Mary and the veil of Moses, the representative of the prophets.

He associates virginity in the New Testament with the prophecy in the Old Testament. the Word of God came from heaven and removed the veil from the prophecies. In other words, He opened the gates of prophecy so that all may read and understand; and He took it upon Himself to seal the virginity of His mother, the Virgin Mary.

He reveals the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Giver of joy to our hearts. Just as He has preserved the virginity of the young virgin upon His birth, He has lifted the veil away from the face of the elderly Moses upon His crucifixion (Ex 34:33-35).

He gladdened the heart of the young girl by keeping her virginity preserved and untouched. Similarly, He gladdened the heart of the old man by removing the veil from his face. In both cases He revealed the brilliance of their faces and proclaimed that He is the source of their beauty, radiance, and glory.

He proclaims the greatness of the Virgin Mary in her conception of the incarnate Word of God while her virginity was preserved. And He proclaimed the greatness of the radiance of Moses' face as it was a reflection of the radiance of God upon him.

In other words, Our Christ is the source of the beauty, chastity, and purity of the youth through His presence within them. He is the source of the greatness and glory of the elderly which is the reflection of the radiance of the Lord upon them.

This concealed Child who did not remove the seal of virginity at His birth, removed the veil at His crucifixion.



He granted both prophecy and virginity gladness of heart, because by His birth and crucifixion He shone radiantly upon each of them.

Indeed, He preserved the cover of her virginity so that she would not be uncovered, while He uncovered the face of prophecy so that it would not remain hidden.

At His birth He did not tear that veil of virginity, and at His crucifixion, He tore the cover of prophecy.

He preserved the youth in the ranks of virginity, while He relieved the elderly of the weight he carried.

St. Mary continued to live in virginity, while Moses discarded the veil which proved to be heavy.

The Virgin rejoiced because He had preserved her virginity, and the prophet also rejoiced because He had discarded his veil.

He left the beauty of virginity preserved and untouched; and He revealed the beauty of prophecy which had been covered (as with a veil).

Moses leaps with joy for his beauty, which had been hidden, has been revealed. And Mary rejoices for her virginity was not damaged.

The young and the old have both won their real beauty through the Son of God **who is Himself the beauty of all that is beautiful.**

The great prophet carried Him on his face under the veil; and the Virgin Mary carried Him inside the gates of her virginity.

At His birth, He left the seals untouched, and at His crucifixion He removed the veils from the prophets.

He revealed their words, and the earth was illumined by His revelation. Their symbols have come to light and now they all carry an explanation¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Fr. Mina elmakary: Memre79; published in English by S Brock, the scholar specialized in the fathers of the Syrian Church, in the Magazine Sobornost, Vol 3, no 1, 1981; Memre 79: On the Veil on Moses' Face (Gen 34:33-35) (Cf. the version by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).
2009Sebastian P. Brock: Jacob of Serugh's Memre on the Veil on Moses' Face, Gorgias Press 2009



PROPHECY, A COVERED VIRGIN

The veil of Moses is a symbol of covered prophecy, and the cover up of the Bride (the Church, the Virgin Mary, or the human soul) are a fulfillment of the prophecies (Ex 34:33; 2 Cor. 3:13).

O chaste and covered virgin prophecy, uncover your face, so that I may see your beauty: how radiant you are!

Speak through the Light so that the world might hear your words, no one will understand your words and stand by them if you remain covered¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

MARY - THE SEALED MESSAGE - FILLED WITH MYSTERIES

When St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the sealed virginity of the holy Virgin Mary, he compares between Eve in the Garden of Eden and the new Eve. The first opened her ears to listen to the whispering and corrupt advice of the serpent; while the second received the news of the Divine Incarnation through Archangel Gabriel, and hid the message in her depths which were filled with divine mysteries.

Let us now behold the manner by which the Son of God descended to the earth and meditate on its beauty!

The Son of the King descended to reinstitute man to his place after being banished from Paradise due to (Satan) the assassin of men.

He pursued with might the steps of the thief, and the path led Him to the ears of the virgin Eve.

Because He is the Word, the doors of the ears received Him, and became impregnated by Him who was delivered with a physical body.

And Mary became like a message filled with mysteries while being sealed with the holiness of virginity.

¹ Memre 133 On the Parable of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7; Matt 21:33-41; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19).
Memre 48: On the Parable of the Vineyard- read in Coptic on Wednesday of Holy Pascha



The Word became incarnated in and of her mysteriously, so that He might visit the world in the form of His incarnated Body.

He took the form of a slave from her blessed womb and visited the slaves in the form of a slave and liberated them.

He dwelt in the daughter of men, and therefore became the Son of Man without disposing of being God with His Father.

And because He came through conception, the arrogant lost their way and denied Him the name of God which belonged to Him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 94: On Faith.



THE REJOICING VIRGINITY, THE VANQUISHER OF THE GRIEF OF DEATH

Memre 191 reveals the joy of the celibate person (or the virgin) on departing from this world. It states the general framework of St. Jacob of Serugh the evangelical; with special focus on his understanding of virginity.

THE REJOICING VIRGINITY, THE VANQUISHER OF THE GRIEF OF DEATH

He opens this Memre by speaking about the believer on the lookout for the day of his eternal wedding. He specifically speaks about the virgin person and daughter who are eager for their spiritual wedding in heaven. St. Basil the Great says: [The death of the righteous has become a rest: indeed, it has become life.]

St. Gregory of Nazianzus looked up to his older sister, **St. Georgina**, as a living model for the Christian person. He was greatly influenced by her, as he loved her purity and devotion. He revealed how she was fearless of death, and how she prepared and even yearned to die.

[Georgina's country was the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22) ... where the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and where the holy elders and the Church of the first born, who have their names inscribed, live in fellowship with Him ...

She deposited in a safe place all what she could seize from the prince of this world.

She left nothing behind other than her body. She abandoned all things to attain the sublime hope. The only wealth she left for her children was the example she set for them to follow in order to enjoy the reward she had received.]

[I am speaking here of her death and the virtues she enjoyed in her life in order to give her the due she deserves ...



She often yearned for the time of her liberation for she knew the One who called her; and she preferred to be with the Lord more than anything else in this world (Phil 1:23).

That saint yearned to be liberated from the bonds of the body, and to escape from the dirt of this world in which we live. **The most sublime thing is that she tasted the beauty of her beloved Lord as she constantly meditated on Him.**

There was an awesome silence at her death. Her death seemed to be a religious rite ...

That is how you sang, O beautiful one among women, and the song became reality. After pain, you have entered into the sweet peace. And you rested as is fitting for a person whom God loves; and who has lived and died surrounded by good words.

How precious is your inheritance! It surpasses what the eye can see in the midst of the angels and heavenly hosts ... It is filled with radiance, purity, and perfection!]

Death is loveable when it is adorned with the Good Name. It is painless for those who are selective in their way of life.

Death is desirable when it is accompanied with righteousness; and it is not saddening when a man of God is buried.

The righteous man has died and has received his treasure, and has become its owner. When he was alive, he lived prudently lest it be stolen.

The world is a sea filled with tremendous evil, and death is a harbor where a person finds refuge from suffering¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE AROMA OF THE VIRGIN IS NOT BORROWED

Mankind has become accustomed to pour beautiful perfumes on the departed one to ensure that no one present would smell the scent of the corpse. Therefore the sweet aroma does not emanate

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



from the dead person, but is offered by others to him/her. This borrowed aroma does not last, for after a certain while the scent of the corpse overwhelms it. This is not the case of a virgin dedicated to God since his/her aroma arises from his/her deeds. The heavenly ones smell it and rejoice. This aroma accompanies the reposed one into Paradise as well as on the great Day of the Lord.

The virgin person acquires a good name and that is the holy 'Bride' of the heavenly Groom. This name grants the believer radiance and glory and a heavenly aroma which gladdens the heavenly ones.

The good name cannot be matched with the good ointment, for it is far better than the ointment of the arrogant.

The person rubbed with good ointment is not praised, for the good aroma betrays him as it is not his own (smell).

The ignorant is rubbed with the borrowed scent of medicines or flowers, and the wise do not praise it.

They realize that the good scent is not his own, but belongs to the ointment he has sought to acquire...

The good name is not foreign to the person who acquires it, and whoever acquires a good name is praised.

For it has not been acquired in the same way as ointment; and the person has not rubbed himself with it for pleasure. Rather, the good name arises from that person just as the aroma that rises from incense.

All those around him/her rejoice; and he is glad; for he has not borrowed incense (spices) to be his shroud.

Consequently he is praised by the knowledgeable ones...

This is evident to all the living ones: the good name is more precious than good ointment as mentioned earlier¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh



THE VIRGIN DOES NOT KNOW THE EXTENT OF HIS/HER WEALTH EXCEPT AT HIS DEATH

Usually a person fears death, as he considers it a loss and a disposal of all that he has acquired in the way of knowledge, honor, riches, friends, etc. The true virgin feels otherwise since death would mean stepping out of the sea of this world filled with dangers in order to enjoy the heavenly glory. There he would find his eternal rest in the Divine bosom.

The virgin sparkles in Paradise as a shining star. He reflects all that he has enjoyed from the Sun of Righteousness throughout his life in the Lord.

At the time of death, the virgin feels that his/her wedding day has come. He does not wish anyone to weep over him. On the contrary, his desire is that they would rejoice with him.

The soul hurries in her release in order to see the One who is more beautiful than mankind. She is gladdened by Him and leaps just as John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb when he met the Word incarnated in the virgin's womb (Lk 1:41). David the prophet also joined and danced before the Lord (2 Sam 6:14). There, the soul would enjoy the sublime divine promises. Probably the greatest of these would be her introduction to the Holy Trinity and her presence with her Groom, enjoying the inheritance and gladness of His Kingdom!

St. John Saba writes the following: [The crown which Christ places on his beloved at the end of his/her struggle is the gift of beholding the Holy Trinity¹.]

Every merchant in the sea is not considered to be rich for it is not known what the high waves will do to him.

When his ship reaches the port and he is unharmed, then he is assured of his possessions and owns his riches since he has been saved from the waves.

Every righteous person in the world lives prudently. However, on reaching the port of death, he rests in his home.

Sin surrounds the soul more than the waves of the great sea;



and she would be drowned in its waves if she bends over...

The good name follows the one who acquires it, and dwells with her so that all the relatives enjoy her.

The treasure of the good name is with God and it cannot be stolen; and his loved ones benefit from it.

The loveliness of the beautiful shines in both worlds, and from now on the light of their lives glows.

Grief is the share of the world, but consolation is the share of the children of light. They are victorious in their lives as well as in their deaths.

It is not appropriate to wail and cry on the day a virgin dies for he/she has left the world to go to God...

The grief of death is close to those betrothed while they are dying, but it is not the case with the one who has betrothed herself to the Cross.

There is a wedding prepared for her in the other world, and she is ready to go and become a Bride in the place where death has taken her.

Her Groom has sent for her, and He has taken her to be with Him. Therefore no one should weep over the pure one or she will be annoyed.

If she had abandoned a betrothed here, people would cry because of the separation that death has caused and kept them apart.

The Groom who has taken her is no stranger; he has snatched her into his arms. Therefore, who dares weep for the Bride on her wedding day?

She has taken with her all her dowry: the ring He has given her, that is His Body and Blood that never leave her.

The warrant of her engagement is with her. Her Groom has dealt with her as He has promised.

She will be with Him, see His face, inherit His treasure, dance in His light, and rejoice in His Kingdom¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



JESUS - THE BRIDEGROOM- REWARDS THE VIRGIN

As we rejoice that the virgin has met face to face with her heavenly Groom, and for her joy in the eternal Kingdom, we make a comparison between her condition during her estrangement on earth and what became of her in her eternal home:

1. While she had disregarded many temporary matters during her sojourn on earth, all these cannot be compared with the generous glories she receives in her eternal home.
2. On wearing the crown of light, she is filled with radiance and discovers that all the temporal glory she had rejected has withered away completely.
3. The world considered that she had deprived herself of family life, especially of a groom who loved her and a man to support her; while the Word of God himself has seated her at His right hand as a beautiful ornamented Bride and Queen in heaven.
4. She had not enjoyed a wedding or parties with their joyful show here on earth. Rather, she was accompanied by troubles and fears due to the instability of the temporal life. With time she would no longer have been considered a beautiful bride. Indeed, she would have grown old or get sick and lost her beauty. In heaven, however, there would be a constant and uninterrupted wedding celebration, and she would remain a beautiful Bride glowing with the reflection of the radiance of her Groom forever.
5. She had not received from a groom any jewelry or ornaments of gold or other precious metals and precious gems. Now she is decorated by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness so that she shines as the moon!
6. On earth, she had been deprived of friends who would have expressed their love and admiration for her. However, in heaven a wedding is celebrated for her which becomes a cause of admiration and astonishment for the heavenly hosts.



7. She has not given herself in marriage on earth on account of her heavenly Groom. In heaven, she is united with Him and becomes one spirit with Him.
8. She has not liked the earthly and temporal things which pass away as a dream and leave no trace. Now, in heaven, she finds what is eternal and incorruptible.
9. Saint Jacob of Serugh finally asks her friends not to grieve for her death, for she has flown in a heavenly and joyful procession to see the divine glories.

On earth, she has despised (many matters) and He will not be unjust to her, Indeed, He will give her bountifully.

Because she has rejected this crown that withers as a flower, He will place a crown of permanent light.

As she has despised the temporary groom and man for His sake, He is the Groom and Man who glorifies His followers.

Instead of the wedding filled with fears and doubts on earth, she inherits in heaven a wedding for an eternal life.

Instead of the jewelry she had despised for the sake of the Lord, He will make her radiant with His rays, and decorate her with the chaste.

And since the turbulent wedding was not fulfilled in the wicked world, those keeping vigil in the world of light will rejoice for her virginity.

She had despised marriage on account of her love for the Only One, and He will be unified with her in one spirit because she has followed Him.

Had she loved earthly matters, she would have passed away as a dream, and flown away as the nightly visions, and as though she existed no more.

She yearned to see heavenly matters which do not vanish, and that is why she was not inclined to earthly matters.

She has gone to that place whose glory she was determined to see, therefore do not grieve on account of her death¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 191: *On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World*



THERE THE VIRGIN WILL ENJOY HER GROOM AND HIS RADIANCE WILL SHINE UPON HER

The soul stands in astonishment as she beholds the beauty, radiance, and glory of her Groom. She is welcomed by His heavenly servants. She looks downwards and notes the signs of grief on her loving ones because she has departed from them. She wishes to speak to them and reprimand them, saying:

‘Why do you grieve when I have left the clothes of this world, the clothes of mourning, and have put on the bright wedding clothes?’

Rejoice with me, for the Groom has shed light on my face and has blessed me!

I have put on the crown of glory and the robe of light.

At my death and departure I felt no pain.

I have been saved from the wicked world.

I have discarded the thorns and stumbling blocks of the world.

I have risen and ascended out of its traps.’

At her death, her mourning is cast off, as she sees her Groom. She puts on the Light and rejoices with Him.

He makes her face to shine and greets her lovingly. Therefore she rejoices and is gladdened by His many blessings.

Instead of the mourning clothes and pain she accepted for His sake, she rejoices eternally in His Kingdom with His saints.

With Him she wears the crown of glory and the robe of light, and the King delights her just as the groom delights the bridegroom.

If it were possible for the dead to speak, you would have heard from her that there is no pain in her death.

She would have told those mourning for her: You should be glad for I have been rescued from the wicked world.

The way of the world is filled with thorns and obstacles, and I have departed from it to a pure place, therefore do not weep over me.



I was surrounded by traps in the world, and I have ascended from among them. I went into the battle and I have preserved my virginity¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

A DEBATE BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND THE DEPARTED VIRGIN

In a spirit of discernment and wisdom, it becomes us to congratulate the departed virgin for the heavenly beauty she has put on rather than grieve over her departure. We ought to bless her as she has become a shining star that delights the heavenly ones.

She sees how honored they feel because she has conquered the powers of corrupt darkness and has enjoyed holiness. Therefore she shares their joy as they celebrate her arrival to the haven safely.

Let us therefore tell her: O you who are filled with the beauty of virginity, enjoy your beauty.

O child of rare virtues let the heavenly vigilant ones rejoice as your pearls are offered as a gift to the royal Groom.

May all the heavenly hosts rejoice, as the Groom of Light incorporates you with his saints.

May the company of Gabriel rejoice, as you are counted among the virgins carrying their lamps.

The hosts of the children of Light are astonished and declare: The weak woman has conquered in the struggle of virginity.

The young daughter has conquered the cheater who overcame Adam in his struggle. Armed with the virginity of the vigilant (heavenly ones) she has preserved holiness.

We should tell her lovingly about these matters; and should not weep over her departure filled with blessings.

May all those who care for her rejoice because her ship has ascended from the sea unharmed.

All her relatives do not need consolation: no pain is involved in her departure and therefore no need for us to console them.

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



When a hero appears victorious after a struggle all his division rejoices at his name and victory¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE UNMARRIED OR MARRIED VIGILANT ONES REJOICE FOR THOSE ENJOYING VIRGINITY LIKE THEM

How the heavenly ones rejoice! While they have been created as spirits without bodies and therefore do not marry; behold the earthly ones, who have bodies, have ascended to the life of virginity, and have become like them!

The heavenly ones proceed as in a procession to honor that earthly one who has attained their heavenly form. They come out, carrying their crowns, to meet the virgin and to behold this earthly one who has finished the struggle and has been crowned with the crown of virginity.

In dying, the virgin received the beautiful crown; and the heavenly ones wondered at her great work.

The vigilant (heavenly ones) often wonder at the war of virginity because it is their characteristic. Therefore they are filled with wonder when they find earthly ones carrying that feature.

The angels own a nature that is sealed, spiritual, and not open to marriage, that is why they love virginity.

They are more sublime than to give birth and to rear children, therefore they yearn to see people who share their nature.

When they see virginity in the earthly ones, they yearn to meet and greet them with great love as though they were one of them.

They love and rejoice with the virginity filled with light just as they would receive a relative of their form and kind.

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



They consider that those who have lived in virginity like them are similar to the earthly who have desired and attained spiritual virginity.

They rejoice with the soul when she is liberated from struggle as they would for a relative or companion filled with beauty.

They go out in a crowd to meet her with their light so that she would come in and join their ranks.

They praise the new companion who has come and joined their voices; and they honor and love her.

They also come with crowns for the virgin whom death has raised away from the struggle.

They rejoice for her and she rejoices for their crowns; and she will be without pain, living with them and among their ranks forever¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN'S MOTHER PAYS TRIBUTE (EULOGIZES) TO HER DEPARTED CHILD

While St. Jacob of Serugh writes this Memre on the occasion of the departure of a virgin from this world, it also applies to all the sincere virgins who have pursued virginity in their lives.

He questions those who lament over the departure of the virgin in spite of its being a victory and a promotion to the joy of heavenly beauty.

It is fitting to congratulate those leaving this world just as we would congratulate someone who has succeeded in harmlessly treading over a trap with his feet

Rather than the grief over his/her death, relatives should offer congratulations because the departed has gone to his heavenly wedding.

How could family, friends, and relatives grieve over one who has flown to his heavenly wedding? The sweet smell of virginity overwhelms and destroys the corrupt smell of death.

Tears of separation mingle with tears of great joy for the passage

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



of the loved one into the heavenly wedding...what a sublime consolation!

Who would cry and wail when he/she is honored: or cry or wail over this one whose death is a victory filled with beauty?

Let family, brothers, relatives, tribes, and all acquaintances rejoice for she has treaded over the trap and has not been harmed.

Let her mother speak to her lovingly and without grief; with feelings that transcend traditional motherly feelings:

‘My daughter, filled with the beauty of virginity, your death is unlike death, what shall I do for you?

Shall I dare cry over you as over a dead person? I am afraid as I know you to be the virgin and Bride of the Son of God.

Do I laugh and weep as I would over a bride? I tremble when my tears run down because you have left me at your departure.

Do I make a eulogy due to your death? I cannot because your God has taken you. I will be blamed if I grieve.

I am bound to suffer due to your departure because nature demands mankind to suffer and grieve over the dead.

Death is bitter, and the aroma of the good name is sweet, and now I possess both from you.

When the bitterness of death arising from your death touches me, I am quickly touched by the sweet smell of your virginity.

Your beautiful name gives me joy, gladness, and consolation; and your death is honorable: I am affected by both matters.

The day of your death brought a mixture of tears and joy, therefore I drank the cup which gives me joy and consolation

I did not desire to be separated from you; but the Groom is more beloved to the virgin than mother.

Pain has passed away and I have become greatly consoled as one upright thought holds me: I will not weep over you anymore.



The purpose of your virginity and chastity is far greater, for those who understand, than the purpose of the pain of death.

Resurrection dissolves and dispels death but there is no chance to dispel your virginity.

You have crossed the blocks, broken the trap, earned the name, worn the crown... all these matters console me¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE MOTHER HONORS AND PROCLAIMS HER VIRGIN CHILD AS HER PEARL

The mother does not mourn over her virgin daughter when she dies for God Himself greets the virgin soul as a pearl of great value which He treasures and adds to His own treasure.

We always look up to God as the pearl of great value for whose sake the merchant sells all his possessions to acquire it (Matt 13:46). In the same way, we now see how God Himself treasures the soul of the virgin, or the wise person, as a pearl of great value. He died on the Cross and paid with His Blood the price to acquire her for a heavenly Bride.

St. Jacob of Serugh desires to have a place among these precious pearls which God gathers to His heavenly treasure. He prays the Lord to grant him his heart's desire and he is certain that He will answer the prayers of his petitioners!

It is written that Eve lives eternally because of her children. May the Word be fulfilled in me and that I live because of you.

When your pearl is honored in the King's treasure, may I also be received mercifully with and because of you.

Although I am not in (a state of) virginity filled with beauty, yet I have given birth to a virgin so that I might be adorned by her since I have given birth to her.

Since everyone will stand in the Kingdom and face judgment according to his deeds, my prayer will be that my good deeds be counted for me.

I have raised my prayer from here as long as the door is

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



still open, for I have heard that once it is shut they will answer no one.

And since I have condoned and rejoiced with you on account of your virginity, may the Groom accept my good will at the great gate.

Then I will see your place and rejoice for the glory prepared for you. I will thank the Good One whose gate is open to all who ask¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN CROSSES OVER TO HER LORD THROUGH DEATH

When a person passes by a cemetery where the dead rest, he is not comfortable with the smell arising from the bodies of the dead. This is not the case with virgins as they cross over carrying their lamps filled with holy oil and their light dispels the darkness.

Death is a port and a person getting there means he has been saved from the sea. He enters the port to enjoy his ship which has braved her way through all the waves.

Death is a rest for the wise virgins whose lamps are filled with light and oil.

The place of death is prepared and transcends the fears of the world, for it provides rest to those who have struggled in their labors.

Through death, the virgin of the Lord crosses over to her Lord, where she is received into His pleasure and saved from the pain in which she had existed².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGINITY IN THE WORLD IS SIMILAR TO A PEARL IN THE SEA

Everyone knows that the sea is full of pearls. However, unless a person extracts the pearl from the bottom of the sea and acquires and adds it to his treasure, he cannot consider it his own. In the

¹ Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World

² Memre 191: On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World



same manner, as long as the virgin is in the orbit of the world, it is not considered part of the heavenly treasure, in spite of her/his beauty and greatness, until he/she safely comes out of the world.

St. Jacob of Serugh probably believed that the heavenly hosts saw the precious pearls [virgins], and yet that they could not rejoice or feel comforted except after they had departed from the world.

In the midst of the sea, the pearl remains shriveled. Once it is extracted, it is used to decorate the crowns of kings. In the same way, the heavenly ones yearn for the departure of the virgins from the wicked world. Then they would rejoice for their light and beauty in the Lord.

If the pearl is not extracted from the sea, it would not be known whether it will be kept as a treasure or used for the crown?

As long as it is shriveled in the waves at the bottom of the waters, its fate will be unknown to merchants and to the wealthy.

When it is brought out, all the merchants will hurry to it, carry and place it in a secure and guarded safe in their homes.

Her beauty is preserved in the waves of the sea: it is not seen until it is brought up. Then all are astonished; how beautiful it is!

The pearl is despised in her location. It is unknown unless it ascends to a location of light, and there it becomes desirable.

It is shriveled in the sea, and all the beasts tread upon her. When she ascends, kings honor her in their crowns.

The pearl symbolizes virginity as the world is a sea; and as long as it is in the sea, its beauty is unknown.

In our wicked world, the beauty of virginity is hidden; yet its beauty is known among the angels who are gladdened by it¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 191: *On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World*



DEATH IS LIKE A DIVER WHO EXTRACTS THE VIRGIN PEARL OUT OF THE WORLD

St. Jacob of Serugh likens death to a diver who probably goes deep down into the ocean and extracts pearls. He brings them up out of the dark and abandoned depths and offers them to the kings and mighty ones. That is how we ought to rejoice at the death of true virgins as they become precious pearls in the treasure of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Similarly, the virgin, full of beauty, ascends on the day of her death as though ascending from out of the sea and carrying a pearl.

Death has gone after her and has raised her to a sublime place, just as the diver who lifts a pearl and brings it up.

He has raised her from the dark and sad depths filled with dangers; and has lifted her up and placed her in a place filled with light and blessings.

He has raised her from the waves and depths to God where she will be the crown for the King of the creation and live in His brilliant light.

Therefore her death brings hope and joy to the heart: blessed is He who has won her into His kingdom to live in His light and with His saints¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 191: *On The Chaste Virgin Child of the Promise who Departs from the World*



EXAMPLES OF THE LIFE OF VIRGINITY

1

THE VIRGINS ADAM AND EVE

ADAM AND EVE: A VIRGIN COUPLE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Having praised the beauty of a holy matrimonial life, St. Jacob of Serugh goes on to elevate a virgin life even more. However, he discerns a common factor between them and that is the factor of holiness which is a feature of the heavenly ones. Without this feature no one will be able to see God. He notes the pains and trials present in marital life, whereas a life of true virginity is adherence to God who grants it and an emulation of the heavenly hosts.

St. Jacob of Serugh considers that Adam and Eve led a life of perfect virginity before the fall. This opinion is not accepted by some Church Fathers who point to God's commandment to them and to their children to be fruitful and to fill the earth (Gen 1:28).

St. Augustine writes the following: [Being plentiful and abundant to fill the earth are a gift and blessing from God. It is the gift to marriage which God has instituted from the beginning and before the fall of man when He created them male and female. This means that He created them as two distinct sexes¹.] **Origen** states: [A man cannot bear fruit and multiply without a woman (so God gave him a woman) so that he would not doubt the potential of the gift².]

God has created mankind as male and female in order to bear children, even had they not fallen and rebelled. It is not, as some believe, that childbearing came as the fruit of sin. That is why St. Augustine³ confirms that childbearing is achieved as part of

¹ *City of God* 14:22

² *In Gen. hom.*1:14

³ *City of God* 14:21



the glory of the marriage instituted by God Himself, and that it is not the fruit of lust. He also rejects the statement that the sin committed by the first parents is that of physical lust, and that this stripped them of purity. St. Augustine goes on to explain that lust came as one of the fruits of rebellion.

In the New Testament, God raises us to an angelic and heavenly life. Some yearn for a life of virginity not because they despise marriage or prohibit it, but because they wish to be dedicated to worship or to the service of the kingdom of God. St. Paul accordingly says: **'For I wish that all men were even as I myself... But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world -how he may please his wife.'** (1 Cor 7:11, 32, 33). In these words, the apostle does not despise marriage, but he elevates the status of virginity. St. Jerome states: [While we allow marriage, we prefer virginity which arises from it... is it considered a humiliation to a tree if we prefer her apples more than her roots and leaves?!]

St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the beautiful two wedded persons bearing the image of God, the king and queen. They are characterized by holiness and joyful faces which is a feature of nature. God granted the virgin Eve to the virgin Adam in a virgin wedding.

He mixed the elements as colors, and incorporated them, and created of them an appropriate likeness to His image filled with beauty.

He made him into a bridegroom in that great banquet which He held.

He decorated Eve, the virgin bride, and gave her to Adam, and He filled the sea, land, and air with her dowry.

All the dancers came to this great wedding which He held, and the wedded couple proudly displayed their crowns and robes.

¹ *Ep.*48:2



He dressed them with appropriate bright and shining light, and left them to take pleasure among the trees.

As a present, He gave them all the trees and their fruits; and Paradise rejoiced for the couple for they were loved.

The tree of life was hidden in the great chambers of Eden, where it would be celebrated for the two illuminated wedded when they would be perfected (Gen 2:8-9)¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

O beautiful ones, arise as you have slept for too long, and the celebrants are waiting to rejoice with you in your domain.

O stupor move away from the banquet filled with beauty, and let the couple wake up to enjoy their crowns.

O you youthful who have been created and formed in the image of the Almighty, now is your day to inherit the earth.

O bride who has been formed from the bridegroom, arise and wake him up. He is unaware of your arrival, and he will greatly rejoice that you have come.

O the lonely Adam arise, for you now have a partner. Behold how she resembles you, and rejoice with her.

The sleep which the groom slept was sweet, because it was the first sleep, that is why it pleased him and so he prolonged his sleep.

In a virgin sleep, Eve the virgin was taken from that groom who slept, and he forgot that he had become a bridegroom.

God ordered that sleep and so he escaped from the Almighty to whom he was tied, but it was impossible for sleep to release him from God.

Adam awoke and beheld Eve who had come to inherit with him the earth, the world, and the whole of creation.

He saw her and rejoiced for he considered she was of his flesh. He was moved by love and he sang to her as to a daughter:

This is my bone, my flesh, from me: a girl, a sister, a wife,

¹ Memre 8: On the Return of Adam. Read on Monday, in the third week of Holy Lent. Memre 72: On the Creation of Adam and the Life of the Dead. (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)



and a woman of her Father.

The couple stood covered in light, which filled them and the whole world rejoiced for this gift to them.

The day laughed before the groom, and offered all his light for the groom's pleasure.

Paradise opened its high gates for the couple to enter and rejoice there in the banquet of blessings that was prepared¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN EARTH CONCEIVED ADAM IS SYMBOLIC OF MARY WHO CONCEIVED THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

As St. Jacob of Serugh deeply loved the life of virginity, he not only spoke about the virgin Adam (before Eve was created), but he spoke about the virgin Eve who was created through a virgin sleep. Even the earth out of which Adam was created was virgin. Indeed, Adam had not come into being through a marital relationship.

The virgin earth gave birth to Adam in holiness in order to depict clearly the conception in the Virgin Mary².

St. Jacob of Serugh

ADAM'S SIDE CONCEIVED EVE, AND THE VIRGIN ALSO CONCEIVED THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In His Memre about the symbols of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, St. Jacob of Serugh did not miss to present the side of the first virgin Adam who conceived Eve during his sleep as a symbol of the Virgin Mary who conceived the Lord without human seed.

The story of Eve is a symbol of the birth of the Church, the Bride of the Lord. It is for her sake that the Bridegroom became Man in order to adhere to her and to carry her into His heavens. The writers of the early Church have presented many articles

¹ Memre 71: On the Seventh Day.

² Memre 80: On the Mysteries, Symbols, and Images of the Lord Jesus Christ



on the creation of Eve and the relationship between her and the Church, the Lord's Bride.

Adam slept and his side was wounded, so that Eve came out to become the mother of the whole world.

She became an image of the sleep of death on the Cross, and of that side which provided baptism.

Just as the side conceived Eve, as it is written (Gen 2:21), **so the virgin gave birth to the Son as it had been planned¹.**

St. Jacob of Serugh

MAN IS TO ABANDON HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND ADHERE TO HIS WIFE (GEN 2:24)

St. Jacob of Serugh explains why Moses the prophet usually covered his face with a veil when he spoke with his people, but removed that cover when he spoke with God. He says that this indicated that the whole Jewish nation did not perceive the underlying truths behind the prophecies, and how these truths would be performed by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of salvation. As for Moses himself, he perceived what lay behind the letter, and his heart yearned for the coming of the Lord and all the events that were to happen in his days, and he recognized their hidden mysteries.

Another aspect is that Moses was a representative of all the prophets of the Old Testament and all the prophecies. It is as though what Moses enjoyed was what all the other prophets, as well as all those called seers, enjoy.

This is the thought of St. Jacob of Serugh which he applies to the prophecy: **'a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife'** (Gen 2:24). He believes that this prophecy specifically points to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the Bridegroom of the Church.

St. Augustine writes that if the Lord Jesus Christ adheres to the Church so that the two become one flesh, then in what manner does He leave His father and mother? He has left His mother in



the sense that: **'being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant'** (Phil 2:6). In this sense He left His Father, not that He forgot Him or became separate from Him; but by appearing in the form of Man. But how did He leave His mother? By leaving the Council of the Jews (the Sanhedrin) out of which He was born according to the flesh in order to adhere to the Church which He has gathered from among all the Gentiles¹.

The concealed Father engaged a Bride for His Only Begotten Son, and proclaimed her through prophecy and the use of symbolism.

In His love, He erected a great mansion for the Bride of the Light, and presented (pictures of) the Groom in various ways in His royal kingdom.

Like a skillful artist, Moses came and described the Bride and the Groom, he then covered the great picture with a veil.

He recorded in his book 'a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh' (Gen 2:24).

Moses has presented the story of the man and his wife as a means to speak about the Lord and His Church.

With the eye of glorious prophecy, Moses perceived the Lord Jesus Christ, and how He and His Church would be one in the waters of baptism.

He saw Him receiving her in the virgin womb, and she receiving Him in the waters of baptism.

Behold the Bridegroom and the Bride have been made one spiritually, and Moses has written about them: 'they shall become one' (Gen 2:24).

However, Moses considered that the (Jewish) people were not qualified to perceive this great mystery, therefore he said about the man and his wife that the two will become one.

Moses, while covered with a veil, looked at the Lord and



named Him a 'Man' and looked at the Church and named her a 'Woman' as a literary imagery.

In order to avoid speaking publicly before the Hebrews, he covered his words through various means intending to conceal them from outsiders.

This is how he painted the picture inside the course of the royal Bridegroom; and he named them man and woman although he knew the truth.

He knew that the one is the Lord Jesus Christ and the other is the Church, and that each is concealed; so he proclaimed them as 'man and woman' in literary imagery.

As this cover was drawn down, no one knew what was the great picture? Or whose it was?¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

WORDS OF COMFORT FROM THE REDEEMING BRIDEGROOM TO ADAM AND EVE

When the second Adam, the Son of the virgin, came and betrothed the virgin Church, the new Eve, He accepted to pay the debt of the first Adam and Eve. He accepted to tear away the handwriting against them (Col 2:14) and to restore them with their children. They would not be sent back to the Garden of Eden but to the Paradise.

O Son of God, O Son of the virgin, who has allowed the fallen Eve to see You there and be comforted by You?

Now the handwriting has been torn (Col 2:14), and the wound has been healed by the Crucified Son. Come, O Adam, to your residence in Eden from which you had departed.

Come, O Eve, for I have suffered greatly for your sake. Now I have liberated you from the handwriting (Col 2:14), which has killed you.

1 Fr. Mena Elmakary: Memre 79. Published in English by S. Brock, the scholar specialized in the fathers of the Syrian Church-in the magazine Sobornost, Vol 3, no 1, 1981. Memre 79: on the veil on Moses' Face (Ex 34:33-35) (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)

Sebastian P Brock: Jacob of Serugh's Memre On the Veil on Moses' Face, Gorgias Press, 2009.

الأب مينا المقاري: ميمر رقم ٧٩، نشره بالإنجليزية سبستيان بروك S. Brock، العلامة المتخصص في آباء الكنيسة السريانية، وذلك في مجلة Sobornost، Vol ٣، no ١، ١٩٨١؛ الميمر ٧٩ على البرقع الذي على وجه موسى (خر ٣٤: ٣٣-٣٥) (راجع نص بول بيدجان ترجمة الدكتور بهنام سوني).

The slaves have been unjust to Me, yet I have endured the agony for your sakes. I have opened the Paradise, so that you might come and enter, and dwell there.

It pleased the Son of God to comfort the seed of Adam in their first hardship.

They had left Paradise, and the Lord of Paradise came to them and led them out of darkness to the light of Eden¹.

The Lord came and accepted the debt; He carried the sin upon Himself in order to tear away the handwriting in His Person.

He said: I am the Heir, I pay the debt that has drowned the mighty one, and that tripped the quick, and bound the strong, and ruined all the tribes, and raised the complaints of the great gatherings. Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham could not face it.

What is demanded of Eve? Let her handwriting be read.

The virgin is guilty, and the Son of the Virgin pays. The snake bit the young one, and she is given medicine to heal her.

I have been informed of the inheritance of the ruined. The Adams have robbed me, and I pay as the Heir. That is why My Father has sent Me; to become an Heir of Adam for he found that there was an Heir who could pay the debt, and construct out of the ruins. I will not leave Our image corrupted in Hades. I will not forsake Our likeness to be treaded upon by the robbers of corruption. I am the Heir and I pay all the debts of Adam².

St. Jacob of Serugh

That is how we have become entitled to the joy of Paradise: through the Virgin Son of a Virgin together with His Church, the Church of the firstborn, the fertile Mother!

1 Memre 53(7): On the Suffering of our Savior, His Crucifixion, Burial, and Ascension. (Bright Saturday-Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony). (The Coptic text- Memre 52). Elkhoury Bolos Elkhafaly, p. 187-188.

2 218 (Turgam) On Passion Week (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).



2

Abel, The Virgin

ABEL, THE VIRGIN PRIEST

St. Jacob of Serugh s wrote four memeres (147-150) on Abel and Cain, besides references to the character of Abel in his other writings. These portray his admiration of Abel due to different aspects such as the following:

1. Abel lived as a virgin and as a priest with no blemish.
2. He was the first being upon whom God looked since the fall of Adam and Eve. It was also the first sacrifice He saw (Gen 4:4).
3. God was preoccupied with him and cared for him. He asked his brother about him: 'Where is your brother Abel?' (Gen 4:9).
4. The first human voice which the heavens heard, for God said about it: 'The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground' (Gen 4:10)
5. His life was a symbol of the Lord's in many ways, though not in His likeness.
6. He was called beautiful because the reflection of the beauty of the Word shone upon him.

Abel was chaste and decorated with untarnished purity, sublime virginity, and the priesthood.

He picked the fat and the first born for sacrifice and fed the sacrifice with love that burned as a flame.

He was beautiful and chaste, and God was pleased with his offering. God loved him and accepted the offering He brought to Him¹.

Abel was a priest, yet not in the likeness of the Son.

Abel was beautiful and good and he offered sacrifice, yet he was far removed from being an ensample for the Lord.

¹ Memre 41: *On David's Words on the Lord: You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).* (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).



It is true that he offered the fist-born lambs and of the finest of his flock. Moreover, he had a pure soul which was fit to serve the Divine One.

However, he carried blood that was not his own: it was unlike that of the Redeeming Son of God.

He was chaste, virgin, and a blameless priest, and God accepted his offering. God loved him and was pleased with his offering.

However, in spite of all these beautiful attributes, he was not in the likeness of the Son of God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Mar Meletius Barnaba: *Selections from the Poems of St Jacob of Serugh, Elmelfan, Homs, 1991*



3

Noah, the Virgin

NOAH (GEN 6-9)

St. Jacob of Serugh notes that Noah lived for five hundred years without having children (Gen 5:32), as he was a virgin. He explains that he chose to live as a virgin all these years for mankind had corrupted marriage by committing adultery. Accordingly, it is written 'the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh... the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown (Gen 6:2-4).

Mankind had corrupted the purpose of marriage. The children of God committed the sin of marrying the women of the violent people who gave birth to mighty children who walked wickedly.

Noah finally married not because of physical lust, but to fulfill the purpose of marriage which is to have children instead of the mighty wicked ones (Gen 9:1, 7).

St. Jacob of Serugh confirms that Noah adhered to virginity by rising above nature; and when he married he wished to fulfill a sublime purpose.

Noah and his sons and wives were the 'few' who remained sanctified to the Lord. In every generation, a remnant to the Lord is found (Isa. 10:20; 28:5; Jer 31:7; Rom 11:5).

The apostle St. Peter considered that Noah and his family, which consisted of eight persons, as a symbol of the Church of the New Testament which has been saved as those in the ark. He writes: 'the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water' (1 Peter 3:20). St. Jacob of Serugh called them the (holy) remnant, who adhered to God while living in a wicked world.



Noah saw the evil of the wicked generation and wove a body of righteousness and put it on.

He armed himself with uprightness and humility, so that his body would not be smeared when faced by sin.

He saw how the adultery of his generation had multiplied, so he aligned virginity to fight and conquer it.

He found that everyone had corrupted his path with the evil of adultery and so the noteworthy one feared to come close to marriage.

He found that nature had slipped and failed in her duty so he stood up to prove that in virginity there is sublimity over nature.

He avoided marriage for five hundred years as he found that adultery was mixed with marriage (Gen 5:32).

He kept the rank of virginity for five hundred years, then the Highest betrothed him to bear fruit to fulfill a purpose (Gen 9:1).

He walked in goodness when he was alone, and his righteousness consoled the earth. After the whole earth was destroyed, it became inhabited through his righteousness.

He named the offerings, and built an altar for complete sacrifices; and he became the 'remnant'¹ in his generation in the world that had been devastated².

Contemplate Noah inside (the ark), riding on the sea, surrounded by the deep, and being carried in a procession on it.

He stepped over the rough waves with the planks, and his heel was placed on the neck of the great sea.

He carried his burden and made his way over the water, and stepped and passed through the flood unharmed.

He put on the wood, swam in the water, and did not drown; his home was surrounded by terrible floods while he was protected.

¹ The expression 'the remnant' left of Noah who remained good and faithful to the Lord became a symbol of the spiritual Israel! (Gen 8:20-22; Isai:9; Jer 40:11)

² Memre 63: On God's Love of Mankind. (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).



That one who had lived for five hundred years in virginity became the second Adam in the world so that he would populate it.

He pleased God with his righteousness and straight living, he became a priest, and God accepted his offering¹. The righteous Noah celebrated for five hundred years and carried the virginity out of which shone the Son of God².

¹ Memre 96: *On the Praise for John the Baptist.* (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).

² Memre 80: *On the Mystery, Symbols, and Images of the Lord Jesus Christ*



4

Melchizedek

MELCHIZEDEK (GEN 14:18-20)

It appears that St. Jacob of Serugh considered that Melchizedek was a virgin. He was the unique king and priest in the Old Testament who is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ the High priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek carried the following features:

1. An honorable one or high priest who offered a unique sacrifice pointing to the unique sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ in which the Lord offers to us His Body and Blood in order to make enjoy eternal life.
2. He possessed all goodness, and carried spiritual beauty.
3. He did not offer animal sacrifices, but presented his conscience or his will as a great sacrifice. It could indicate that what he did was not of his own will but an act of obedience and self-sacrifice.
4. Since his thoughts were filled with true love, God considered them an acceptable offering. He offered love of God as the sweet smelling incense.
5. He brought himself as an offering to God, and therefore says: 'a priest to himself'.
6. His vows and his offerings were concealed sacrifices presented to the concealed God.
7. The priestly robes with which he covered himself were the constant prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God. These are more pleasing to God than animal sacrifices.
8. He declared his royal power not over mankind but over wicked inclinations which dared to resist him and enter into a struggle with him.



What a true virgin priest shining with unique brightness!
Melchizedek the honorable one, the king of all righteousness,
lived a life of spiritual beauty.

Instead of animals, he offered his conscience before the Almighty; and instead of burnt offerings he committed his thoughts to God.

He ordained himself spiritually before God, and offered his all being in prayer which is the sacrifice without decay.

He honored God by understanding and chastity and without being smeared by the blood of physical offerings.

He lovingly brought to God his inner vows: hidden gifts pleasing to a hidden One.

He used his intelligence as a great censor to God, and he used his love of God as incense instead of perfume.

His robe and crown are the truth and faith, and his instruments are the constant praises of his mouth.

He never knew the sacrifices of the Lord, therefore he offered thanksgiving to the One he loved.

He knew that the Lord is only honored by love, therefore he prepared himself with love, so as to be His priest through holiness.

He is the king who has subjugated all the wild inclinations, and who has not engaged in any other battle where he could be fought¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 63: *On God's Love of Mankind, and On the Love of the Righteous.* (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony).



5 Virginity and the Daughter of Jephthah

St. Jacob of Serugh has a particular opinion regarding Jephthah as a man of faith; and of his virgin daughter as an acceptable sacrifice to God. We often hear that Jephthah was wrong when he made a vow to offer to God whatever would come out of the door of his house to greet him if God grants him victory over the people of Ammon (Judges 11:30-31). Some consider that he meant if he met a clean animal he would offer it as a sacrifice, and if he would meet a person than that person would be consecrated as a servant for the Lord. The reason why God allowed his only daughter to greet him is that He wanted this event to serve as a lesson to all future generations. No one should vow to offer a person as a sacrifice, for God is never pleased with human sacrifice. When He asked Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, it was a symbol for the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; and He did not allow this action to be completed. God accepted instead Abraham's sincere intention, true love, and obedience. These are the acceptable sacrifices to God.

He notes the following points about the virgin daughter of Jephthah as a sacrifice to God:

1. The virgin daughter pleaded to have two months to weep over her virginity with her friends. She was in pain because, like all other Jewish girls, she desired the Messiah and Savior to come through her offspring.
2. Her slaughter by the hands of her father is a symbol and prophecy of the sacrifice to be made on the Cross. God loved the world and sacrificed His Only Begotten Son for the sake of the whole world.



3. The sacrifices offered had various forms since it was impossible for one sacrifice to reflect the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. The sacrifice of the virgin daughter by the hands of the father was acceptable to God for both were beautiful.
5. The Law forbids the offering of human sacrifice; however, faith in the Messiah our Savior has allowed this celebration as a symbol for It.
6. The sacrifice of the beautiful one (that is the one filled with the glory of God) was acceptable in order to save the life of her people. The same can be said when the wholly beautiful Christ ascended on the Cross for the sake of the whole world and so granted believers the life of victory.
7. The daughter of Jephthah encouraged her father to be a priest and offer her as a sacrifice on behalf of the whole nation. Therefore it is fit that we do not fear death. Indeed, we should find in the suffering leading to death an inward peace since it is for the sake of the salvation of many and their joy in having fellowship with the Savior. This is the message of the virgin whatever his/her role, talents, or work: the salvation of mankind from eternal death should constantly be his preoccupation!

O Son of the virgin, to whom the virgin was offered as a sacrifice, grant me to speak about the victory of this crowned one.

O Only Begotten One to Whom Jephthah sacrificed his only daughter, bless my words so that I may speak fully and at length about her.

O Only One who is of the One, the only daughter has been offered to You by that one who sacrificed her, may I be that vessel for You that speaks of many matters.

You have been pleased with the offering of the only one by her father. May Your voice open the gates for my words relating her victory.



The sacrifice offered to You by the hands of Jephthah was amazing: a beloved virgin was sacrificed by her father.

The father offered his daughter to die, because he loved you; and in order to present You whom the Father offered for the sake of our salvation.

Your shadow has fallen on the daughter of the Hebrews; and she offered her neck under the knife of Jephthah her father.

He presented the image of Your death through the body of this pure one; and that is why she could become a sacrifice offered by her father.

For Your sake, the symbol of sacrifice was a threat from the very beginning: it was as through You were sacrificed, when this was done to the beautiful ones.

Your symbol appeared on the sacrifices and blessed them; and it seemed to multiply them on every occasion.

It seemed good to Him **to spill the blood of the virgin at her father's hands so that it would be similar to greatness of Your slaughter, O Son of the Almighty Savior.**

O Lord, if Jephthah had not presented the image of Your mystery, his sacrifice would not have been honored.

The love for the Father was kindled within him, so that he gave his daughter just as the Father delivered His Son.

He treaded upon the law, and offered sacrifice without the Law, because faith is far greater than the Law.

It is written: 'Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed' (Gen 9:6).

The Law considered that Jephthah deserved the sentence of death, so how did he not die, and how was he greatly honored instead?!

By faith, he disobeyed the Law and in spite of that he was not demoted. He spilled blood while the Law did not judge him...



Destruction came at the hands of Jephthah as a reward for his sacrifice, yet he did not feel any pain as a result of his vow...

The undefiled one was chosen to be a sacrifice, and because of her beauty many ranks fall down for her sake.

Death came for she was filled with mystery. She grew among the people, and death was hindered from many (Hebrews) so that they would not perish.

The people lived because she had died on the behalf of the whole nation; just as the Son ascended on the Cross on behalf of the whole world...

The virgin of suffering was betrothed to be crucified, and that is why her father's people were victorious.

Mystery chose this beautiful one to be sacrificed to Him, and He marshaled the thousands of the army to fulfill his offering.

The blood of the young girl there was selected mysteriously as the war raged on the horsemen of Ammon.

Justice beheld the beloved sacrifice which had been prepared, and ten thousands of people were killed for her sake...

Had mystery not kindled her to be sacrificed, it would have been hard for her to uncover her face before the multitudes.

It was time to be betrothed to suffering, it was time to celebrate the feast of her sacrifice. Therefore she uncovered her face for the people to behold her great beauty.

She was the first one that her parents saw, and she was chosen to be sacrificed to achieve victory.

The young daughter said: Yes, father, fulfill all your promises and complete your vow to God without sadness.

He has helped conquer the Ammonites according to your prayer. Offer the sacrifice you had chosen and do not be disturbed.



He has given me to you, therefore do not grieve when He takes me from you. I come from Him and go to Him, therefore be thankful when you receive.

I am your daughter, and you are a father because of me: I will become a sacrifice and you will become a priest because of me.

Until now you were known as a father only. From now onwards, you will be considered a father and a priest.

Had the Ammonites conquered you in war, the unclean would have taken me with them in exile.

I thank God that He has allowed you to be victorious, and has also allowed me to be among the sacrifices of peace and among the offerings to Him.

They used to call you the father of the virgin just like many other virgins; but after a while you will be known as the man of a woman full of pain.

From now on, they will (call you) the father of the slain who became a sacrifice; and a priest who offered the fruit of his body instead of a sacrifice.

A priest who gave birth to a sacrifice and whom he raised with love. He did not borrow in order to make an offering, but he slaughtered his daughter on the altar.

Congratulations for being the father of the sacrifice, and may your daughter reap through the love of your vow to the Lord!

You are my father, therefore be my priest and fulfill your vow. You gave birth to me and now sacrifice me fittingly.

I have come from you, and by you I am sacrificed on behalf of all. I become a great example of a new sacrifice in the world¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 159: *On the Daughter of Jephthah (Judges 10-11)*. (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony). Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Ophir MunzManor: *Jacob of Serugh's Memre on Jephthah's Daughter*. Gorgias Press, 2010.



6

VIRGINITY AND ELIJAH THE PROPHET, THE VIRGIN SERVANT

In the examples of virginity we have presented so far, none of them had been called to be church servants or assigned as priests to care for the flock, none had been called to serve a particular people or to serve mankind on the whole. Yet they were all virgins who possessed hearts filled love and true yearning for the salvation of others. Later on, in the period of the Judges, St. Jacob of Serugh presents the daughter of Jephthah, who had no role as a minister among her people, but was glad to offer herself as a sacrifice and slaughtered by her father's own hands for the sake of the victory of her people.

Now we present characters who practiced physical and spiritual virginity as well as service for the kingdom of God. St. Jacob was interested in presenting from the Old Testament three characters who were dedicated to the ministry of God: Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah. You might want to refer to our publication of the memers of St. Jacob of Serugh on these three prophets with some commentary on them.

In order to reveal the thought of St. Jacob of Serugh concerning these virgin ministers, we wish to underline briefly the relationship between virginity and ministry.

VIRGINITY AND MINISTRY

Virginity of the heart and dedication to serve are essentially two facets to one and the same feature. They are found in every true believer who enjoys the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15, 23). While every believer adheres to the consecration of his/her heart, thoughts, feelings, senses, potentials, and talents to God; real sublimity of the believer is achieved in the virginity of his depths, his loyalty, and his dedication. Clearly, it is not just a certain kind



of committed which determines the level of sublimity.

In essence, dedication and virginity are the acceptance of the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of the living believer who insists on walking according to the Spirit. In such a state, the believer demonstrates the life of God's adopted child. He proclaims membership in the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ as he is a living icon of the heavenly Bridegroom who interacts with the Holy Spirit who has made of him a holy tabernacle for the Lord. Thus his depths are transformed into a heavenly kingdom, which is renewed constantly up to the day of departure from this world when he will live in the divine paradise. At the same time, the believer yearns that the whole world accepts the divine love, so that the earth might become heaven and mankind become angels!

THE PATH OF VIRGINITY AND MINISTRY

Often the person who desires to lead a life of complete consecration to God and inner virginity is perplexed when faced by the choice of the path to take. He is faced with the following choices:

1. Life of **monasticism** in any of its forms.
2. Life of **priesthood** in any of its ranks.
3. Life of **virgin ministry** such as preaching, visiting the sick, serving in the educational activities at church and in youth conferences, serving the sick and the old and widows; as well as serving the needy, the prisoners, and those suffering hardship.
4. Complete **commitment to theological study and research**, that is, focusing on academic aspect of theology: spiritual and educational.
5. **Marriage** with the couple, or at least one of them- focusing on witnessing for the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ in one way or other.

On choosing a path, it is fitting that the believer is aware of the following:



1. A person often loses his inner peace while he is studying the most favorable path to take. He needs to be aware that the true path is first and foremost the **Lord Jesus Christ** who says: '**I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life**' (Jn 14:6). Therefore what should preoccupy the believer's thoughts, hearts and feelings as he chooses the path to take is to watch that his inner sight do not deviate from the glorious Lord Jesus and adhering to the Holy Trinity. Thus the believer experiences the tender love of the Father, membership in the holy Body of Christ, and interaction with the Holy Spirit to whom he has consecrated himself as His tabernacle. Thus a person might choose the path that is compatible with his talents, potentials, and circumstances. However, the loss of his focus and preoccupation with the work of the Holy Spirit could cost him the loss of his goal.
2. It is appropriate for the believer who is intent on the path of full consecration, whichever one he chooses, to comprehend that the essence of consecration is love: **Love of God and men**. Success becomes apparent in his sublimity and the constant progress in the path he has chosen, and while he enjoys love in his inner depths as well as in his worship, his service, and behavior.
3. The most dangerous setback for the believer is probably his doubt in the **choice of path he has made**. Then he would lose his peace and energy as he blames himself inwardly. He believes he has made a mistake in choosing the suitable path for himself and consequently lives in doubt and as a lost soul. In such circumstances, if a person is appointed as a priest, he will feel he is unable to strike a balance between his inner spiritual life and his efforts to bring salvation to his fellowmen. When he is visiting a family or engaged in solving a family problem, he would be in a pitiable condition as he believes his life before priesthood was more spiritual. When he is preparing a sermon or writing a paper, he weeps over his



earlier life when he practiced the word of God and meditated upon it for his own spiritual progress rather than for delivering a sermon or lecture or for engaging into a discussion with those he serves.

In contrast, when he pays attention to his inner life, he feels guilty because many are in need for someone to visit and care for them.

4. A believer needs **to turn to God with full purity and submission** so that He would reveal to him the appropriate path for him. Then he would enjoy the salvation of the Lord. The assistance of his father in confession is also vital. However, the decision should arise from the heart of the believer who should not expect the decision to be made by someone else.
5. Hesitation is a danger threat which destroys man's life. For example, changing the monastery to which he belongs often indicates failure unless there are urgent circumstances necessary for the edification of the group. It should not be due to his discontent with his situation in the monastery.

What we say about a monk applies to the life of a priest he thinks he cannot find the kind of congregation he wishes to serve, and therefore desires to move from one church or one city to another. This is also applicable to a virgin who dedicates his/her life to service or study or research etc., for hesitation destroys life as it turns one into a prisoner of failure.

Success is a feature of a Christian person 'whatever he does shall prosper' (Ps 1:3). The blessing of the Lord fills the place and the inhabitants wherever he goes. This what we sense in the life of Joseph as God blessed the house of Potiphar because of him though a slave there (Gen 39:3-5). Similarly, the guard and the prisoners were blessed because he was there and unjustly imprisoned. We are told 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the



blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate (Gen 39:3-6).

For those desiring to change their place of work or their service, may not base their decision upon discontent or failure or blaming colleagues, whether they be managers or colleagues or subordinates.

6. On choosing the path of total consecration, a believer needs to comprehend the correct implications of the following issues based on living biblical principles, and the understanding of the Early Church of these issues:
 - a. What is virginity?
 - b. The priesthood and its true role.
 - c. Inner consecration and applied behavior.
 - d. Research and study on a correct scientific basis while observing the true goal.
 - e. The unity of the communal life of the church and the personal life.
 - f. The evangelical perception of marriage, its purpose and its mission.
 - g. The correct perception of the world, sex, and the family
 - h. The openness to the heavens
 - i. Comprehending the true potentials of the believer wisely. Therefore the power of divine grace is not ignored while pride is avoided!
7. One of the basic factors for success in the life of consecration, whether in a life devoted to contemplation or one devoted to service, and these two are inseparable, is the believer's awareness that he is the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, the representative of the heavens, who does not act through sheer human thought. Human thought would lift him in a spirit of haughtiness at times, or drive him down to utter failure and so destroying his soul and potentials. The believer



needs to adhere to the vibrant hope in the work of the Holy Trinity within him.

8. The consecrated person is often destroyed due to his hasty expectation of fruit and not due to a mistake in the form of consecration he has chosen. He could be too quick in evaluating himself, his work, his service, and progress, or too hard in condemning his degradation due to some superficial human ideas.

If one of the leaders had made a questionnaire about the Lord's service in the last week of the Lord's life, Pascha week, the result would have indicated that He failed completely. This would be especially clear when He was hanging on the cross for He seemed like someone who had wasted His life and struggle without producing any fruit or results. If we would wait to the days after Pentecost and repeat the same questionnaire with the same questions, we would find that He was amazingly successful. Indeed, He is the Word of God incarnated who grants life to those who believe in Him and who work in His vineyard. Note how in the first few moments of the first day of Pentecost the Cross attracted over three thousand souls from different countries to believe in Him (Acts 2:41).
9. It is impossible to evaluate the true value of the work and service of a person, and his holiness and fruit except after he has departed from this world. There were seven thousand unknown men living in the days of Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 19:18), and the world as well as the prophets did not, and will not know their names until they meet them in paradise!
10. It is dangerous for a person to compare himself with others. Every believer has his own unique personality, his own mission, and a plan which God has set. It befits each one to achieve this plan in a spirit of harmony, unity, and coordination with others.



VIRGINITY OR CELIBACY

Virginity or celibacy in the literary narrow sense means the serious desire of a person to live without commitment to another person (a husband or wife); and to totally abstain from sexual relations. Having this concept, the person abstaining from marriage due to sexual incapacity could believe that he is celibate or that she is a virgin. Besides, a person who suffers from psychological or financial hardship, or who has family obligations which impede him from marriage could believe that he or she is a celibate or virgin!

Virginity in the broad spiritual sense means the elevation and sublimity of the soul. Consequently the believer responds to God's plan for him/her, and takes pride that he has been created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). He does not become enslaved to needs or pleasures or sexual desires.

1. We can truly say that virginity is essentially the fulfillment of God's yearning for us to be His children, and vessels of His love and pleasure. Spiritual virginity is the feature of God's children.
2. The virgin lives as a king (or queen) and lord, who directs his talents and potentials for his own edification, as well as for that of the congregation to which he belongs, and for society and all mankind.
3. Virginity does not involve a deprivation from physical pleasures or a suppression of physical needs. Rather, it is a flight of the whole being of a person so that he/she seems to come from another world, living and behaving as someone living in heaven itself!

Do not be amazed when we learn that the Early Church invited all believers to lead a life of virginity. Besides, she considered all those married and had children to be virgins. This does not contradict the sublimity of the body and the consecration of all potentials to work for the service of God's kingdom. When the body with all its potentials is in harmony with the soul, then the virgin lives with his whole being as



'God's child,' and sings with the apostle saying: 'Christ ... raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places' (Eph 2:6).

4. The Lord Jesus Christ began His service at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and ended it in the holy week of Pascha. During that last week He spoke about the Kingdom of God. He likened it to a wedding celebration which the King held for his Son. He offered His incarnated Son, the Blood of the crucified Groom, as a dowry for His Bride. This led St. Jacob of Serugh to name the mountain of Golgotha as '**the mountain of the wedding celebration**'. It is as though the Lord came to earth to invite the world to be spiritual virgins, and so be prepared through the Holy Spirit for the heavenly wedding celebration.

The virgin seems to find pleasure in life through his/her union with the heavenly Groom, and in being His holy Bride who is admired by the heavenly hosts.

SERVICE AND THE SERVANT/MINISTER

The Incarnated Word of God came to the world to serve rather than be served. He did so by offering Himself to be a sacrifice for many (Matt 20:28; Mk 10:45). He is the Holy One who proclaims: 'And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth' (Jn 17:19).

He is the Virgin, the Son of the virgin, by whose Blood He builds the Church of the virgins, the heavenly virgin of whom the apostle says: 'I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor 11:2).

It is befitting that every believer becomes a virgin in spirit, in thought, in heart, and all his/her inner being through the adherence to the Holy Virgin One. Moreover, it is appropriate for Him to be a Servant. A believer should not be exempted from possessing a virgin soul, and from serving, which is a direct result of that, as well as witnessing for the Holy One. Every believer should be a servant, since he is a member in the Body of the Lord who serves all humanity



St. John Chrysostom writes the following: Do not say I am neither a priest nor a monk! Let love be for all mankind, and prayer for even those who have wronged you; and witness to the redeeming work of God. This is what every believer should offer according to his talents and abilities!

Our Lord Jesus Christ was neither related to the priests or the Levites, nor to the scribes or the Pharisees. He was not assigned any specific duty at the temple. Yet He came from His heavens in order to embrace the world with love and to pour His radiance on believers. The Holy One came to sanctify and glorify everyone if that were possible.

Since virginity and service are inseparable, they are the feature of every believer who is truly sincere in his faith: sincere in his love to God and to men.

ELIJAH: A MODEL AND EXAMPLE OF A LIFE OF VIRGINITY AND SERVICE

The Holy Bible presents to us the most outstanding character in the Old Testament who has practiced a life of virginity. This character is considered a living model for everyone who desires to consecrate his/her life to God in a perfect manner. Thus he/she would be the object of God's pleasure, and of amazement to the heavenly hosts.

We feel that one of the greatest Fathers who have soared to live as Elijah is St. Jacob of Serugh. We stand amazed and feel inadequate as we speak about him. A number of memers or poems have been written about him in the Syriac language. These kindle the heart of the believer and incline him to follow the lead of the virgin Elijah, the prophet and servant who possessed a fiery heart!

These poems are considered strong and clear signposts on the road to virginity and service. The believer, in modern times can benefit from them if he wishes to experience the joyful and blessed life of virginity. These are the signposts:

1. Being independent of relatives and family

The Holy Bible does not mention the names of the father or mother of Elijah the prophet which is contrary to the way it deals with many other prophets. There is no mention of his people or the



tribe to which he belongs. It is as though it intends to confirm that Elijah the virgin was more like a heavenly being who possessed God given heavenly power and never dependent on any human relation.

The mention of Elijah the virgin remains across the years a confirmation that we should not search to know about the family and lineage of the virgin. Rather, we need to focus on his character, life, thoughts, and service for the Lord.

2. He is called the Tishbite which means the Stranger

It befits the consecrated virgin to live as a stranger in the world and to walk as his Master, who said about Himself: 'the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head' (Matt. 8:20; Lk 9:58). The apostle also says this about men of faith: '(they) confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth' (Heb 11:13).

St. John Chrysostom writes: [Truly they suffered the pains of delivery each day, yearning to be liberated from this world in order to return to their country. But whenever we suffer of some fever, we neglect everything and cry like children because we fear death. It is not without reason that we do so. It is because we do not live as though we were strangers who are in a hurry to return to their country. We behave as though we will be going to receive our punishment and therefore we grieve. We do not walk as we should and we reverse matters so that we grieve when it is right to rejoice, and we tremble as though criminals and gang leaders who remember their offences when brought before the judgment seat and consequently fear and tremble¹.]

The Bible concealed his life, for he followed a sublime path, and we were unable to speak about it.

Since childhood, he adhered to a great vision and accomplished victorious deeds, which even nature could not comprehend.

As soon as he distinguished between good and evil, he began with goodness and was never overpowered by evil.

As soon as he knew the world, he abandoned it to avoid living in it. He loved poverty and solitary life in the mountains.

As soon as he felt that there is another world where God reigns, he turned his face to it, and hurried to get there.

¹ In Hebr. Hom.24:5



As soon as he realized that the world passes away, he did not debase himself to deal or work there.

As soon as he heard that this was not his place, he did not like it, and never desired to get close to its activity.

Ever since he learned that there is **another life to live for God**, He searched tirelessly to inherit it.

When he learned that **Adam had died upon disobeying the Law**, he never departed from the living Law.

He looked **at nature (mankind), and realized that had it not sinned it would not have died**; therefore he dreaded sin lest it bears the fruit of death.

Since he learned about death, and about life, he struggled in order to attain life.

Since his childhood, **he grew spiritually and rose to great sublimity**, until he reached this most sublime of all ranks.

He looked to God and once he discovered His great beauty he never turned his eyes away to see anything (else)¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

3. Assigning Amazing Titles to Him

Due to the great admiration which St. Jacob of Serugh had for Elijah the virgin, he assigned many names to him. These reveal the saint's yearning to be like him. He also invites us to follow the example of his life and behavior. Moreover the titles portray what features should characterize those who desire to experience true virginity. Some of the most common titles St. Jacob uses for Elijah are:

A. The Beautiful

When St. Jacob of Serugh speaks about the virtues God grants to the believer through divine grace, he calls them 'the beautiful ones'. According to **Origen**, virtue is truly the attainment of the Lord Jesus Christ himself: proclaiming His dwelling in the heart, and reflecting His divine beauty in the inner man so that believers are considered 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

¹ Memre 115: *On the Saint Elijah the Prophet, and His Ascension to Heaven* (2 Kgs 1:2-11); Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony. Also Cf. *Jacob of Serugh: Sermons on Elijah the Prophet*. Antonian University, Lebanon 2003 Fifth Sermon, p. 176-178.

الميمر ١١٥ على القديس مار إيليا النبي، وعلى صعوده إلى السماء (٢ مل ١:٢-١١) راجع ترجمة الدكتور سوني بهنام، وأيضاً يعقوب السروجي: عظات حول النبي إيليا، الجامعة الأنطونية، لبنان ٢٠٠٣، العظة الخامسة، ص ١٧٦-١٧٨.

The concern of a virgin following in the footsteps of Elijah the Prophet is the dwelling of the glorious Lord within his depths. As a result, this person's inner depths become 'beautiful' in the sight of the Lord and in the eyes of the heavenly hosts as they behold the icon of the Lord in Him

The reason for his ascension is that he was **beautiful** in his deeds, and not because an onlooker saw the beautiful sight of his ascension.

If he had seen a defect in his spiritual beauty, the righteous One (God) would have seen this blemish, and would not have allowed him to ascend.

If there had been any sort of blemish (of any kind) in his soul; if sin had beaten his body down constantly;

If he had accidentally faced harm or disability; if he was burdened by a thought that brings death;

If he had retained one ugly word, or was disturbed by one temporal act;

If he had fallen into the trap of any one lustful thing; if he had considered any matter with a lustful eye;

If sin had grasped him in her teeth as is her custom; if one of the physical pleasures had taken hold of him.

If he had any physical defects; if any of his senses had fallen away from God;

If his mind had descended to live in the world: **he would have remained in the world, and would not have ascended to where he has gone.**

And because he was radiant, beautiful, righteous, and without blemish, he ascended to a place where blemish is not admitted¹.

St. Jacob Serugh

¹ Memre 115: *On the Saint Elijah the Prophet, and His Ascension to Heaven* (2 Kgs 1:2-11); Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony. Also Cf. *Jacob of Serugh: Sermons on Elijah the Prophet*. Antonian University, Lebanon 2003 Fifth Sermon, p. 174-176.



B. The Radiant

St. Jacob of Serugh frequently repeated this title when he spoke about Elijah the prophet. A person who consecrates his life to the Lord bears the reflection of the Lord's radiance, or the light of the Sun of Righteous shining on him so that he really becomes radiant.

C. The Vigilant

In many of his memers, St. Jacob of Serugh uses the word 'vigilant' to indicate an angel or one of the heavenly hosts. This is because there is no sleep in heaven, and all are vigilant out of love, care, and concern for mankind who are the object of their love. St. Jacob uses the same title for Elijah the prophet.

It befits the virgin who consecrates his/her life to God to be vigilant. Vigilance here refers to the love to worship. Indeed, the believer finds true comfort in worship, especially at midnight as he defies even his physical needs.

Besides, vigilance indicates the alertness of the soul to fight a hostile enemy.

Added to that, vigilance indicates the love of the performer. When a virgin stays on vigil, he/ she is as a father or mother who works to edify others, protect, and answer all their needs.

Over and above all this, vigilance means watching out for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom even at midnight.

Elijah the (heavenly) vigilant one is prepared and filled with beauty and much patience so that he could incorporate himself in the Lord.

He incorporated all his life into the Lord, and dwelt in the desert free of all worldly desires.

He procured good will in union with God, so that he and God would not possess two different wills.

In all situations which demanded him to fight against the people, he would be engaged in fulfilling God's will.

He never desired to act alone as he was concerned with completing all the tasks set by God.



He did not live for himself and did not move to serve himself. **All his personal initiatives to move were in and for the Lord¹.**

St. Jacob of Serugh

4. THE GRATIFICATION OF BEHOLDING GOD AND UNITING WITH HIM

St. Jacob of Serugh presents a fascinating portrait of virginity. It is of a soul fully captivated by the vision of God, and united with Him, so as to shine with His light within her (soul). It is not renunciation of marriage, or an escape from family obligations and responsibilities. Rather, it is the dedication of the soul to God with great joy, a soul that comprehends the great riches of the true God. Therefore she (the soul) dismisses all anxiety and all physical lust that would enter stealthily and corrupt her joy. She does not feel she has needs or necessities. She needs nothing else other than being with God. He is the Bridegroom with whom the Bride cannot accept anyone else to come in and occupy her being.

For Your sake, Elijah lived in virginity. This helped him to look towards You as he could see **You through chastity.**

When he meditated on You, he became chaste, and therefore You desired to dwell within the chastity of his heart.

In order to see You, He cleaned himself as a mirror so that in its clarity Your great picture would appear.

He fled from the world to find and live with You a good life, a life of poverty blessed by Your riches.

He despised possessions to facilitate attaining You; for anyone who possesses anything else besides You is undeserving of You.

He constantly secured his soul to preserve her from anxiety and to keep her receptive when You come and dwell in her.

¹ Memre 63: On God's love to Mankind and on The Love of the Righteous. (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)



He emptied himself of every temporal thing, lest he wavers in serving You.

He dismissed all physical desires, as someone walking in a new life (Rom 6:4), because he has known You (Phil 3:12).

He lived in this world in poverty, scarcity, and solitude since it was not his world nor was it to his advantage.

His heart was where his treasure was (Matt 6:21). It was with God who was his true unchanging treasure.

He extracted his heart from the world through love, and planted it with God so that he would drink of His source.

He rejected all worldly thoughts, so that his heart would ascend and dwell with God.

He ignited the love of the Lord as a flame in his soul, lest any worldly thought would take root in her.

He set the Lord before him at all times (Ps 11:8), and looked to Him so that he would not see the world which deceives those who look at it¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The life of Elijah the Prophet marks the principal behavioral signposts on the road of virginity. They ensure safety from swerving right or left. Together with a fiery heart to save God's people, Elijah possessed purity of faith and worship at a time when the worship of Baal occupied the hearts of the leaders as well as the nation. However, he translated his zeal into his adherence to God. He remained focused on heavenly matters and liberated himself of all material and temporal issues. He believed that there was no solution to the bitter situation in which he lived other than the intervention of the Lord Himself.

He had a personal relationship with God, and his heart was constantly uplifted to heaven. These factors, besides his asceticism and withdrawal from the world, helped him to keep focused on his

¹ Memre 115: Memre 115: *On the Saint Elijah the Prophet, and His Ascension to Heaven* (2 Kigs 1:2-11); Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony. Also Cf. Elkoury Bolous Elghafaly: *Sermons on Elijah the Prophet*. Antonian University, Lebanon 2003 Fifth Sermon, p. 169-170.



service. These constituted the signposts on a path of true goodness and reconciliation.

Elijah had no doubt or questioning even in his inner depths on how to strike a balance between a personal spiritual life and service. He considered that both were one complete function with two aspects; and as one aspect progressed, the other would follow too.

His correct understanding of his inner life as well as that of the ministry granted him a simple and upright existence, free from any inward conflict. Indeed, it enabled him to gain inner comprehension of God and granted him a practical experience of fellowship with God.

5. SERVING THE GENTILE NATIONS

One of the features of a virgin is his/her great love to God as well as love towards all humanity. It is good to follow the example of Elijah the Prophet whose heart was kindled with love of the living God and love of his own people. In spite of that, he was sent to a Gentile woman to serve her and be served by her. The Gentile woman served him and offered all the food she had to him though she greatly needed it to feed herself and her son lest they die of hunger. As for Elijah, he served her as he set her as a symbol of the Church of the Gentiles who receives the Lord Jesus Christ as her Redeemer.

Elijah was sent to this Gentile woman not only as a sign of God's care for His children but also of His care for the Gentiles. She would receive him in her house and he would bless all she possessed. The Lord Jesus Christ says: I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow... (Lk 4:25-26). Elijah was the first prophet to be sent to serve the Gentile nations. His people despised him, so he turned to the Gentiles, and the apostles give testimony to that (Acts 18:6). In that manner, he testified about the



Lord Jesus Christ who came to His own people, and they rejected Him. He came to the lost sheep of Israel and when they rejected Him, He opened the gates to the Gentiles so that they would accept His Redeeming work and His supreme love.

St. Augustine writes the following: [Elijah came to the widow because the Lord Jesus Christ is coming to His Church¹.]

As much as the virgin's heart is kindled with love and the desire to spent time in solitude with God, yet this love does not shut the doors of the heart to mankind. Indeed, this love opens the heart to all mankind, even to the unbelievers. The person who adheres to the Lover of mankind cannot but love everyone and desires them all to enjoy partaking of the eternal glories.

In other words, there is no separation between a life of meditation and a life of service. However, we recognize that each virgin possesses individual talents without ignoring other aspects.

Even when a virgin is an anchorite who may not see the face of a human being for years, yet he humbles himself in his solitude so that the whole world might enjoy salvation.

The virgin who offers services in any form will not be considered a true virgin unless he has personal meetings with God and has practical joy of fellowship with the heavenly ones.

The successful virgin will not suffer from inability to strike a balance between meditation and service. He will not feel there is a conflict between them, for in Christ he enjoys love for God and for men. Besides, he enjoys participating with the heavenly hosts while serving mankind!

6. NOT BELITTLING THE UNKNOWN AND BELOVED HOSTS

The all-knowing God, in wisdom, uses some people for chaste jobs. He did so with Elijah the Prophet and his disciple Elisha, and with others. At times, He prompts them to disappear for a period of time lest they lose the glory they have acquired from Him. He also, in wisdom, preserves many in the ranks of the unknown.

¹ Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermon 124:2



He does not assign a declared task for these and the path to their salvation is in being just that- 'unknown ones'!

Elijah the prophet almost collapsed in moments of weakness which he endured as a human being. He suffered of loneliness and isolation, and desired death. He believed there was not one faithful person left on earth other than himself. God revealed to him these ranks and said to him: 'Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him' (1 Kings 19:18).

These ranks exist in every generation. They are beloved of God and they are concealed even from the sight of some of God's saintly men. There is a rank that witnesses for God in hiding, and they hold a place in the Church of God although it is not visible even to the church leaders.

It befits the virgin not to ignore this fact, lest he becomes shut in within his own ego. This would lead him to pride or to frustration.

In the Didascalia, it says: [There were only seven thousand holy persons in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal: out of these, Elijah and his disciple Elisha were the only ones who did miracles. Yet neither of them despised Obadiah who feared God yet did not do any miracles¹.]

In the days of Ahab, there were seven thousand persons out of the whole nation in the ranks of the unknown beloved ones (1 Kings 19:18).

Although the idolatry of Jezebel was like a great sea, yet she did not recognize them. This was because they lived in the Lord and guarded as though in a harbor.

So that they would not be harmed by the spray and waves of the sea, God hid them so that they would not be known to the house of Ahab.

They existed but they were unknown; and they were revealed to Elijah since he was a friend, one of the sons of the House, and the keeper of secrets.

¹ Constitution of the Holy Apostles, book 8:1



God saw them in hiding and knew them; and revealed to Elijah that they were seven thousand.

None of them could resist the war of idolatry; and God did not give them this task lest Ahab would know them.

He examined Elijah and perceived that he was capable of facing the great danger; therefore He designated him to go into battle against the sinners.

He was the only one to become famous: he commanded the battle and conquered mightily the great treachery of Jezebel.

It was befitting that he became known, famous, and great; for his soul possessed the power to overcome passions daily¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

7

Virginity and Elisha the Prophet

Elijah the Prophet is considered a radiant and amazing virgin. As a bright star, he attracts all those seeking virginity as he would be the example to follow as much as possible. Across the years, every virgin we have known has revealed to us an aspect or aspects of true virginity.

Elisha the prophet, who was the disciple of Elijah, was a virgin with a kindled spirit. He enjoyed a double portion of the spirit of his master. His life presents aspects which befit a virgin to observe. We mention some of them as follows:

1. THE CALL TO VIRGINITY AND SERVICE

Elisha the virgin was called in amazing circumstances and in a unique manner. Elijah the Prophet had met the Lord on Mount Horeb, where Moses the Prophet had met Him. Like all God's servants across the ages, who felt bitter due to the resistance of the world to God, to faith, and to God's servants, Elijah was feeling very bitter. He cried to the Lord and said: 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life' (1 Kings 19:14).

In his conversation with him, the Lord said: 'Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him' (1 Kings 19:15-18).

'So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of

¹ Memre 112, The Second: On Elijah when He Fled from Jezebel (1 Kings 19). Cf. the translation of Dr. Sony; and St Jacob of Serugh- Sermons on Elijah the Prophet, Antonian University, Lebanon 2003. 2nd Edition, p. 80-81.



Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, 'Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.' And he said to him, 'Go back again, for what have I done to you?' So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. He then arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant' (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Elijah surely groaned within his depths due to the condition of the Church and the people. He felt that his day of departure from the world was drawing near and worried that there was no one to replace him. It was as though the ministry was undergoing a phase of extreme poverty and bitter aridity. However, God assured him that His eyes were on the Vineyard and that there were witnesses for Him in the ranks of the 'unknown' and He stated their number. Moreover, God was also preparing a leader to fill in for Elijah's ministry.

It is truly beautiful that a servant continues in ministry, and for the people to pray God to send workers for the harvest. Yet it is important that they all trust that God will not forget his Vineyard and His people. Indeed, He is the Worker and the One concerned with every big and small issue.

As a living believer, especially the one seeking to lead a life of virginity, it is commendable that he/she follows the example set by Elisha the prophet:

- a. He was loyal and serious in his work; and God called him while he was doing strenuous work. When Elijah called him to serve, he found him plowing in the field and dedicated to work in the vast land his father possessed.
- b. When Elijah threw his cloak over him, Elisha immediately left the oxen and ran after him.
- c. He was a chaste person who had great respect for his father and mother. Therefore he felt the need to go and kiss them



before following Elijah, in order to learn discipleship at his hands. However, Elijah directed him to watch lest this love become an obstacle to his mission and service.

- d. Elisha withdrew from his daily task (with the oxen), and even from bidding farewell to his parents, in order to follow the prophet.

In the Middle East, bidding farewell to the parents might take days or months. That is why Elijah did not want any postponement, and told Elisha: 'Go back again, for what have I done to you?' It was as though he was telling him: 'I have not called you to fill the role of a prophet but God is the One who called you. Therefore, why do you postpone? If you want to go back, not only to bid farewell to your parents but to stay with your friends and in your land.' He might have said these words to confirm that the call is not an obligation. Indeed God detests forcing anyone to serve Him. He wants each person to think and chose, with his own free will, the path he desires to take.

- e. Elijah left Elisha immediately so that he would choose the way to take without delaying his father's work. There was no time for further delay.

St. Ambrose considers that the way Elisha acted in this situation is characteristic of those directly called to serve. This was the case with many of the prophets in the Old Testament, as well as with the disciples and apostles in the New Testament. However, when someone is called to serve, it is necessary to have a period of prayer and fasting, and to study the whole issue before quitting one's work and starting a new life of full dedication. This is what St. Ambrose writes on this point: [The Lord does not wish us to abandon all our concerns in one step. Rather He wishes us to release them gradually unless we are in a similar situation as that of Elisha: he killed the oxen and fed the people with what he had so that he would no longer have any concerns over what he had to



leave. Indeed, he abandoned everything and devoted himself totally to learning the duties of the prophets¹.]

- f. In the case of Elisha, it is clear that God is the One who called him; and Elijah found great joy in anointing a prophet to take his place. Yet he left Elisha to make the decision from his inner depths. Although we recognize and appreciate the role of the father of confession, yet it is not his right to make the decision and oblige his spiritual son to take a certain path of consecration. His role is just to guide and direct, without being forceful as he comprehends the free will of his spiritual son.

2. Walking in a Spirit Filled with Love and Tenderness in the Lord

God granted Elisha the power to do double the amount of miracles made by his master, Elijah. This is not because he was greater than Elijah, but to confirm the need of society for more work to face the increase in corruption. Miracles were not intended to be a show of his power and potentials. Rather, they carried practical divine and spiritual implications bearing on his daily life and fellowship with God. The miracles done by God through the hands of **Elisha the prophet reveal most prominently Elisha's tender fatherhood.**

On studying Elisha, consider the following: he was a man blessed with a living spirit and understanding.

God had created his soul and planned all his actions so as to help the people through his good heart.

Elisha's heart was captivated by God through the Spirit which he received and without Whom he could neither move nor act.

His soul became enlightened by the Lord who dwelt in him and he did not stumble. This was because he walked in the Lord as one who walks in the daylight.



A human being is great through the divine riches: from that Treasure which Elijah on his ascension granted to Elisha¹. This poor one was using that rich One; for he had not amassed gold or silver when he lived with God during his life on earth.

He had no possessions, yet he was rich in every way. He enriched the needy as he granted them all their wants.

There was a certain widow who was harassed by her creditors, and she came to him in tears and presented her case.

Her creditor was unrelenting, so **she hurried to Elisha so that he could fill the role of her man and act in the time of need.**

The Lord is the widow's Man, and (Elisha) in God's place, requested pardon for the needy one.

She held on to Elisha, who acted on behalf of God, to represent her man lest her creditors tear her apart.

She understood that he was the keeper of God's House, therefore she prayed him to save her from her creditor.

To whom would a widow go in times of need other than to God who is her Man?

Since Elisha was His keeper and representative, she held on to him to save the orphans from the slavery of the creditors.

She hurried to submit the concerns of those whose father had died to the Father of all orphans for He has promised to lift the oppressed.

So her voice was raised and she cried loudly before Him, praying Him to relieve her of the debt, and to save her two children from slavery.

The intelligent woman said to him: 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his

¹ Memre 116: *On Elisha and Purifying the Water.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, p. 35-36).



slaves,' (2 Kings 4:1). Therefore stand in his place for the sake of God whom he feared.

The intelligent woman presented her case wisely in order to oblige the prophet to get up and fulfill the task.

She informed him of her husband's death, and that he feared God so that he would be engaged due to these two factors.

She obligated him to stand as her man would, and save the two sons of the God fearing father from slavery.

She knew that he was a prophet of the One who has promised to reward richly those friends unjustly suffering and shows mercy even to a thousand generation (Ex 20:6).

She prayed the prophet to fill the role of God based on the promise she preserved as a warranty.

The prophet stood up as a defense attorney to pay all her debt on God's behalf.

He was required to do so as though his name was included in the accusation, and he gladly paid to redeem the two orphans.

He stood in God's place at the side of the needy widow, and stood in the husband's place to satisfy her need¹.

This wealthy man did not possess any gold, silver, or buildings in this world.

Yet he possessed the ability to heal the water when it became corrupt, and to heal the polluted wells when they asked him (2 Kings 2:19).

He stopped death and granted life to mankind (2 Kings 4:36); **and he ordered the wild beasts to act at his command** (2 Kings 2:24).

He created ditches in the thirsty land for the armies (2 Kings 3:20), **and transformed the water into oil when circumstances dictated** (2 Kings 4:1-7).

¹ Memre 116: *The first one on Elisha and the purification of the Waters of Jericho Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: On Elisha the Prophet, 2003- p. 40-42).*



He granted barren women to conceive in the womb (2 Kings 4:16-17); **and brought the dead to life when people prayed to him** (2 Kings 4:36).

He transformed the bitter into sweet when this happened (2 Kings 4:41); **and multiplied the little bread through his prophetic power** (2 Kings 4:45-44).

He cleansed the bodies from leprosy when he is faced with it (2 Kings 5:14), **and perceived with the inward eye all things concealed** (2 Kings 6:16).

He covered with leprosy those who stole and lied to him (2 Kings 6:16), **and drowned the wood into the river, contrary to its nature** (2 Kings 6:5-7).

He made iron to float on the water contrary to its nature (2 Kings 6:6), **and spiritually perceived and exposed the depths of the kings** (2 Kings 6:9-10).

He prayed and closed eyes were opened (2 Kings 6:17); **and horses of fire ran with him wherever he went** (2 Kings 6:17).

He closed the eyes of the enemies of God's House (2 Kings 6:23); **and perceived distant matters as though they were at hand** (2 Kings 6:16).

He conquered armies with the sound of weapon 13:21) **as though there was no battle** (2 Kings 6:23); **and fed the cities with plants** (2 Kings 7:1-16).

By his word, almighty kings were weakened; and uncovered the future through revelations.

He revealed to ailing kings the time of their death,(2 Kings 8:7-15); **and foretold who would rule before he was crowned** (2 Kings 10:3-6).

He anointed kings to reign mightily (2 Kings 3:6); **and granted power to the almighty in battle.**

And when they prayed him for the life of the departed, just by touching him (2 Kings 13:21); **he revealed**



his power, loaded with all spiritual riches¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

3- The Yearning for the Salvation of all Mankind

St Jacob of Serugh considers the widow and her children, whom Elisha the prophet saved from the cruel creditor, to be a reference to the Church. She had brought home empty vessels from the market and from the neighbors so that Elisha would fill them with oil. This is a living picture of the **Church who brings in people from all countries and nations to become members of the Church, and their hearts consequently are filled with God dwelling within them!**

The prophet asked her to bring vessels from the market and from her neighbors and to fill them.

This points to what the Church takes from all nations: empty people whom she fills with faith.

He told her: **'Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors'. This is just what the Church takes from the nations and people.**

Come and behold how the House (Church) of the All Mysterious One is like a place filled with riches to those who know Her.

Every vessel which enters there empty is filled by Her, She requested empty (vessels) and then She filled them with riches.

This is how the Church deals with atheists and rebels whom she gathers to herself and goes on to fill them with faith.

She takes the empty ones and fills them to the brim, just as this widow who filled up the vessels to overflowing.

Outside her door stood the corrupt and the needy; inside her house they became satisfied and perfected.

The Church, through God, fills everyone who is lacking and perfects him when he/she enters within her doors.

They brought to her empty vessels, and she poured into them

¹ Memre 116: *On Elisha and Purifying the Water*. (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, p. 35-36).



so that all those empty ones became filled.

This is a reference to the fullness of all the nations who will all come to God; and that would signal the end of all things.

Elisha portrayed these mysteries through this widow. He ordered her to ask for empty vessels and to fill them up¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

4. HE LIVES AS A POOR MAN AND ENRICHES SO MANY

Elisha's way of life reveals how the children of Truth are poor yet grant riches to so many. The child of Truth carries 'the Truth' within him/her. Consequently, he overflows onto so many others. He is more sublime than wealthy people, as he makes use of necessities and does not seek luxuries or wealth. This enables him to lead a carefree existence!

Behold how Elisha has been set as a mirror for children of the Truth, so that when they look at him, they will become adorned with inner beauty.

He followed in purity the great path of Elijah, having no possessions and leading a life of chastity and poverty.

He who was poor enriched so many. He possessed nothing, yet he received everything from the Lord of all creation.

This is the path of the great House (Church) of God. It is filled with poor ones, yet it is more sublime than the wealthy.

It is pure and chaste. It detests temporal riches, and the children of the King walk in it without possessions.

It learns to be perfect through Elisha who was the student of that glorified and beautiful One praised among teachers.

Behold who he is from his cell in Shiloh: He possessed no unnecessary luxuries in his home.

¹ Memre 116: (part one) *On Elisha and Purifying the Water of Jericho*. (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, p. 46-47).



He just used the bare things that were dictated by his needs without caring to obtain much of anything¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

5- Comprehending Divine Capabilities

Elisha, the poor man, commands kings and leaders (2 Kings 4:13). Elisha lived in the spirit of truth as a man of God. Like his teacher, Elijah he neither feared any one, nor felt threatened by people with authority. His greatness and his glory rested in God actively working within him. Therefore the great ones of this world feared him even though they sometimes resisted him. They felt they needed him in times of trouble.

O privileged one; know that walking with God in poverty brings riches and all the treasures to those who receive Him.

Elisha commanded the kings of the people just as he would deal with slaves (and with no favoritism); and heads of armies and kingdoms as equally as to paid laborers.

The words of the great and the rich were despised and rejected; and the word of Elisha was great: it was as though he was the master of the masters.

In his poverty, he subjugated kings and they obeyed him; and the heads of armies respected and accepted his word to issue their orders.

He who does not wish to possess anything other than God rests above the world, and is in command of all things as a master would be.

O privileged ones, contemplate a poor person in the House of God commanding heads of armies and kings (to carry out) all plans!

He asked the believer: Do you have any wish that you need to be conveyed on your behalf to a king or army commander?

¹ Memre 118: (part three): *On Elisha and the Shunamite Widow.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, 2003, p. 69-70).



It replied: I am better off just by living among my people, and I do not need the help of any king or leader.

That is how this blessed and chaste person witnessed that her (the Shunamite woman) heart was steadfast and devoted to the world of God.

It welcomed him as It hoped for eternal issues, and had no worldly needs which would make her turn to him.

It did not seek to get help from a king or a commander for her hope was placed in the King of all kings¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

6. ENJOYING THE WEDDING AT GOLGOTHA

St. Jacob of Serugh calls Mount Golgotha 'the wedding of Golgotha,' as he sees the heavenly Bridegroom offering His precious Blood as a dowry to His Bride. He writes about Elisha who went up to the room to raise the son of the Shunamite woman through God. He considers that God has transformed that room into Mount of Golgotha. Going up to the room, Elisha felt he was in the company of God, the heavenly Groom who grants the resurrection to human beings who believe in Him, inviting them to live with Him in His heaven.

Elisha had lived in the room, where he brought life to the son of the Shunamite, as though he lived on Mount Golgotha. He lived with the crucified Lord who could raise the dead through His Cross. The mission of the virgin Elisha and his heart's desire was to adhere to the crucified Lord. He prayed that all mankind would experience the Cross as the power of God and consequently enjoy the resurrected life.

The upper room of that saintly man became like Golgotha; and he became like our Lord who gave life to the dead so that he lived.

The captor perceived the sign of the King in Elisha: and the deprived exile was restored to his place.

¹ Memre 118: (part three): *On Elisha and the Shunamite Widow.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, 2003, p. 74-75).



He dismissed death from his upper room through the Cross, and the lightened life of the dead was revealed there.

The prophet descended carrying these mysteries from the peak of the mountain, and portrayed these symbols in the dead one when he revived him (2 Kings 4:27)

He looked around and took measure of himself and the young boy, and diminished himself for his sake so that the boy would live through him.

The mighty One descended to the stature of the youth, and granted him life just as God shone upon Adam in the form of a human being.

He revived the youth through the mystery of his God, and delivered him to his mother. Blessed be the Living One who died as He willed and revived Adam¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Briefly, it befits everyone who desires to lead a holy life of virginity to follow the lead of this prophet.

1. Comprehending the call of God to lead a chaste life, and to work in God's vineyard in one form or other.
2. Acting as a father, mother, or brother towards all mankind if possible.
3. Yearning for the salvation of every one.
4. Forsaking all, yet enriching many others.
5. Comprehending the sublime divine capacity.
6. Adhering constantly to the wedding of Golgotha.

¹ Memre 118: (part three): On Elisha and the Shunamite Widow.. (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony; translated by Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly: *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, 2003, p. 92).

JONAH AND THE VIRGIN ALTAR

A VIRGIN ALTAR IN THE SEA

St. Jacob of Serugh stands in astonishment before the character of Jonah the Prophet. He visualizes him as a unique monk living in the midst of the waves of the sea. He lives as someone living with God in solitude. He does not see any face in his monastery. He also visualizes him as an angel who enjoys seeing the holy heavenly places. Moreover, he is like an amazing priest in a strange temple and a virgin altar where no other priest has offered a sacrifice!

His conversation is wonderful. A priest who prays abundantly and whose temple is among the speeding waves.

The altar is within the whale; his voice is instead of the sacrifices; and the Holy of Holies where no one enters except One (the high priest).

No one has built the altar other than the one born inside the waters. The priest has come from the earth, entered, and worshipped there.

Aaron served in the tent, Elisha on the mountain peak, Solomon in the temple, and Jonah from inside the whale.

It is a virgin altar where no one has served ever since the radiant Priest entered carrying the unique service¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

It is good to follow the example set by Jonah the Prophet. In this manner bitter hardships may be transformed to unique blessings. He decides to offer a sacrifice of praise while he was within the whale, with the waters twirling around his head. In a unique place never inhabited by a person, he offers a prayer specifically about the Lord's resurrection!

¹ Memre 122: On Jonah the Prophet- Two Transcripts: 14623-p. 31 Rome, 117, p. 117 –(Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)... (Coptic text, Memre 12 On Jonah the Prophet and Repentance of the People. The Passage is read during the Holy Fast of Jonah.

الميمر ١٢٢ على يونان النبي- المخطوطتان: لندن ١٤٦٢٣ ورقة ٣١، روما ١١٧ ورقة ١١٧ (راجع نص بول بيجان ترجمة الدكتور بهنام سوني) (النص القبطي الميمر ١٢ على يونان النبي وتوبة أهل نينوى يقرأ في صوم يونان).



9

VIRGINITY AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Having presented examples of virgins from the Old Testament, we now wish to present the character of St. John the Baptist. It would be right to say that he represents the prophets of the Old Testament for he presented a prophecy and a testimony at the same time. He proclaimed: 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! At the same time, he met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face and baptized Him.

The character of John the Baptist is very similar to the character of Elijah, so much so that John was asked if he was Elijah. but he clearly negated this supposition. The Lord said this about the Baptist: 'But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands' (Matt 17:12).

1. God allowed Elijah to appear suddenly in order to confront the wicked Ahab and Jezebel. We know nothing about Elijah's lineage, family, childhood, or youth etc., so that the call is made to follow Elijah's example just by contemplating his life. This invitation is made to every virgin who considers himself/herself a child of God, and part of God's family who lives as a stranger on earth and is a citizen of heaven. Virginity is a living experience and not a deprivation. It is purification and ascension from the earth into the heavens!

Although we know that John the Baptist came from the tribe of Levi, and that his father was Zechariah and his mother Elizabeth, yet he was deprived of them while still a child. According to Coptic tradition, he was reared in the desert under the guardianship of a heavenly angel. In this context, he joins Elijah in calling us to be disengaged even from family matters and to walk as those who are in heaven; and to yearn that all mankind arise and attain a heavenly life.



2. Both virgins, Elijah and John the Baptist were concerned with the salvation of the people. This salvation could be achieved by repentance and which intrinsically means the return to God. The concern of Elijah was that every person would abandon the worship of Baal and adhere to the living God; and John was concerned that every person abandons his sins and adheres to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Their virginity provided them with the sweet fellowship with God; and they yearned that all people would have this joyful experience.

3. Each of them - Elijah and John the Baptist - were exposed to the oppression of the reigning king in their days. They were asked to be silent and not pronounce the divine truth. But they faced humiliation and hardship powerfully; and both insisted on testifying for the divine Light while rejecting the darkness of Satan.

It is fitting for a virgin to emulate them and refute befriending darkness and its opposition to him/her. A virgin finds joy in adhering to divine truth in the midst of the destitute and narrow path.

The sad night of Herodias filled with darkness, the day John was imprisoned so that he would be silenced.

They demanded him to be silent and he would not; they imprisoned him to abolish his teachings.

Fear, O Justice! John has been imprisoned, and the voice of the defiled rings loud in the kingdom!

The **virgin is being humiliated**, and the honor of the adulteress is safeguarded. Truth is silent and evil neighs among the unjust.

The Son of God turned to the depths of Hades, that is why His seekers are imprisoned, and he was not to be envied.

He sent John before Him; indeed the prison was being prepared for Him as well. That is as planned for he was to prepare the way before Him.



Since he was set and walking in the way according to his mission, the defiled ones imprisoned him, for he reproached and guided them.

Sin feared the righteous one who was pursuing her; so she imprisoned and mocked him.

She cast her net, set her traps and imprisoned him for she despised and ignored his loud voice.

Adultery strived and the virgin was imprisoned: thus no one would hear his teachings.

The corruption of the family of Herod was revealed, and John's holiness was concealed.

All the evil lying spirits gathered so as to conceal the light that shone in the desert.

Storms blew from all sides onto the shining one. They pushed and imprisoned him to extinguish him through injustice.

He had gone out pursuing the evil in the country and continued his fight. The chance presented itself and evil seized it and rapidly imprisoned him on account of his boldness.

The family of Herod provided the chance for evil to enter, lay its hands, and mock righteousness.

The devil envied the voice crying in the wilderness of Judah, for it revealed and reproached the corruption in the land¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

4. While Elijah the Prophet met God and spoke with Him face to face as Moses had done in that same place (Mount Sinai or Horeb); John the Baptist considered himself the friend of the Groom who rejoices when believers adhere to the Messiah as their own Groom.

5. Both of them, as God's children, feared and loved God. Therefore they had no fear of people however high their ranks or authority. Elijah faced courageously Ahab and Jezebel, their son

¹ Memre 96: On Beheading John the Baptist (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



Ahaziah, the heads of the fifty mighty warriors and many others. John the Baptist faced Herod and Herodias and was not afraid of the sword.

6. Elijah the Prophet was lifted up to heaven in a fiery chariot, and the heavenly hosts rejoiced when they saw an earthly one had followed their example and came to share their heavenly life. John the Baptist took flight to Hades where he preached to all the men of the Old Testament who died while they were embracing the hope that the promised Messiah would come soon and deliver and carry them into Paradise.

How joyful Adam and his children, as well as Abraham and all his offspring, and all the righteous must have been by the arrival of this herald of the Lord who announced to them the great news that He would soon come!

ST. JOHN THE VIRGIN: A GOLDEN LAMP FILLED WITH THE OIL OF SANCTITY

St. Jacob of Serugh considers the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist to be an awesome picture touching one's soul. He reflected on the martyr and this is how he perceived him:

1. A righteous virgin murdered by the wicked for the sake of an evil adulteress!
2. A slaughtered priest who had done no harm.
3. A golden lamp lit and bright with the oil of sanctity. The wicked daughter of darkness could not tolerate him for the light dispels darkness. Therefore she rushed to snuff and turn him off.
4. St. Jacob considered him to be as an olive tree planted not on streams of running water but on the stream of the baptismal font, There the head is anointed and sanctified,
5. A voice preaching the Kingdom, while evil tries to bridle his mouth.



6. A musical instrument playing praises to the Lord and which the wicked desire to destroy.
7. A violin whose tunes drive out demons from mankind and therefore Herodias tried to crush it.
8. A tree bearing the fruit of faith, which the wicked tried to uproot.
9. The Bridegroom's friend; therefore the evil one cut his head off in order to prevent him from going to the wedding banquet!

All these painful images provide support for all virgins who face the resistance of the wicked ones! However fierce the opposition becomes of the devil and all his forces, it can never corrupt the divine work to which virgins have consecrated themselves.

The wicked have carried out an evil act against a righteous man (the Baptist), unjustly killed as a favor to criminals.

An awesome picture: **A virgin killed because of an adulteress**; and great fear: a priest slaughtered without being guilty.

A golden lamp filled with oil of sanctity that was snuffed out by the young girl instead of the wind.

A glorified olive tree planted by the baptismal font that was cut down by the despicable ones lest it anoints the head with oil.

A voice that preached the Kingdom of God, while the wicked barked and silenced him lest he speaks.

A pipe filled with melodies and singing the tunes; but was envied by the dumb so they broke him, lest it plays the music.

A violin that drove out demons from mankind was feared by Herodias. For fear that her devil depart, she crushed that violin!

He preached with respect and holiness on earth, yet the adulteress was displeased and silenced him.

As a fire that awakes nations to repent; the ignorant



family of Herod silenced him lest they repent.

As a tree that bears the fruit of faith; it was uprooted lest anyone eats of its fruit.

The friend of the Bridegroom whom He had betrothed and handed to the King and Groom: they cut his head off, lest he enters the banquet¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE FATHERS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By comparing St. John the Baptist with the Fathers of the Old Testament, St. Jacob of Serugh encourages our love of virginity by recommending that we pick from every flower its aroma. In this manner, we can enjoy the delicious honey which satisfies and gladdens the soul.

He is righteous as **Noah**, and loved by God as **Abraham**. He is slaughtered as **Abel**. and we find in him the beauty of **Enoch**.

He is loved as **Isaac**, and humble and chaste as **Jacob**. He is imprisoned as Joseph, and as zealous as **Elijah**.

He is as great as **Moses**, and does not fall short in any respect compared to **Elisha**. He is erudite as the famous **Melchizedek**.

His priesthood is greater than **Aaron, Eliezer, and Samuel**; and he is foretold and promised to God more than **Samson**.

He is selected and sanctified since he was conceived in the womb as **Jeremiah**; and sublime in prophecy as **Isaiah**.

He is chosen as **David**; and his beauty exceeds the beauty of Josiah. He is as pure as Hosea and reproaches kings as **Micah**.

He perceives the mysteries as **Ezekiel and Daniel**; and his fast finds favor as that of the **youth of Hananiah**.

He is like all of these for all beauty is represented in him, and none of them was greater than him.

¹ Memre 96: On Beheading John the Baptist (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



He is as righteous as one of them; as holy as one of them; as humble as one of them; and is as **virtuous as one; and as virgin as that one, and as pure as that one....**

It has been said: None has risen greater than him; search now and compare him with all who are great....

The stature of the man was revealed to be great through those whose conquests and deeds were apparent.

He is sublime among the chosen ones; he is glorified among the perfect ones; and amazing among those known. He is radiant among virgins, worthy among saints, and great among prophets.

He is one of the apostles, and counted among the preachers. He is pure among the ascetic, and counted among those fasting. He is known among the oppressed, and proclaimed among those envied.

He is intelligent among the glorified, and aligned among the slaughtered. He is killed with the martyrs; a companion of the erudite; great among the priests, and the head of martyrs.

He is a relative and brother to all the beauty of his peers, and he possesses another (feature): he baptized his Lord, blessed is He who has chosen him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 96: On Beheading John the Baptist (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



10

THE VIRGIN SAINT MARY

In the Old Testament we find Elijah the prophet to be a living example of virginity. He was ready to ascend into heaven by a fiery vehicle which God sent for him. He would live there until the day when the false Christ would appear. Together with Enoch, he would support the oppressed Church. In the New Testament we find the virgin St. Mary whose glory exceeded that of the heavenly hosts: the Word of God became incarnated in her womb. Indeed, she is the first and ideal member of the Church of the first-born!

We perceive the mystery of her sublime virginity in the following:

First: By the incarnation of the Word of God, she became the mother of God.

Second: A virgin mother with perpetual virginity.

Third: Isaiah the prophet foretold her virginity.

Fourth: Ezekiel the prophet foretold her virginity.

Fifth: The Old Testament presents symbol of her virginity.

Sixth: The fellowship of the Trinity in the incarnated Word within the Virgin.

Seventh: Comparing the ever virgin Mary with the wedded Elizabeth.

Eighth: The Standing of the Virgin among angels and mankind.

Ninth: Comparing the virgin birth with events related to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tenth: Why did the Virgin conceal her virginity?



First By the Incarnation of the Word of God, She became the Mother of God.

By isolating himself from his Creator and Giver of life, the heart of man became inclined to corruption. Even though he conceals the signs of corruption, yet 'out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man' (Mk 7:21-23). Standing before this painful picture which man has chosen for himself through his rebellion against God, he has attempted to retreat and cover up his corrupted nature. He got hold of a fig leaf and stitched for himself a cover to conceal his defect. However, the fig leaf dried up quickly and his fall was revealed even more conspicuously. The cover became a confirmation of what had happened to him.

The Word of God did not look superficially at the sin into which we have been drowned. He knew that 'a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit' (Matt 7:18). And that 'a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things' (Matt 12:35). We need to change the kind of tree, so that it is good, and its fruit is different. We need to change the nature of the heart, so that it can live righteously and produce goodness.

The Son Himself came forward - the true Love - in order to redeem mankind. He came to carry a body in order to share our nature and to become one of us. Thus he would act on our behalf and pay the price of sin; 'who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even

the death of the cross' (Phil 2:6- 8)¹.

The Word of God was incarnated without the seed of man. St. **Cyril the Great** stood before the Fathers at the Council of Ephesus and declared: [Peace be upon St. Mary, the Mother of God; the royal treasure of the whole world and the eternal Light; the **Crown of virginity**; and the Scepter of Orthodoxy; the incomprehensible Altar; infinite Dwelling; the Mother and Virgin. Peace be to you who has carried the Infinite in your holy virginal womb ².]

This incarnation became a new song of praise on the lips of generations of believers. We will borrow a few of the words which St. Jacob of Serugh sang in praise of this sublime mystery, and which do not need any commentary:

Now she is a virgin; and what can I say about her Baby as I stand astonished and terrified by this Child and find no explanation.

Ever since Eve and leading up to this Hebrew woman, virginity and milk have never existed in one and the same body.

Due to her virginity, I believe He is a God; and due to His incarnation, I hope He is a man.

All the ways of that Child are far above me: He has struck me and I do not know what to say.

I understand that he was not born out of wedlock, and I consider his birth inexplicably sublime.

His mother is a virgin: so who could be His father? If He is earthly, whose son is He? Yet I do not know where his father is³.

Our Lord is One from the Father and from Mary: all might belongs to Him and in Him, humility belongs to Him and in Him as well.

¹ The author: *Divine Love*, 2010, p. 384

² *St Mary in the Orthodox Concept*: p. 28

³ *Memres- that is Sermons- of El Serugh, Cairo Press, Elfagallah, 1621- Memre 22: p. 279 etc...*
Monastery of St Macarius: Refer to Memre: 'On God in the Flesh and the Annulment of the Satanic Deceptions'.

ميامر أي مواظ السروجي، مطبعة مصر بالفجالة، ١٦٢١ ش، ميمر ٢٢، ص ٢٧٩ الخ؛ دير القديس مقاريوس: راجع ميمر: «على ربنا بالجسد وإبطال ضلالة الشياطين» (قام بنسخه القمص بطرس السرياني).



Because He is Almighty, He is God; and because He wished to be one with us, He is Man as well.

His way is prepared on the lips of the ushers: for His Father is concealed and His mother is a virgin; so who can examine Him?

It is neither a common nor natural matter for a virgin to give birth. Yet may the hearer listen without arguing.

The Father is concealed, and **the mother of the only One is a virgin**. This is a wonder and cannot be described by rejecting it.

The one who speaks, if he speaks about his subject with love, will beautify all he says about our Savior.

However, if he thinks that he is providing an interpretation, then he has failed in his subject and deserves to be blamed, shaken, and lacking wisdom.

The subject of the only One becomes more sublime than words, for there is no way by which teachers can provide an interpretation¹.

The young girl said: Your proclamation is correct. I, the wronged one, knew Him for a long time.

Yes, it is true that He is the King of the heavenly ones; and the earthly ones did not feel that He has visited them.

For He has sent me a messenger from among the heavenly ones too, and has informed me of His birth and that He is the Son of God.

The messenger descended from among the heavenly ranks, and miraculously and clearly revealed His message to me.

I received the Light from on high by just hearing; as for marriage, I know nothing about it.

I became miraculously pregnant without the thought of marriage; and I accepted his proclamation from on high and the Child dwelt in me.

I did not get married to have a child. As you see, my

¹ Memre 130: *On that Man Possessed by Legion of Devils* (Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-29; Matt 8:28-34)



virginity is preserved. Behold, you see that I have a Child.

I have no clue of what marriage is like, and here I am registered in the rites of those married¹.

The Word is God whose description is impossible. The Only Begotten Son of God is the Word.

He came from the Father, and entered into the holy virgin while remaining in the Father even though He dwelt in the virgin's womb.

Since the beginning of time, the Word was with God; there was never a time when the Word was not with Him.

They are both Eternal; He is in the Father and He is present in His mother: something amazing; and it is hard to interpret the mysteries of the Creator of the world.

And he who seeks to describe Him deviates in the deepest sense!²

St. Jacob of Serugh

ALL MATTERS RELATED TO THE LORD ARE NEW!

Everything performed by our Lord is new; events did not happen as part of nature or according to custom.

Where have you seen a virgin mother other than His own mother, or a newborn who terrifies kings other than the Lord?

For whom did the stars become messengers other than for Him, and what other birth did they proclaim other than His?

For whom did the star appear in the sky besides Him? All these are sublime matters which have been infinitely fulfilled through Him.

Let the teachers be silent when dealing with explanations about His birth, and so may the interpreters be restrained when

¹ Memres- that is Sermons- of El Serugh, Cairo Press, Elfaqallah, 1621- Memre 22

² 'On God in the Flesh and the Annulment of the Satanic Deceptions'. (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)



faced with questions regarding His glorification
 Searching for His homily can be fulfilled only through
 praise; and His Word cannot interpret His great news¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE AMAZING SON OF GOD

The Son of God humbled Himself on account of His love for His Father; and He came to be the son of the young virgin for a purpose.

And since the path of the sublime One is higher than all the heights, then let man rave boldly as much as he wants.

They could not reach Him; and when they believed they had, they fell short of His sublimity. They found themselves running till the gates of Hades.

Stand up, stand up O fallen ones and walk in His path without questioning. Indeed, the way is full of light for those who choose to walk in it.

In her virginity, Mary gave birth to God and He became a wonder... and who can be doubtful of such wonder?

In the prophecy, the Lord Jesus Christ is given the name 'Wonderful'. If there is anyone who can define Him, then He would not be a wonder.

No one can snatch away His name from Him, and replace it to make it finite instead of being 'Wonderful' according to the Book.

O Son of God, You have come from on high and You are wonderful. You came and dwelt in the virgin and therefore Your name is Wonderful.

The womb carried You, and the manger was enough for You. You were carried in the arms and the knees hurried in Your procession. You were cuddled against the breast and the mouth uttered loving words to You.

The shelter contained You while You breast- fed just like

¹ Memres- that is Sermons- of El Serugh, Cairo Press, Elfagallah, 1621- Memre 22 p. 279 etc....
 Monastery of St Macarius: Cf. Memre: 'On God in the Flesh and the Annulment of the Satanic Deceptions', (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian).



a child. In the midst of all these events: You are Wonderful¹!

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE FRUIT OF LIFE

In this month when there is no fruit, He sent the Fruit of Life to feed us with His health...

In this month when all the trees are barren with no leaves, this virgin provides a cluster within her embrace.

In this month when the leaves are scattered from the trees, the leaves of Adam are replaced by clothes of light...

In this month when the earth is deprived of all joy, the great Benefactor has been sent to all souls....

In this month when the nights retreat from the days, the Light advances to reach all souls living in darkness².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN MARY IS THE CLOTH INTO WHICH THE SPIRIT IS CONTAINED

No eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard such work as has been done by God through the birth of His Son.

God reveals Himself as a person: when and how has such thought crossed the mind?

Who has ever seen the Spirit held in the grasp of the hand; or water gathered in a cloth?

Who has heard that the Almighty has descended from His heights, and came to be born, and the world saw Him in the body?

Who could have conceived telling the Father: 'Send Your Son to taste death instead of sinners'?

Which of the righteous prayed and asked for the Son of God to come and be a Sacrifice on the Mount of Golgotha?

¹ Memre 94: On Faith (Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan- Dr. Sony Behnam).

² Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on 'The Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ,' (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian).



Has it occurred or has it been imagined that something could take place in the world as that which happened through our Lord?

This is what eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, and which has never occurred to the heart or thought of men:

That the Word would come, be incarnated, proclaim Himself, and become Bread and food for all sinners...

The ear has heard, the eye has seen, and the hands have held the Spirit in handfuls and the living water in a cloth....

The Fire is placed on the fingers of mankind; they handle it and are not burned by its flame.

Behold the Water of Life in the holy cloth; Mary, who was bundled and sealed in virginity¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HAS RISEN - THE DAY AND THE NIGHT- FROM THE VIRGIN MARY

The virgin became the Eastern sky for us; and she gave birth to a new Sun. Behold the whole wilderness is lit by His rays.

The joyful day has come filled with Mary's beauty; and the dark night has fled and hid from humanity

The day of the great Light has come and revealed itself; and has conquered the shadows on (all) sides².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE ONE DWELLING WITH GOD HAS SHONE FROM MARY

He shone in the womb; His light rose upon the ship. He was conceived in the womb, and the wing of the angel is kindled from Him.

¹ Memre 133 on *The Parable of the Vineyard* (Isa 5:1-7; Matt 21:33-41; Mk 12:1-12; Lk20:9-19).
 Memre 48: *On the Parable of the Vineyard is read in Coptic in the Matins on Wednesday of the Holy Pascha*).

الميمر ١٣٣ على مثل الكرم (إش ٥: ١-٧: مت ٢١: ٣٣-٤١: مر ١٢: ١-١٢: لو ٢٠: ٩-١٩); الميمر ٤٨ على مثل الكرم، يقرأ باكر يوم الأربعاء من البصخة المقدسة، قبطي.

² Memre 93 *On Lazarus (The Resurrected) from the Dead* (Jn 11).



He is wholly present in Mary, and He is wholly present in His Father. He is present in everyone. He terrifies the Cherubim... and present in all.

His authority encompasses all creation, while He is present in Mary. He controls the heights and the depths while He dwells in His mother...

When He came and dwelt in her, He enlightened her thoughts with faith. She carried the Brilliance, and the Beauty shone through her youth.

The compartment shook when the Lord and King entered and dwelt in her; and the virgin rejoiced in the Holy Lord whom she was carrying.

Being amazed, she took pride in the seed, and felt honored yet in awe. Moreover she passed through stages of fear, joyful encouragement, and pure questioning¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

MARY WAS GLADDENED BY HER VIRGINITY AND BY HER CHILD, AND TERRORDESCENDED ON THE DEMONS

His new birth brought joy to the heavenly hosts and gladness to the earthly beings. All creation was enlightened by the Son who had come and cheered them by His birth.

The angels rejoice, mankind is glad, but the devils grieve. They wail because they saw the Light and were terrorized by Him.

The heavens offered glory, the earth rejoiced, the lands trembled: for there appeared the great Salvation for the whole creation.

The Wise men came to offer their gifts and their respect; the shepherds came with their gifts and songs of glory.

The angels cheered with their voices and branches; and Mary was gladdened with her virginity and her Baby.

Her Son poured glorious joy and cheer over all creation: glory be to the Father who has sent the Light to the whole world².

¹ *Monastery of St Macarius: Memre 'On the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian.*

² *Memres- that is Sermons- of El Serugh, Cairo Press, Elfagallah, 1621- Memre 22:p. 279 etc....*



Terror filled all the followers of the left (the devils) for they perceived that He was the Son of the virgin.

The devils and all their denominations were shocked and gathered together in confusion.

Satan froze in his place, as he bowed and genuflected with the angels before the Child. All his ranks feared and trembled before Him.

As they watched and saw the virgin breast feeding the Child, they bowed for they were in a state of astonishment.

They were terrified by the Fruit that had come without marriage; and by the mother's embrace that remained sealed with her virginity preserved.

The Baby in the manger is feared by the heavenly hosts: the One laying in the cave moves the heathens standing outside with His radiance¹.

The active Son tore away the altars of the demons and cast them away; and He established churches all over the world.

He extracted the bramble of idolatry from all directions, and planted cedar trees to provide shade for the world.

He paved the desert with gold and precious gems, and produced praise from the barren lands.

He transformed the world into the King's chamber filled with beauty; and He placed there the Cross as a pillar of pearls.

Incense filled the earth to heal it with the sweet Aroma coming from the virgin earth (the Virgin Mary) who delivered Him to the world.

The smoke of animal sacrifices vanished, for they suffocated the whole of creation with a horrible smell².

St. Jacob of Serugh

Monastery of St Macarius: Cf. Memre: 'On God in the Flesh and the Annulment of the Satanic Deceptions', (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian).

ميامر أي مواعظ السروجي. مطبعة مصر بالفجالة. 1621 ش. ميمر 22. ص 279 الخ: دير القديس مقاريوس: راجع ميمر: «على رينا بالجسد وإبطال ضلالة الشياطين» (قام بنسخه القمص بطرس السرياني

1 Ibid.

2 Memre 86: On the words of the Lord in the Gospel: The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened, (Matt 13:33).



THE LORD RODE ON THE POWER- FILLED CLOUD OF THE VIRGIN!

Joseph obeyed the order of the angel, and took the Bearer of us all to Egypt as though an escapee.

The Lord mounted the power-filled cloud of the virgin in order to visit the sick land of Egypt.

The young Girl is carried over a cloud in a procession; He descended to the land which was sick with the darkness of idolatry.

The idols of Egypt perceived the Savior and feared and trembled just as the prophecy had foretold¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

1 Memres, that is Sermons of El Serugh, Cairo Press, Elfagallah, 1621- Memre 22



Second

Mother and Ever Virgin

A VIRGIN EVEN AFTER GIVING BIRTH TO HIM!

His birth exceeds the sublimity of the wise and the speakers; He came to dwell on earth on a path which no one had crossed.

He entered through a closed door when He came into the world; therefore the teachers are unable to pursue Him.

Being a God, He did not have to open a door when He took the road to be born and to enter incarnated into the world.

From the start, He usurped His path from the wise in such manner that those who wish to examine His path would be unable to walk in it.

The Virgin gave birth, and what does the speaker have to say; if they ask him to interpret the inexplicable matter?

He would admit that she has given birth, and no one knows how she did so? And she remained a virgin when she gave birth; for her Son is God.

God passes through inanimate objects; and when He walks, He neither leaves nor opens doors.

For a virgin to give birth is not a story with an ending; it is a wonder described by faith.

If anyone diverts from the wonder of faith, he/she falls into questioning: Will the world end and this matter remain unsolved?

Mary gave birth in her virginity; and this gave rise to crowds of commentators, debaters, and researchers.

She was encircled by all the wise men, the speakers, the opponents, and all those arrogant pursuers.

The virgin stands, and the Child is laid down. If there a fearless person, let him come forward to interpret or to cast doubt?



According to interpretation, a virgin cannot have a child; and naturally the subject is more sublime than to be interpreted.

If faith came in and stood to speak up, then his words would be beautiful and filled with wonder for it offers no explanation.

When God designates a task to be fulfilled, let the speaker be silenced and covered with amazement.

The virgin stood among the crowds to reveal herself among the people: her voice is loud and her face is joyful.

She stands among the ranks of the unmarried virgins, yet there is no dispute as she carries a Son just like all mothers.

The milk runs in her breasts, and virginity is found in her bones. Her subject is beautiful and it is described by faith¹. The flesh took the form of a person in order to save the world, and came through birth from Mary the daughter of David.

He preserved her virginity through His incarnation, so that He would not corrupt the womb that had carried Him. **The virgin preserved her virginity and that is proof of His divinity.**

At His birth, He was covered with her cords to confirm that she had conceived a person. In such a manner, the conception in the womb was divine, and the birth and its labor were physical.

That is how He combined the divine with the human!² The Only Begotten Son of God, the **Word, came and dwelt in the womb of Mary.** He became incarnated of her just as the word takes a body through writing.

He appeared with a body like ours just as a word is conceived in the mind. He came through a miraculous birth just as a word is miraculously conceived in the mind.

¹ Memre 98: On Faith-(Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan-translated by Dr. Sony Behnam)

² St Melatius Barnaba: Selections from the poems by St Jacob of Serugh- Bishop of Marug Elmelfan, Homs, 1991



The virgin who bore Him remained a virgin; and the seal of the message was not broken. The Word appeared fully without change, separation, or misconstruction¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Ibid*



Third

Isaiah the Prophet Foretold her Virginity

It was not easy for the heavenly hosts or for mankind to accept that the Word of God would be incarnated. It was hard to accept that he would truly become a man, dwell among mankind, share their lives, and offer Himself as a sacrifice of love for their salvation. For thousands of years, God used every means to confirm His amazing love to mankind. He desired them to believe in Him and to enjoy the blessings of the Cross.

Besides, it was inconceivable to the human mind that someone could become pregnant without a human seed that is, from a virgin and without a man! The Old Testament presents to us, through many prophecies and symbols, material that would prepare us to recognize the holy virgin Mary as being the mother of God.

The ultimate purpose of these prophecies and symbols is to help us comprehend that the holy Virgin is the ideal and unique member and example in the Church who urges us to lead a life of inner virginity so that the Lord Jesus Christ is mirrored in us.

St. Jacob of Serugh notes the following points in the words of the holy Elizabeth to the holy virgin Mary:

While the old lady (Elizabeth) was reading and meditating on the words of Isaiah, she explained to Mary all that had been said:

‘My daughter, it is written in the prophecy that a virgin will conceive. Read the words of this prophet (Isa 7:14), so that you may understand your pregnancy.

Take with you this roll containing the prophecy and give it to your groom so that he might read and understand it too.

Is there a supernatural matter that overwhelms him upon seeing you? Let him read the written divine prophecy.

By reading it, he will be enabled to comprehend how a virgin could conceive without marriage. The story of your pregnancy will be revealed to him when he learns about it.



Get up and go to him, for he is a righteous person. He will help you. Reveal your secret to him for the Child is concerned with paving the way for you.

I rest on my bed of suffering; but it is not right for me to lie down while you are serving me.

You carry the King, and I am the servant. I cannot watch the mother of the great King exert herself before my eyes¹.

Isaiah cheered and said: Behold, the virgin shall conceive without being married, and she shall bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Isa 7:14)².

The Almighty God took for Himself a body from the virgin daughter of king David in order to fulfill the words given to prophets.

She gave birth to Him, and remained a virgin in a supernatural way. He was born and revealed Himself by miracles and wonders.

Indeed, He does not need anyone to witness for Him: for He is the Only Begotten Son of God. He causes wonder due to you O holy virgin Mary.

For the Word was born of her while she was a virgin, indeed! She became a mother while her virginity was preserved. She is a mother and a virgin and there is no explanation.

He is the Word of God. He willed it, and became incarnated, in a manner which perplexes the mind of mankind.

If one of the reporters wishes to contemplate nature, he would not find an answer for there has never been a virgin who has given birth while retaining her virginity.

The Word came to the world in the flesh to fulfill His mission: He carried the sins of mankind, and healed us by His wounds.

¹ Memres on The Mother of God- Translated into Arabic by Nahed Fouad.

² Memre 80: On the mysteries, symbols, and images of the Lord Jesus Christ --(Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan-translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



Blessed be the concealed and covered One who has appeared among us: He is our God and it is impossible to search for Him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Mar Melatius Barnaba: Selections from the poems by St Jacob of Serugh- Bishop of Marug Elmelfan, Homs-1991.

مار ملاطيوس برنابا: مختارات من قصائد مار يعقوب أسقف سروج الملقان، حمص، ١٩٩١.



Fourth

Ezekiel the Prophet Foretold Her Virginity

THE CLOSED DOOR OF EZEKIEL IS A SYMBOL OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE VIRGIN MARY (EZ 44:1-2)

The Spirit of the Lord brought Ezekiel to the East gate, but he found it closed. And the Lord's words were reassuring: **'This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. As for the Prince, because He is the Prince, He may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way'** (Eze 44:2-3).

St. Jerome says [The East door mentioned by Ezekiel is Mary: It is always shut, always brilliant, always sealed. At the same time it reveals the Holy of Holies. The Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) comes in and out through it. He is the One who is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec (Heb 5:10)¹.

What is the mystery behind the closed door through which the Lord has entered other than the virgin who was sealed when she bore Him?²

Ezekiel saw the glorious waters running out of the temple from a door that was not open: the prophet saw that it was shut.

He saw how the water flowed from the doorstep while the door was shut: and it was amazing how the waters ran.

The virgin gave living water: it flowed from her to the whole world while she retained her virginity³.

¹ Epist. 48:21

² Memre 80: *On the mysteries, versions, and images of the Lord Jesus Christ --(Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan-translated by Dr. Sony Behnam)*

³ Memre 164: *On the River which Ezekiel saw*(Ez. 47:1-11)

When He came He entered into the world through a closed door. Therefore, the door was not opened when He came into our world (Ez. 44:2); lest the wise become confused concerning His steps.

When you look at the beginning of His path, you will not find any trace of Him, or find footsteps, for He walked neither to be examined, nor to be comprehended when He set out to fulfill His plan.

The virgin has given birth... what can we say? This cannot be described according to nature. Do not be bold and interpret it. This overpowers nature, for according to it a virgin does not bear children. Therefore, be amazed at the plan, and do not struggle with nature.

When the virgin gives birth, then her Child is God: the One who can penetrate solid matter without opening it. He neither needs a door to come through, nor leaves a trace when He leaves.

St. Jacob of Serugh



Fifth

The Old Testament Presents Symbols of Her Virginity



A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY AND THE BURNING BUSH

When Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight' (Ex 3:3). At this point, Moses entered a new stage in which he met God: the mysterious Power and the invisible Shepherd working for the Salvation of the world and the establishment of the Church. **St. Clement of Alexandria**¹ perceives the bush to be a proclamation of the virginal birth; for the Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin while her virginity was preserved. This is also what **St. Gregory of Nyssa** refers to in his words: [The Light of divinity who shone from her towards mankind through the birth (of the Lord Jesus Christ) did not burn the fiery bush. Similarly, the flower of virginity in her did not fade when she gave birth to the Child².] **Theodoret** also proclaimed the same opinion³.

Now, compare the virgin with the bush if possible... and behold what place would be beautiful as His dwelling place?

The daughter of David and Abraham, a rib of Adam: the Virgin is the daughter of the mighty and famous ones.

A pure nature who deserved to be an icon of God; and therefore the Son of God descended and dwelt in her.

He dwelt among the thorns of the bush and was unharmed. Just because He was conceived by a virgin, they say: He is not a God!

¹ *Adu. Anthropom* 26 P.G.76:1129 A

² *Vita Mos.* 2:21

³ *N.P.N.F.*, vol 1, p. 229(n)

Who is the beautiful One among the thorns of the Bush other than the daughter of David? Or what other fitting place was there where God could dwell?

If you admit that He dwelt among the thorns without finding this repugnant; then why are your thoughts troubled because He dwelt in Mary?...

Now come and behold the path which the Son of God took to descend and be with the earthly ones; and admire her beauty!

Consider the exile from Paradise caused by the murderer of mankind: The Son of the King descended to restore man from slavery to his former place.

He pursued the thief with might and the path led Him to the ear of the virgin Eve.

Being the Word, the Door of the ear received Him; and became pregnant and delivered Him in the flesh.

Mary became as a message filled with mysteries, and sealed by the holiness of virginity.

The Word became incarnated in and through her mysteriously in order to visit the earth through the revelation of His body.

From the body of the blessed one, He took the form of a slave and visited the slaves in order to liberate them¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN GAVE BIRTH WITHOUT LABOR; AND THE PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER BECAME A MOTHER TO MOSES

St. Jacob of Serugh considers that the adoption of Moses the Prophet by pharaoh's daughter is a symbol pointing to the birth of the incarnated Savior, born of the Father before all ages, from a virgin without the seed of mankind. Moses delivered the children of Israel from slavery to Satan who thought he was the head of the world. This is the only point of similarity with respect to pharaoh's

¹ *Memre* 94: *On Faith* (Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam).



daughter who did not beget Moses from a man.

Moses was born as a perfect child when pharaoh's daughter became his mother and when he had no need (for her).

He was a new born, he was perfect, he was a child; and a mother was brought to him, who had not suffered the travails of child birth, and she became his mother.

The image of the Son of God was thus presented in a mysterious form, for He was a child who was born and came in the flesh.

The virgin gave birth to Him who was born: she became the mother of the One who was born; and she became His mother without seed, or labor, or man.

That is similar to this Egyptian who became the mother of Moses who had not seen him and had not known who his father was.

In the same manner, Mary became the mother of the Son of God while the Father seemed invisible and at a distance from her¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

GIDEON AND THE FLEECE OF WOOL (Judges 6: 33-40)

Gideon asked God for a sign before going out to war. He humbly asked that there would be dew on the fleece of wool placed on the threshing floor while the rest of the ground would be dry. This was answered so that he could squeeze it and fill a bowl of water. Then he asked for another sign so that the fleece would remain dry while the surrounding floor would be covered with dew. These two signs bear spiritual implications which many Fathers have interpreted. We mention the words of **St. Jerome** who writes:

[At the time when the fleece of Israel was dry although the whole world was cool with the heavenly dew; and at a time when

¹ Memre 110: On the Blessed Moses: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear' (Deut 18:15; Acys 3:22)



many came from the East and the West (Lk 13:29); and sat in Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22); then Judah stopped knowing God and His name ceased to be great in Israel (Ps 76:1). The voice of the disciples had reached all the nations and to the ends of the world (Ps 19:4)¹. **St. Iraneous** writes: [This is how Gideon indicated that the Jews would no longer possess the Lord's Holy Spirit. Isaiah accordingly says: 'I will also command the clouds... that they rain no rain on it' (Is. 5:6); and dew here refers to the Spirit of God... covering the whole earth]².

As for St. Jacob of Serugh, he finds **that this sign refers to the Virgin Mary.**

The fleece on the thresh floor, and the dew on the ground: what could this represent other than our Lord the Son of God and His coming?

The act of Gideon, the son of the Hebrews, is as clear as the sun. His character represents the whole New (Testament) including the conflict.

Mary is the fleece that received the dew from on high; and the Only Begotten did not terrify her when He dwelt in her.

The thresh floor is mankind and the grain and the chaff are mixed together there until the end of time.

The bowl filled by Gideon is the baptismal font where the nations and people will be washed from the dirt.

Then the bowl received the dew from the fleece: and from Mary the baptismal font (received) the Son of God.

The fleece is not terrified when the dew descends on it; and Mary does not suffer by the pregnancy when He dwelt in her.

The dew descended on the whole earth and the fleece was dry: this indicates that the Son reinstated the nations and they were humbled.

The fleece was squeezed and the dew which it held was no longer in it; and this represents the crowds who become estranged from God.

¹ Ep.58:3

² Adv. Haer 3:17:3



The nations received Him just as the ground received the dew. Therefore, they are proclaiming Him with thundering voices; and yet the enriched crowds are barren¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

ELISHA HEALS THE SOURCE OF WATER IN JERICHO (2 KGS 2:21)

Elisha began his service by healing the source of water in Jericho. The water was bad and the land was barren. He put salt in a new bowl, and he cast the salt in the water. Then the water was cured and no longer carried death or dryness.

St. Jacob of Serugh presents Elisha as a symbol of the spiritual and heavenly spice. He describes the village of Jericho as a sick person who needs a unique physician, and describes the water as being sick. What Elisha does - curing the water - is **'healing'** it. St. Jacob also focuses on the new bowl which contained nothing but salt. He finds it to be a reference to **the Virgin Mary of whom the Word took flesh**: the Salt of the world that healed the corrupt world; while she remained virgin.

He put the salt in a new bowl to represent the full conception within the womb of the pure virgin.

He represented the virgin by the new bowl which was never touched by any blemish...

He represented the Son of God by salt which gives flavor to every trivial bit with a specific flavor.

By the new bowl he represented the chaste body of the virgin, and by the salt he represented the Son of God who lends taste to every tasteless matter...

The salt descended into the bad water and cured it, and this refers to the Son whose birth healed the children of Adam.

The whole beautiful village was sick, corrupt, and suffering until the salt visited and healed her...

In the same manner the whole world became invaded

¹ Memre 80: *On the Mysteries, Symbols, and Images of the Lord Jesus Christ*



by death until the Son shone from Mary and healed the living.

If the new bowl had not poured the salt on the sick water source, it would not have been healed.

And if the Virgin had not given birth to the Son of God, the human race would not have risen from its fall.

The salt was mixed with the drinking water so that all could drink of it. This is how God incorporated the Son with mankind so that all would live¹.

The bowl used by Elisha represents the virgin; and the salt represents the Son who gives flavor to our absurdity.

The salt descending into the bad water and healing it refers to the Son's descent which healed mankind².

If the teachings are not flavored (salted) with bread and water, the soul would be deprived of the benefits that gladden her.

The earth was barren and the water of the whole world was bad until Mary poured the salt (the Lord Jesus Christ) into the sources.

And the water was healed, the pastures became healthy, the cattle became fat, and God (rather than man) granted blessings and provided for us.

Behold the world is alight with His teachings and feeds on His mysteries: taking pride in Him for He is her Guardian³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE STONE OF DANIEL CUT OUT WITHOUT A HAND IS A SYMBOL OF THE VIRGIN MARY (DANIEL 2:34-35)

The following is related concerning one of the dreams of the king of Babylon, and which God revealed to Daniel: 'You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image

¹ Memre 116: *On Elisha and the Healing of the Water*. (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony, and translated by Elkhoury Paul Elghafaly - *Sermons on Elisha the Prophet*, 2003, p. 27)

² Memre 80: *On the Mysteries, Symbols, and Images of the Lord Jesus Christ*

³ Memre 144: *The sixth: On Praise at the Table*



on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that there was no trace left of them. And the stone, that struck the image, became a great mountain and filled the whole earth' (Daniel 2:34-35).

The most important point in this dream is the amazing stone that could destroy all these kingdoms in order to establish a spiritual kingdom filling the whole world: a kingdom that will be established forever. Here he is speaking about a new kingdom established by the stone cut out without hands. This is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ who was born of the virgin and without the seed of man.

St. Irenaeus comments as follows: [This is the reason why Daniel foretold His coming and said that a stone cut without hands would come into the world. This is the implication of the words '**without hands**'. His coming to the world would not happen as a result of human action, or by those whose work is to cut stones. Joseph did not play a role either; and Mary alone cooperated with the (divine) plan, which had already been set.

This stone from the earth was made by God and His wisdom. Isaiah is inspired to say: '**Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation. A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation' (Isa. 28:16)**. Consequently we perceive that His coming in the form of mankind has not happened according to human will, but by the will of God¹.]

Interpret or analyze for me the dream explained by Daniel: what is that stone which has been cut without hands?

Why did the stone strike the idol in the dream, and how was the whole world filled by it?

The stone is the Lord Jesus Christ. In certain instances in the prophecies, He is usually and clearly referred to as the stone.

¹ Adv, Haer 3:21:7



It is written in the prophecy: 'I lay in Zion a stone' and it is 'the stone which the builders rejected'.

This stone cut without hands is the Lord Jesus Christ who was born without marriage.

This stone has crushed the world because the world is an idol; and He dissolves this world which is an idol as well.

The stone which has appeared is cut without hands: for the virgin Mary did not conceive Him through the seed of a man.

The Good News is a huge mountain that fills the whole world. It has become the Stone which has gained dominion to the ends of the earth¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 80: On the Mysteries, Symbols, and Images of the Lord Jesus Christ



Sixth

The Participation of the Holy Trinity in the Incarnation of the Word in the Virgin

In speaking about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, St. Jacob of Serugh clarifies the real role of the Holy Trinity in the divine incarnation. The Holy Spirit sanctified and prepared the virgin to have the Word incarnated in her; the Son descended into her to be incarnated; and the Father proclaimed His love towards mankind as He granted her the power to receive the incarnated Word.

Through the singleness of the divinity of God and the distinct hypostasies, the Holy Trinity achieves divine acts expressing God's supreme love. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** explains: 'Every act is issued by God the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit'. All divine acts, whether it is the act of creation, of salvation, of resurrection, or attainment of eternal glory are divine gifts granted by God in His Only Begotten Son and through His Holy Spirit.

St. Ambrose writes the following: [There is one grace, one love, and one fellowship (2 Cor 13:14): the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Consequently there is unity of action; and where there is unity of action then undoubtedly there is neither a conflict of power nor a separation of the essence¹.]

The Holy Spirit comes to you through holiness; and **power from on high dwells upon you through love.**

The One who has created children, becomes a Child, and puts on flesh from you ...

He descends into you, yet He does not move away from His Father...

You will not need to get married in order to be pregnant, for the One who will dwell in you is the One whose mystery/symbol creating children in a marriage ...

¹ *The Holy Spirit* 1:12:13



A man will not come forward to have children from you, for the power of the Almighty will bear fruit in your virginity

The seal preserved by your youth will not be broken, for the pure Sun will rise, descend, and dwell in you.

Banish physical concerns from your mind; and do not examine the conception in your womb, for He is the Son of God.

Besides, to indicate by a signal that you have been informed: behold Elizabeth your relative is pregnant.

The old one who has been barren for long time is bearing a child at the end of her days ...

If the barren one, the damaged vineyard, has produced fruit; then why is it hard to accept your virginal pregnancy¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)



Seventh

A Comparison between Mary- The Ever Virgin- and the Wedded Elizabeth

The holy virgin Mary has become a representative of believers, or of the Church, as she has accepted to believe in God's promise. She is a model as an excellent member of the Church. She has submitted to receive the Word of God to dwell in her. As soon as she enjoyed the Word within her she '**went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,**' to meet her relative Elizabeth. This is a living picture of the Church carrying the Bridegroom within her. She never sit still; she is hurry throughout the generations and across the mountains in order to present her Bridegroom to every soul in the world.

Origen states: [The chosen ones will precede the less chosen to receive some advantages. In this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ came to John to bless baptism. As soon as Mary received the angel's message of her pregnancy with the Savior, and that her aunt Elizabeth was pregnant, she '**went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,**' and entered the home of Elizabeth. The Lord, while in the virgin's womb, hurried to sanctify John the Baptist, who was at that time still in his mother's womb¹.]

St. Ambrose writes: [He who is of higher rank visits the lower one. Mary went to Elizabeth; and Jesus went to John. The Lord wanted to sanctify baptism, as well as John himself, in order to be baptized.] He goes on to say:

[The blessings of Mary's visit and the presence of the Lord were clear immediately, for when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child jumped joyfully within her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth was the first to hear Mary's voice, yet John was the first to be affected by grace...

Elizabeth was gladdened by Mary's visit, and John felt the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The woman acknowledged the presence of the woman, and the child acknowledged the presence of the Child.

While they were speaking about grace, the two babes were consolidating internally the work of divine mercy.

He leaped and then the mother was filled, so that she was not filled before the child.]

Mary mounted on the cloud filled with mercy so that she could water the thirsty earth which had become fruitful.

The King sat in the chariot filled with power in order to go, visit and enrich his servant...

The virgin got up and hurried to the home of the old one, so that the wonder increases by the young and the old...

The offspring of the lion roared in his mother's womb as Jacob declared; and the calf, the son of the barren one, trembled when he heard His voice.

The young one (St. Mary) whispered calmly in the ear of the old one. The sound resonated, entered, and stirred the preacher of the Truth.

The child was shaken with awe before the Son of David. He danced joyfully before the Ark.

He signaled to let his mother bow down instantly before His Master who had come and stood at the door.

The Spirit overflowed from the Holies onto the barren old one; and filled her with power so that she would proclaim the truth powerfully to His mother.

The great tide of adoption filled the child of Aaron in order to release the flow of the hidden mysteries to the daughter of David.

The fingers of prophecy touched the strings of her body and she began to sing amazing things with a loud voice.

¹ In *luc.hom* 7:1



The daughter of the Levites was filled with the Holy Spirit: she sang with her lips sounds filled with glorification¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

BETWEEN THE VIRGIN MARY - THE SEALED MESSAGE - AND THE WEDDED ELIZABETH

In this manner the Word descends into the message, and remains preserved under the seals in the records.

No one can imprison the voice contained in the message, and John did not descend into the virgin because she was sealed.

Our Lord, the Word and Son of God descended into the young one, and the news was preserved under the seal of virginity.

The voice was issued by marriage, that is, it was declared through the son of the Levites. He sent John before Him to the desert of Judah.

And just as the place of the voice was empty, so was John sent to a deserted place².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)

² Memre 96: On the Beheading of John the Baptist (Cf. Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Sony Behnam)



Eighth

The Standing of the Virgin with the Angels and with Mankind

IN THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH

Joseph took the consecrated one and she lived in his home. The virgin **lived with the saint conventionally**.

The carpenter became a preacher of the Incarnation to the world, and he received the ministry with purity and great fear¹.

The virgin conceived the Lord of kings in her pure embrace, and she moved and ascended with Joseph to Ephrath ...

The conception came upon the Child's mother so that she would deliver a Child, for the time had come for the birth of the Creator of children.

He knew the village of David and entered to dwell there, for He would be honored in the places of dominion of the king his father.

As there was no place for His mother in Bethlehem, they headed to a cave to dwell there, the sky was distressed.

The rich came with the poor into a borrowed house; the weak and the powerful gathered in the hollow cave ...

The young pigeon came to the small nest to give birth while she was a virgin, to that ancient Eagle who is King of the birds².

The king returned from the house of slavery to the home of his mother; the virgin came to the house of the elderly Joseph while pregnant with the Child (in her womb).

The chaste groom looked at her body and was astonished; he looked at the young girl and saw that she was pure and virtuous, so his heart was greatly troubled.

¹ Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)

² Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Fr. Botros the Syrian)



She seemed chaste yet her womb was full: what could he say?

She appeared virtuous, while she was full with child; what could he find?...

He wondered at her radiant honor, and trembled at the sight of her pregnancy....

The more his spirit dwelt on the events, the pregnant body proclaimed the conception of the Child.

He approached her and gently said: Inform me young girl, what happened to you ...

O you guarded ship, where has your speed drowned you? What sea has snatched your goods and carried them into its waves ... ?

O radiant dove, who has cut off your beautiful wings, and plucked your virtuous feathers and carried them off?

O virtuous one, who has stolen your gem...and approached the guarded seals and corrupted them?

O ever radiant one, when was your honor debased, and when did the thieves come in and stolen your riches?

O fortified city, who has attacked your walls and destroyed them, and carried away the plunder to give to strangers?

O guarded field who has sown in you stolen tares, for that passerby is not one of us?

So Mary answered and said: My gem is preserved within me; it has not been stolen, and my virginity is preserved as well ... no one has corrupted it.

Behold the heavens testify that my Son is from on high, and I have never come near a man¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARY AND JOSEPH

Joseph said: Who can confirm that, for nothing like this has ever happened ...

It has never been heard that a virgin became pregnant without a man! It is hard for me to believe such new words coming from your mouth ...

Mary replied...Who got married to the earth and she conceived Adam?...

Read the prophets and note the comparable news in the holy scriptures which the Holy Spirit has preached to the prophets.

Have you not heard of Isaiah who preached saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel'?!...

She turned her eyes towards herself and looked adoringly at the One in her womb.

O Truth, consider this injustice, and shine with Your Truth; do not conceal from the humble the truth about Your mother...

I have become worthy to be his betrothed, make Him worthy too to be a parent by Your glorious birth, which is full of sanctity.

Do not abandon him to be strangled by doubt on account of this pregnancy. Rather, grant him to adhere to You in the harbor of faith that is rich with hope.

Be a witness to Your mother who has been greatly troubled. Inform Joseph so that he would be my consolation in the face of skeptics.

When he is reassured, he will despise my unjust accusers easily; and he will preach the truth concerning Your birth¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Monastery of St Macarius: Memre on the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Transcribed by Fr. Botros the Syrian)



THE MEETING OF THE VIRGIN MARY WITH SIMEON THE ELDERLY

He saw the virgin carrying Him, so he held his hands together and trembled as he bowed down; then he asked the Child lovingly.

He began to pray Him saying: ‘Lord, set me free... For my eyes have seen Your salvation; now let Your servant depart in peace.’

My eyes have beheld Your tenderness as You have promised. Set me free so that I may find rest on earth to the day of the Resurrection.

I have been waiting for You to come and remove my bonds through Your birth. Therefore, grant an end to the elderly who is begging You ...

Mary said to Simeon the Just: Convince Joseph, for I truly now comprehend these matters.

I have been informed of everything from the angel; and no doubt troubled my mind as I comprehended your words.

I have heard all about Him from the messenger who brought the good news. There is no place for doubt concerning your prayer.

How could I breed doubt concerning the Child to whom I have given birth while being a virgin?

It is worthy of you to be an advocate among unbelievers. Raise your voice so that everyone can hear you.

O elderly one, stand up and prepare your lyre. Sing praises before you are allowed to depart. Explain that He has held you so that the world may know that He is the One who has liberated you.

O ancient man, raise your voice as a horn, so that the world may know that the Fruit she has delivered is the Lord of all time.



Cheer, O senility, and testify to the Son who has been here since eternity, because of Him, I was considered as an adulteress¹.

He carried the oblations to offer sacrifice in the house of forgiveness; and He is comprehended that He is the Lord of the altar of sacrifices.

The elder of the temple recognized that Him to be the Lord of the House; and he prepared a prayer to offer to Him as he would (offer it) to the Lord.

He perceived Him in the prophetic inspirations, before His pregnant mother delivered Him².

St. Jacob of Serugh

SIMEON PROPHECIES THAT A SWORD SHALL PIERCE THE VIRGIN’S HEART YET SHE WILL NOT STUMBLE

Simeon perceived the whole path of the Son of God; how many would fall and how many would be lifted up due to his humility!

He had previously revealed future events to prove that His path was prophetically foretold.

The elderly man told the virgin what would happen to her, so that she would know that the news concerning her were clearly perceived by the prophets.

So he told her: A sword will pierce your heart. Hardship was called the sword which came due to the Cross.

When the Only Begotten One was stripped naked, pain pierced the heart of Mary on account of her loved One.

Simeon the elder called this hardship a sword; and he announced to Mary that she would suffer through this hardship.

O virgin, His whole path has been revealed to you. Behold, you have given birth to Him and have preserved your virginity...

¹ Memre 165: On the Entrance of the Lord into the Temple; and Simeon’s reception of Him (Lk 2:22-35). Memre 24: On the Entrance of the Lord into the Temple; and Simeon’s reception of Him in Coptic

² Memre 166 B: On the Words of Simeon to the Blessed Mary: Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (LK 2:34). Memre 25 in Coptic



Hardship will pass through you quickly. It will not last for long, for your Fruit is living even while He is on the Cross.

When they crucify Him, remember who He is? How He was born? Behold, now you know how He will die on the Cross.

Then this hardship which will terrify you more than the sword will pass away; and you will not collapse because of the death of your only begotten One

Simeon the elder proclaimed the news to the virgin: it was in the prophecy which reveals the mystery of the House of God.

He foretold and revealed the path of the Lord filled with glory, humiliation, standing up and falling down.

He did so lest her mind be troubled by the sublimity of virginity; especially when facing the doubts of the Pharisees and Scribes.

And so that she would not surrender, when hardship would grasp her heart when they humiliate and crucify her Only Begotten One.

His path is filled with sublimity and depth; and it is very fearful due to the many doubts scattered there.

Yet it is paved with faith and surpasses the stumbling blocks. These would cause the fall of anyone who abandons faith.

O my Lord, through You I rise up with all those who have preserved the faith. Preserve my faith through grace, for praise is due to You¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 166 B: On the Words of Simeon to the Blessed Mary: Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (LK 2:34). Memre 25 in Coptic.

الميمر ١٦٦ ب - على قول سمعان الشيخ للطوباوية مريم: إن هذا موضوع لسقوط ولقيام الكثيرين وآية الخصام (لو ٢: ٣٤): الميمر ٢٥ قبطي.



Ninth

Comparisons between the Virginal Birth and other Events pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ

THE CLOSED GATES ARE A PROOF OF ST. MARY'S VIRGINITY (JN 20)

The Lord Jesus Christ entered through the closed doors of the upper room. This is a symbol of the virginity of St. Mary. He passed through the closed doors to teach the disciple about His birth and His resurrection. He who claims that the Lord damaged her virginity when He was born, let him also claim that He opened the doors when He came into the upper room. He was not a spirit for He possessed flesh and bones when He came in as He testified Himself. Such matters surpass explanation.

St. Jerome comments as follows: [The Lord is Himself a Virgin, as well as His mother. Indeed, she is a mother and remained a virgin, for He entered while the doors were closed (Jn 20:19). In His grave, a new tomb was cut out of the solid rock; and no one had ever or would ever be laid there (19:41). Mary is an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed (Song of Songs 4:12). In Joel, it is said: 'A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord (Joel 3:18)'¹.]

St. Augustine states: [Truly, that One, who was born while His mother preserved her virginity, was able to enter without opening the doors².]

St. Mark the Ascetic writes: [The disciples were gathered and the doors were closed as they feared the Jews (Jn. 19:20). He/she who lives in peace in the city of revelations, laboring in holy meditation, and fearing evil spirits, and preserving his feelings, receives the Word of God. In a mysterious way, the Word comes

¹ Letter 48:21

² St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John; tractate 121:4



and manifests Himself to a person through a path other than the channel of the senses. The Word proclaims peace to that person, granting tranquility, and freedom from lusts. He breathes into him and so grants him the many gifts of the Holy Spirit. Besides, he is granted power over evil spirits and the signs of the holy mysteries are revealed to him.]

He instructed them concerning His birth and His resurrection; and that all His powerful and creative ways surpass examination.

He entered and stood among His disciples while the doors were closed to prove that her virginity was preserved when He was born.

He entered the upper room just as He come out of the womb, so that they might not exert themselves in explaining the manner of His birth.

The disciples were not there when He was born; so the wise One portrayed the virginity of His mother by the closed doors.

He used actual means to instruct them about future events: He indicated with tangible matters the hidden mysteries.

The disciples perceived the sealed virginity by means of the closed doors; for no one opened them when He entered and nothing was touched when He left: that is a great wonder.

When He entered, the doors did not move to allow Him in; and virginity did not lose her seals when He was born.

He stood among the disciples in the upper room while the doors were locked; and He came out of the womb while the virginal seals were preserved.

He was born out of the womb in a mysterious and inexplicable manner; and He stood in the upper room through a miracle that had no interpretation¹.

The disciples were assured of her virginity by means of the closed doors: He taught them as He stood among them in the upper room though the doors were closed.

¹ Memre 57: *On the New Sunday and on Thomas the Disciple.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan, translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)



This was exactly the way virginity was preserved at His birth; He was born from the womb in a wondrous and inexplicable manner.

He entered the upper room in a miraculous manner that transcends explanation: and the doors were not opened before Him.

He who claims that her virginity was damaged, then let him claim that the doors of the upper room were opened: if the one is difficult, then the other is not an easy matter.

When God allows a matter to happen, do not question why, how, or where. God's power and His ways are infinite and unrestrained by boundaries, they are free and limitless...

With the body which He carried when He was born from the Virgin, He entered the upper room while the doors were closed: He was not a spirit but had a body and bones as He Himself testified.

The disciples and believers touched Him; do not exert yourselves in providing interpretations, for He is the incarnated God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Mar Meletius Barnaba: *Selections from the poems by St Jacob, Bishop of Serugh Elmelfan, Homs, 1991.*
مار ملاطيوس برنابا: مختارات من قصائد مار يعقوب أسقف سروج الملقان. حمص. ١٩٩١



Tenth

Why did Both the Virgin and Joseph Conceal Her Virginity?

There are two instances for the birth of the Son: each instance is filled with wonder and there is no word that can describe either of them.

The Father gave birth without a beginning in an amazing manner; and the mother gave birth while retaining her virginity and that is amazing.

The virgin gave birth and she retained her virginity, therefore words were frozen and wonder witnessed in great astonishment.

Nature was overcome; and interpretation failed to explain the second birth. The words of the speakers were cancelled and amazement prevailed.

If a virgin is found who has given birth and yet has retained her virginity, this would greatly disturb the wise and the scholars.

Nature is not equipped to interpret this great act which has occurred...

The first (birth) is invisible and concealed from the wise; and the second is amazing, confusing, and glorious to those who are informed.

Blessed is Mary who has preserved the hidden mystery: she did not proclaim her virginity after having given birth to the Lord.

She kept silent lest the Hebrew daughters, the children of the snakes, would mock and deny her claim if she should declare the truth.

Blessed is the righteous Joseph for he received and preserved the mystery; and acted as though he was the father.



Gabriel commanded him not to be afraid of taking the virgin to live with him while she was carrying the Fire (Matt 1:20).

He preserved the mystery in his mind filled with pure and holy thoughts lest it be released to strangers.

The virgin is chaste, and Joseph is saintly, and the Lord is quiet: no one beside them knew that He was the Son of God.

The virgin Mary filled with blessings was honored; and she considered the extent of humility of the lion's cub.

She marveled when the righteous Joseph called Him, and when He would respond and submit to him as to a father.

Her heart became a depository for the mysteries of God's House; and she was in awe on account of the mysteries concealed with her (Lk. 2:51).

She was confused as to how her virginity was preserved; and at her breasts, which like other mothers, were flowing with milk for the Child.

Many hidden words were exchanged between her and Joseph; and they were never careless in their service to the amazing Mystery.

They watched the Son of God in great fear; and were troubled by Him; how could He become so humble as to obey them.

They were afraid to honor Him in front of strangers lest they question the reason for honoring Him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 81: *Explaining Why the Lord remained on Earth for Thirty Years; then worked wonders in the World?* (Lk.3:23). (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan; translated by Dr. Behnam Sony)



Eleventh

Virginity and Saint John the Beloved

VIRGINITY AND SAINT JOHN THE BELOVED

The Early Church Fathers were often interested in the amazing friendship that existed between St. Peter (the old and married man) and St. John (the young and virgin youth). What is amazing is that the disciple Peter was characteristically impulsive and jealous; while the beloved John was known for his calm, loving, and gentle nature.

Out of all the other disciples and apostles, these two and St. James the apostle accompanied the Lord Jesus Christ on many occasions while the others were excluded. For example, at the Lord's transfiguration (Matt 17:1); at the restoration of life to the daughter of Jarius, the ruler of the synagogue (Mk 5:37); when he went up the Mount to pray (Lk 9:28); while He sat on Mount Olive, facing the Temple, Peter, James, and John asked Him privately (Mk 13:3); in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion (Mk 14:33); they went together to the Lord's tomb on resurrection Sunday (Jn 20:6); and they also worked together at the beginning of their ministry after Pentecost (Acts 3:1-11;4:13-19;8:14).

It is amazing to find such harmony between two different characters: they shared a unity of spirit, thought, and goal. This is a worthy path for every virgin as he participates spiritually, at church and as a preacher. It is good to work with others in a spirit of harmony and mutual understanding.

St. Jerome writes: [Those who were Jews by birth were unable to retrieve through the Gospel the virginity they had lost in Judaism. In spite of that, it is said about John - one of the twelve disciples and the youngest of them - was a virgin when he accepted the faith. Based on the fact that he remained a virgin, the Lord loved him all the more. He leaned on the Lord's chest, and



Peter - who was married did not dare to ask the Lord a question - asked John to ask Him that question. After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene reported that the Lord had risen (Lk 20:4) both ran to the tomb. However, John outran Peter and arrived before him. When they went fishing on the Sea of Tiberias, the Lord was standing on the shore and the disciples did not recognize Him (Jn. 7:21); only the virgin disciple recognized the Virgin One, and told Peter: 'It is the Lord'¹.

SIMEON-THE MARRIED MAN, AND JOHN THE VIRGIN (JN. 13:2-25)

St. Jacob of Serugh makes a comparison between the life of St. Peter leading a holy marital life and that of the virginal life of St. John. He describes the first as being holy and ranks it as second best of all beauty, and that it is most sublime. It is as though the holiness he demands of those wedded should be similar to that of the unwedded angels. In this manner, he raises up the issue and standard of holiness in marriage. The path of marriage is beautiful and pure and it is rich in beauty as long as it despises adultery. While marriage is beautiful, holiness is far more sublime since without her no one can come close to God. Adultery is an absolutely beastly trait.

As for virginity, it is more sublime than a life based on holy matrimony. Its beauty is not the product of any creature. It is solely the work of God without recourse to a human element. It is a divine gift granted to those who seek it diligently.

1. At the Institution of the Holy Eucharist

St. Peter asked the virgin St. John to find out from the Lord about the person who would betray Him. In this manner it is holiness (which is the second in great beauty) which motions to her sister - virginity - to find out the mystery. This is a practical lesson on virginity. Though St. Peter the apostle deserves all honor,

¹ *Against Jovianus, 1:26*



he needed the young virgin who brings him through virginity into the blessing of knowing the holy mysteries (Jn. 13:25).

He passed through the ranks until he got to the disciple (whom Jesus) loved, for he wanted to find out from the Omniscient the concealed mystery.

Holiness, which is the second great beauty, motioned to virginity her sister to find out the mystery.

The honorable elderly one looked at the young virgin to hurry up and enter into the depths, and learn its mysteries.

He asked from (the one possessing) the joyful countenance - a natural possession of virginity - to know the mystery found in the House of God.

The rank of holiness belongs to angels; and while it is very sublime, virginity surpasses it.

Virginity possesses the prime beauty possessed by nature and there is no other beauty in the world that matches it.

It is a beauty that is not artificial or adorned by any creature. Indeed, it is simply a beautiful creature in itself.

Virginity is beauty formed by the Creator, and it is more sublime and excels above all the beauty of nature¹.

Simeon turned to (the owner of) pure virginity in search of the fulfillment of holiness; for virginity is a feature of the angels.

Virginity is beauty, clarity, and the mark of purity.

Marriage is one of the church sacraments which the Lord has sanctified; it is a beautiful and blessed mystery. Nevertheless, virginity remains the paramount beauty².

When the disciples felt the weight of their fishing net, they knew Him immediately, for they knew how the sea obeys the Son of God.

¹ Memre 53B: *On the Cross; Section B: Tuesday Eve.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan; translated by Dr. Behnam Sony). Memre 52: *On the Mother of Our Savior, His Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection-in Coptic-Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly*, p. 40-41

² St Melatius Barnaba: *Selections from the Poems of St Jacob, Bishop of Serugh El Melfan, Homs, 1991*



That disciple whom Jesus loved recognized Him instantly, for he possessed quick insight and sharp faith.

The young virgin rested his head on the Lord's chest at the Supper table, and clearly learned from Him the concealed mystery¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

2. CAIAPHAS DELIVERED THE PRIESTHOOD TO SIMEON AND THE VIRGIN JOHN

St. Jacob of Serugh explained in previous writings that the Lord was stripped naked on the Cross in order to cover Adam with the robe of righteousness which he had lost. Here we find the head of the Levite priesthood stripped with his own hands in order to deliver the ministry to the priesthood of the New Testament. Peter, the married man, and John the virgin were present during the Lord's judgment. It was as though they had come to receive the new priesthood after Caiaphas had stripped himself from the priestly office.

Simeon took the office of the priesthood of the children of Aaron; and all offerings ceased, so that the world would receive life from the Son of God.

O Caiaphas who is stripped naked and annulled of the priesthood, depart from the sacrifices, and deliver the ministry to the tribe of John.

The young virgin, who refused to escape with the disciples, remained to receive from You the office (Mk 14:50),

O son of the Levites, the spirit of the elders have torn your clothes, so that they would rest on Simeon and John².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 178: *On the Third Instance for the Lord's Appearance to His Disciples after His resurrection (Jn 21:1-14)* Read on Holy Tuesday

² Memre 53, section C: *Friday Eve.* (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan; translated by Dr. Behnam Sony). Memre 53: *On the Suffering of Our Savior, His Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection-in Coptic- Section C: Friday Eve; Elkhoury Paul Elfaghaly, Jacob of Serugh: On the Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 135-136.



3. THE TWO DISCIPLES HURRIED TO SEARCH FOR THE ALMIGHTY AMONG THE DEAD

St. Jacob of Serugh comments that Simon Peter and John, while on their way to the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:3-10), are a picture of holiness and virginity.

Simon and John hurried on the way to the tomb; and the youth beat the elderly and honorable one in getting there first (Jn. 20:3-10).

The two disciples hurried to search for the Almighty among the dead. They had not learned that He had risen with great power.

Due to their fear, they were struck with anguish, as they thought that the Almighty had been stolen just as they had been told.

The young virgin John hurried and reached the tomb before Simon Peter...

Holiness and Virginity hurried and the strong wings of virginity reached there first...

The undefiled one (virginity) flew and passed quickly though she did not enter until the One filled with holiness arrived.

John reached the entrance of the tomb of the King and Groom, yet he did not go in until Simon, the totally holy one arrived...

The young in spirit respected the rank of the honorable elderly one. Let him be the first to preach and make this the basis.

Simon Peter arrived at the tomb and was the first to enter, then John entered and followed Peter.

The two blessed companions entered the place where the Groom had slept and saw that His bed was empty. He had departed and gone away.



The Lord of the wedding had risen with power, while they searched for Him and did not find Him in His bed¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED (JN. 19:26)

John, the beloved virgin, was known among the disciples and apostles as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' When he refers to himself in the Gospel, he uses this title in which he takes pride.

This title testifies to his being unique in his beauty and radiance among the disciples.

This title did not arouse envy, for envy had no place among them. They were all different members of one body, and each felt honored when any of them was honored. When one of them was glorified, all the others would rejoice since it implied glory to them all.

St. Jacob of Serugh compares the relationship between Jesus and John with the fear of the heavenly hosts before Him. Indeed, the Cherubim and the Seraphim cover their faces in His presence; whereas this virgin leans intimately on his chest.

In the same manner, true virginity grants us a close relationship with our glorious Lord Jesus Christ!

This most blessed disciple has invited me to sing praises to him. Listen to me lovingly, O you who know the mysteries of the House of God.

The fiery message would have required a fiery mouth, or a tongue of flames to pronounce his praise.

The name of the winner is placed in the center, as it describes that disciple who was loved by the Son of God.

His name and title reflect the beauty of his perfection, for the Lord loved him more than any of his companions due to his beauty.

¹ Memre 54: For the Great Resurrection Sunday (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan, and Dr. Behnam Sony); Poems by St John of Serugh: Memre 53 (corrected as 54): On the Resurrection of Our Lord- read on Easter Sunday in Coptic.

Thomas Kollamparampil: Jacob of Serugh's Memres on the Resurrection, Gorgias Press, 2008.



The Lord loved him, because he was pure and enjoyed a chaste spirit; filled with beauty, chastity, gentleness, radiance, and perfection.

His name is written: 'that disciple whom Jesus loved.' Therefore, his name proclaims his sublime and divine beauty.

The reason for his name is to assist the chosen ones to meditate on him, for his beauty exceeds the sublimity of the beautiful.

Had the Lord not found in him something unique, He would not have loved him more than all his fellow brethren.

Had his beauty not exceeded that of his companions, he would not have been named the disciple whom Jesus loved....

They were beautiful, honorable, chosen, and without blemish. However, his beauty exceeded that of all the others.

If envy existed in the world of the children of light, I would have feared to say these words.

If there was one among his saintly brothers who would have envied him, I would have kept silent lest I arouse jealousy.

If they envied, I would not have spoken about John, lest I stir envy in them towards the beautiful one.

They are set in order in the same way as members in the body are set. Therefore, when one member is glorified, all the others rejoice on his account...

At the supper, he leaned on His chest and learned His mystery; because of his beauty he was closer to Him than his brothers

The ranks tremble, and the choirs pray for mercy. The crowds tremble, and the vigilant are struck with awe. The Cherubim tremble, and the Seraphim cover themselves.

Gabriel hides, Michael is troubled, and the virgin youth is **embraced in the arms of the Flame.**

In His Father's Kingdom, the fire stands away from Him; while the disciple whom He loved carried Him upon his chest.



The Seraphim was standing close to the mystery in awe and great fear; and that youth was leaning on His chest and speaking tenderly to Him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE PROMISE TO THE VIRGIN: THIS IS YOUR MOTHER. (JN 19:26-27)

Origen believes that whoever accompanies the Lord Jesus Christ on the Way to His Cross enjoys the blessings which St. John the Beloved has enjoyed. He received the Lord's mother to be his own mother. This makes him occupy the Lord's role as he becomes her son in His place.

St. Jacob of Serugh follows the virgin St. John as he accompanies the Lord all through the way to the Cross and until He gives up His spirit. He finds St. John acting as a child who feels that his mother is on the way to her death. Therefore he holds on to her and refuses to let her go. He is the only one, out of all the disciples, who accompanied the Lord to Mount Golgotha. He therefore enjoyed receiving the holy virgin to be his Mother as well as becoming her son.

The Lord delivered Himself to be a Redeeming Sacrifice for the whole world; and He entrusted St. John the virgin to His role as the son of the holy virgin

The disciples fled at the time of the crucifixion. As for John, he did not move for he was like a child whose mother was dying and therefore does not abandon her.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ gave him a mother as though he was a child; lest he feel deprived when He left and returned to His place.

He loved John so much that He gave him His mother to be his mother; and as a result John the virgin would fill in His place.

¹ Memre 60: On John the Evangelist, the Disciple whom Jesus Loved. (Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).



He put John in His position: so that he would fill in the place of the Righteous One whom the people had crucified. In this manner the holy virgin would not suffer the pain of being deprived of Him.

The virgin mother gave birth to just One only Son; and when He was crucified, John came in to be her son.

Our Lord spoke to His disciple while He was dying and said: 'Woman, behold your son'; and then he said to the child: 'Behold your mother'.

The son John was called an heir in two Testaments: and He lovingly delivered to him the virgin mother so that she would become his mother.

At Golgotha, Mary took the son whom she had not delivered in birth. Indeed, the creation had taken the One she had delivered so that the whole world would be purified through Him.

Behold, O chosen ones, to what extent John has been promoted so that he became the son of the virgin, and she has become his mother!

Therefore, it was fitting that he was clearly called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' more than any of his companions.

The Lord loved him so much that He gave him His special place, and made him become His substitute as a son to the Virgin at the time of His suffering.

This is love: that a person loves his friend as much as he loves himself. If love is not expressed like that, then it is not counted as love.

The Lord Himself set an example. what kind of love a friend should have for his friends if it is true love?

He wished to testify that this disciple loved- not by words - so He revealed the act of love towards him.

He literally carried him, took him upon His chest, integrated him with Himself and filled him with His Spirit.



He revealed His mystery to him, and gave him His mother.

This was how the Son loved the virgin child John: the radiant youth and honorable elder.

He is the blessed man, the amazing disciple, the beautiful picture, the beloved among the chosen, the glorified among the perfect, the one selected from among the disciples.

Embraced by the Fire, the one leaning on His chest, blessed is He who has loved and richly blessed him in the congregation of his brothers!¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE VIRGIN DISCIPLE AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

John is like the eagle that soars high above and reaches the Father Himself. He writes: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1) ... The virgin writer describes mysteries which the wedded ones were unable to explain².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memre 60: On John the Evangelist, the Disciple whom Jesus loved. ((Cf. the text by Fr. Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).

² Against Jovinianus, 1:26



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Glory be to God for ever, Amen