

Mary the Queen Mother

By Greg Witherow

The Queenship of Mary is something deeply embedded in Catholic culture. Statues of Mary wearing a crown are common. The tradition of the May Crowning is an old tradition seeing a revival. And it is not uncommon to see parishes named Mary Queen of the Apostles, Mary Queen of the Angels or even Mary Queen of Heaven. All of Mary's queenly titles are derived from her office of Queen Mother. To many non-Catholic Christians such titles are further evidence of what happens when you stray from the Bible. You end up with idolatrous myths.

In this essay we will identify where the office of Queen Mother is found in Scripture, review who occupied the office before Mary took her appointed position, and see where in the Bible Mary is depicted in Heaven wearing her royal crown. Our apologetic will be based on Scripture.

The Office of Queen Mother

Christ's reign is described as a kingship, not a republic or even a democracy. Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of David who came to establish and fulfill the **Davidic Kingdom, not just any Kingdom**. Saint Matthew wrote his gospel for a Jewish audience. In it he is careful, by documenting Christ's lineage, to identify Jesus in the royal line of David. It is interesting to note that if the Davidic kingdom had never been conquered, Saint Joseph would have been the rightful King of Israel. And Mary herself (as we will see) would have had a unique role.

The **Davidic kingdom** had a number of offices besides that of King. One was that of the Chief Steward. This officer ruled in the king's absence. The Chief Steward was to be "a father" to the people and hold the keys to the house of David. What he would bind would be bound and what he shut, no one would be able open¹. In Christ's Davidic Kingdom, the Pope (meaning father) fills the office of the Chief Steward. With the keys and the bishops, he binds and looses what "**shall be bound and loosed in heaven**". This Davidic type is fulfilled with the reign of Christ.

Queen Mother was another office in the Davidic kingdom. Solomon established this office in the Old Testament. We read about it in the book of I Kings.

"So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak on behalf of Adonijah. And the king rose to meet her and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right. Then she said, "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me". And the king said to her, "make your request my mother for I will not refuse you"."^{2 3}

¹ This office is described in Isaiah 22:15-25. With the giving of the keys the disciples must have understood this.

² I Kings 2:19-20

³ Protestants are quick to point out that Bathsheba's request in this story was foolish as Adonijah, on whom behalf Bathsheba spoke was put to death. This is all true. But it does not negate that the office of Queen Mother was established. In fact, all the Old Testament types of New Testament realities fall short in many ways, but they do not negate the imagery. Adam, Moses, David, Solomon, Samson and the Judges made unwise choices or had sinful

The office of Queen Mother continued throughout the history of the Davidic throne and is referenced in the following passages of Scripture.

“King Asa even removed his mother Maacah from being **queen mother** because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.”⁴

“Jehu met relatives of King Ahaziah of Judah and said, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are kin of Ahaziah; we have come down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the **queen mother**.”⁵

“Say to the king and the **queen mother**: "Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head.”⁶

“This was after King Jeconiah, and the **queen mother**, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.”⁷

When reading of the rise and fall of Kings in Old Testament Israel, there is a difference in how the Kings of Judah are introduced as compared with the Kings of Israel. With Judah, the King's mother is always mentioned when he comes to the throne. Not so with Israel.

The reason is because Judah (with its Davidic line) also installed a Queen Mother, and therefore the mother is named in the transition⁸. Israel (with its non-Davidic throne) had no such office (Jezebel tried to establish it, but it never took), and therefore the mother is not named. But why was the mother of the king installed as Queen? Why not his wife? The answer is that the kings had many wives but he only had one mother. In polygamist conditions, it was much easier to single out the mother as Queen. It doesn't take too much imagination to see why.

Mary as Mother and Queen in the New Testament

One of Christ's final acts while hanging on the Cross was to formally make Mary the Mother of all Christians.

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son. Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”⁹

blights on their records, but they are all images of Christ. And Solomon's sin of idolatry does not cancel out the fact that he was a type of Christ, another Son of David who built the Temple – his Church.

⁴ 2 Chronicles 15:16 (see also 1 Kings 15:13)

⁵ 2 Kings 10:13

⁶ Jeremiah 13:18. Jeremiah is speaking out against the royal house in this passage.

⁷ Jeremiah 29:2

⁸ It is only the kingdom of Judah that has the true Temple, the Levitical priesthood, the Davidic throne and its offices of Chief Steward and Queen Mother. And today it is the Catholic Church that has the Davidic King (Christ), reigning over the true Temple (the Church), with its priests of “Levitical succession” (apostolic succession), a Chief Steward (the bishop of Rome) and Queen Mother (Mary). Christ's kingdom fulfills the Davidic type.

⁹ John 19: 26 , 27 Tradition tells us Mary lived with John, but the passage means more than living arrangements.

Standing a few feet away was John's biological mother. It wasn't as if he was in need of motherly attention¹⁰. And this was no last minute, merely personal matter weighing on Christ¹¹. No. Each gasping word Christ struggled to speak from the Cross had redemptive ramifications, meant to bring salvation to mankind. In fact, Christ was making Mary the mother of us all¹². Our translations state John "took her into his home", but "home" is not into the Greek¹³. The Greek word for "own" means John took Mary "pertaining to one's self". Have we done this?

What might be called the first Marian apparition takes place while the apostle John is on the island of Patmos. There John has a vision of a woman wearing a crown.

"And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, **and on her head a crown of twelve stars**; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, on who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne."¹⁴

This scene is juxtaposed against Genesis 3:15, often called the proto-evangelicum. There it is said the woman's Seed will crush the serpent's head. In this prophesy the Seed is Christ, the serpent is Satan and the woman is Mary as it refers to the virgin birth. Women do not have seed. With the virgin birth, Mary did. In Revelation we see these three again doing battle in history. In John's vision the woman is Mary, the child is Christ and the serpent is Satan¹⁵. With a crown and playing an elevated role in the redemptive battle, Mary is depicted as a Queen¹⁶.

¹⁰ This was the mom who marched James and John (the sons of Thunder) to Christ asking that they sit on the right and left hand of Christ in his kingdom. Perhaps "Thunder" refers to the mom instead? This woman had gall.

¹¹ This act also attests to the fact Mary had no children to care for her as she is turned over to John. Protestants will quickly retort, "No, instead this points to the fact that none of her children were Christians and Christ was looking to put her in a Christian home". But Protestants claim James was one of Christ's biological brothers, born of Mary. But Christ appeared to James after the resurrection and Paul calls this James an apostle of the Church. *In the Protestant scenario*, she had a very holy son to live with. See 1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 1:19. Within hours after Christ's death this James would be a pillar of the Church. Why would Christ take Mary away from James and give her to John to live in far away Ephesus (eventually)? The Protestant case is weak on this passage.

¹² Some argue Christ said all older Christian women are our mothers (Matthew 12:46-50). True. But this does not contradict Mary's *unique* motherhood. Paul claims to be a father to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 4:15) and it is said that Abraham is our father (Romans 4:16). But this does not contradict the *unique* fatherhood of God.

¹³ The King James and New King James bibles put words in *italic* that are not in the Greek. "Home" is in *italic*.

¹⁴ Revelation 12:1-5

¹⁵ The woman can also represent Israel or the Church. But a double meaning does not negate Mary. Many prophesies have double meanings. For example, Isaiah 7:14 prophesies the birth of Christ, but as the Reformation Study Bible (Protestant) points out, there was probably a partial fulfillment with the birth of Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Even "the seed" crushing Satan in Genesis 3:15 has a meaning beyond Christ as all Christians will crush Satan under their feet (Romans 16:20). But double meanings do not negate Christ from the prophesy.

¹⁶ It is true that the saints in heaven will be given crowns of righteousness. But it is also true that we will cast our crowns at the before the throne. This woman, a mother of the child and the glory of the sun and moon has a

Later in this passage we see a reference to Mary's motherhood of all Christians. After the male Child and woman are saved by God we are told the following.

“Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and he went off to make war **on the rest of her offspring**, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.”¹⁷

One last objection

In the Biblical book of Jeremiah the prophet tells us the Israelites offered sacrifice and worship to a goddess called the Queen of Heaven. Fundamentalist sometimes use this account to claim Catholics are falling prey to the same sin by honoring Mary as Queen of Heaven.

But this claim is uncharitable and far from the mark. First, false gods, of which there are many in the Old Testament, do not disprove the true God. Likewise, a false Queen of Heaven does not disprove a true Queen of Heaven. Second, Catholic's do not worship Mary. To do so would be a mortal sin¹⁸. Guilt by name association is not valid.

C.S. Lewis also has an interesting insight worth noting. In his essay “Myth Became Fact” he points out there are many pre-Christian myths that anticipate Christian truth. He states,

“The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens — at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.”¹⁹

In many ways this makes sense. In all cultures there is a yearning embedded in mankind's consciousness to worship God. It can be argued that false gods are a proof of the existence of a true God. Likewise the false goddess of Old Testament Israel can attest to true and proper Queen of Heaven. While not a goddess, she is worthy of honor. “All generations will call me blessed.”

Summary

Christ has fulfilled the Davidic kingdom foreshadowed in the Old Testament. As foreshadowed, Christ's kingdom also has a Chief Steward and Queen Mother. Additionally, Mary was made the Mother of all Christians at the foot of the Cross. The same John, the first to take Mary as his own, sees her crowned in Heaven while exiled on the island of Patmos. Those keeping the commandments and bearing testimony to Jesus are said to be her children. Catholics and Orthodox therefore look to Mary as their Royal Mother, Queen of Heaven. And as any good mother, she intercedes for us. After all to pray is to intercede, is it not?

special significance. While we are all part of the royal family, and therefore royal children of the King, who can argue that Mary did not play a unique role in redemptive history? The imagery in Revelation 12 is powerful.

¹⁷ Revelation 12:17

¹⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 2112 - 2114

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 66-67.