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**THE ONTOLOGICAL AND GNOSIOLOGICAL TERMS FOR  
THE PERSON OF HOLY VIRGIN MOTHER ACCORDING  
THE WRITINGS OF EPIPHANIUS THE MONK (1015AD)**

*Introduction*

In the period of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century the Byzantine Empire had to face up many different situations. During the 10<sup>th</sup> century the fortunes of Byzantium undergo a remarkable revival. The Empire reached its height under the Macedonian emperors of the late 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>2</sup>. During these years the Empire held out against pressure from the Roman Catholic Church to remove Patriarch Photios, and gained control over the Adriatic Sea, parts of Italy, and much of the land held by the Bulgarians<sup>3</sup>. Mainly the control of Byzantines was re-established over much of the Balkans when the Slavs are brought within the empire - first by their conversion to Greek Orthodox Christianity, then by treaties and alliances. The Bulgarians were completely defeated by Basil II, the Bulgaroktonos or the Slayer of the Bulgarians in 1014<sup>4</sup>. The Empire also gained a new ally, yet sometimes also an enemy, in the new Varangian state in Kiev, from which the empire received an important mercenary force, the Varangian Guard<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Christophilopoulou, *Byzantine History 867-1081*, t. III, publ. Vantias, Thessaloniki 1997, p. 111- 260.

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Vasiliev, *History of Byzantine Empire 324-1453*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, p. 320-321.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

Emperor Basil II had reigned for 50 years in Byzantine Empire. By the time of the death of Emperor Basil II in December 1025, Byzantium was “the dominant power of the Balkans and Middle East, with apparently secure frontiers along the Danube, in the Armenian highlands and beyond the Euphrates,”<sup>6</sup> writes Michael Angold, “additionally, they had succeeded in spreading Christianity to the north”<sup>7</sup>. Also, the dominating feature of politics during the years 1025-1081 was the constant manoeuvring for the throne<sup>8</sup>.

In Church, that period of time in 1054, the Schism between the East and the West Christian Church took place. The consequences would be very dangerous mainly in political situations in later years with most significant impacts for the Byzantine Empire and above all for Empire’s external security and integrity, culminating in the conquest of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders during the fourth crusade in 1204<sup>9</sup>.

That period of Byzantine Empire Epiphanius the monk lived. Few things are known about Epiphanius the Monk who lived in Constantinople. According to Church historian and poet, Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, Epiphanius the Monk wrote about the Holy Virgin Mother with many details of her character and appearance. Epiphanius embroidered with details reaching beyond mere Christological themes to disclose an emergent theological interest in the figure of Mary herself<sup>10</sup>. He described Her according to the Byzantine ideal of beauty<sup>11</sup>. She was to be portrayed in the middle age. She was a good looking woman and she always smiled. She was meek, modest, too humble and she spoke as little as needed. The way of her life and her whole appearance showed a woman who was fulfilled with the divine grace<sup>12</sup>: “her complexion was pale, with light brown hair and eyes, black eyebrows, a straight nose, a long face and long hands and figures”<sup>13</sup>.

*1. Holy Virgin Mother according the text of Epiphanius the monk (PG 120, 185-216)*

Epiphanius says that although the Holy Virgin Mother was the central person for the incarnation of Christ, we know very few things about her life, her

<sup>6</sup> M. Angold, “Belle époque or crisis? (1025–1118)”, in J. Shepard (Ed), *The Cambridge history of the byzantine empire c. 500–1492* p. 583-627, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 583.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 583-584. M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History* Longman 1997, p. 19-28.

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, p. 124. M. Angold, “Belle époque or crisis? (1025–1118)”, in J. Shepard (Ed), *The Cambridge history of the byzantine empire c. 500–1492* p. 583-627, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 588.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> K. Coyle, *Mary in the Christian Tradition: From a Contemporary Perspective*, Twenty – Third publications, Herefordshire 1996, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, *Church History*, II, 23, PG 146, 816CD.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

upbringing and for her death – dormition<sup>14</sup>. All the writers, who dealt with her, praised her and they involved her in development of their dogmatic teaching. The only thing was known for her, was that she came from the David's generation<sup>15</sup>. Naturally, some people who tried to write about her, they didn't say correct things about her but unfortunately, they expressed accusations against her<sup>16</sup>.

Epiphanius seems to have a good knowledge of the tradition of texts and writers who dealt with the Holy Virgin Mother. He refers to the names of many writers that wrote about Theotokos, but he doesn't write them with chronological order. So, he mentions first Andreas, bishop of Creta (660-740) and then Cyril of Alexandria (370/380-444). By this fact, it becomes obvious that Epiphanius wants to speak about the life of Holy Virgin Mother and not to reproduce only some dogmatic information about Her with a scholar way<sup>17</sup>.

He wants to create the whole puzzle with the life of Holy Virgin Mary, because he implies through this text that he had more detailed knowledge. In addition, he makes clear that Christ and Theotokos in the events of their lives together, as mother and child, unmistakably moved forward to the ultimate purpose and reason for the Incarnation<sup>18</sup>.

Epiphanius insists on details of the generation of Holy Virgin Mother and general Her life, because by this way he wants to show that Theotokos is the first and most perfect example of God's plan and design for the whole Church and for each individual Christian and she can be example for us in order to imitate her.

*i) Mary the mother of Christ and her generation.*

It is undoubtedly known that Mary's father was Joachim. This information is not based on the texts of the New Testament, but to the Holy Tradition. For Orthodox Christians the Holy Tradition has the same validity with the Bible, the written Tradition. We know from Sacred Scripture and from Sacred Tradition that Mary was a descendent of David<sup>19</sup>. The paradox is that although Epiphanius underlines Theotokos' ancestors from her father's generation, at the same time he speaks for the father and brother of Joseph, the protector of Mary<sup>20</sup>. The both genealogies were presented in order to bring the Messianic

<sup>14</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 185A.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 185B.

<sup>17</sup> "Epiphanius identifies among the sources of his brief *Life the Protevangelium*, the homilies on the Dormition by John of Thessalonica and Andrew of Crete, and the *Transitus of Ps. John* but not the *Maximus Life of the Virgin*. Nevertheless, in contrast its predecessor, Epiphanius' *Life of the Virgin* seems to have exercised almost no influence on the subsequent tradition of Marian biography, which stands deeply indebted to the *Maximus Life of the Virgin*", St. J. Shoemaker, (2009), "The Virgin Mary's Hidden Past: From Ancient Marian Apocrypha to the Medieval *Vitae Virginis*", *Marian Studies*: Vol. 60, art. 5, p. 1-30, esp. p. 23., [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol60/iss1/5](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol60/iss1/5).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 185A.

<sup>19</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 189A.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 189B.

claims into conformity with Jewish criteria<sup>21</sup>. Also, Epiphanius wrote this, because he had influenced by the details of the genealogy of Mary according to the tradition of the Jews of Tiberias<sup>22</sup> and John of Damascus and others who reported the same information, only inserting an extra generation, Barpanther, Aramaic for son of Panther, thus indicating a misunderstood Aramaic source<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, the reference to the genealogy of Joseph, the husband of Mary and the “father” of Jesus according to the law was necessary. Jesus should have a family according to the law, in order the moral and social status of Theotokos to be preserved and at the same time the mystery of divine incarnation to be protected<sup>24</sup>. Also, by the genealogy of Joseph, Epiphanius underlines that he was cousin with the Holy Virgin Mary. Joseph therefore, is by nature the son of Jacob, of the line of Solomon, but by law he is the son of Heli of the line of Nathan<sup>25</sup>. We can explain that Epiphanius refers to the genealogy of Joseph, because he follows the Jewish tradition. Considering the fact that by the Jewish tradition women are never listed in the genealogical links, it is acceptable that Luke lists Joseph instead of Mary (as he was the „father“ of Jesus) and thus Luke names Joseph as son of Heli. Further, since Heli had no sons but only daughters, we can find a precedent of the same type of name substitution in Num. 27:1-11 and Num 36:1-12. So Epiphanius is in line with the previous tradition in which, Jesus, through his blood relationship with his mother and her ancestors, becomes the true son of God.

<sup>21</sup> M. J. Borg, J. D. Crossan, *The First Christmas*, HarperCollins 2009, p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi*, p. 1.42, PO 40.67–68, transl. in part by W. A. Lukyn, *Adversus Judaeos: a bird's-eye view of Christian apologiae until the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1935, p. 155–156.

<sup>23</sup> John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14. Andrew of Crete, *Oration 6 - On the Circumcision of Our Lord*, PG 97,916. Epiphanius apparently draws from a lost work of Cyril of Alexandria, perhaps via Hippolytus of Thebes.

<sup>24</sup> G. Patronos, *The historical route of Jesus. From the manger to the grave*, Athens 1991, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 189C. *Ibidem*, PG 120, 196C. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.14: “And so since Joseph was descended from the tribe of David and was a just man (for this the divine Gospel testifies) [Math, 26:39], he would not have espoused the holy Virgin contrary to the law; he would not have taken her unless she had been of the same tribe. It was sufficient, therefore, to demonstrate the descent of Joseph. One ought also to observe this, that the law was that when a man died without seed, this maws brother should take to wife the wife of the dead man and raise up seed to his brother. The offspring, therefore, belonged by nature to the second, that is, to him that begat it, but by law to the dead. Born then of the line of Nathan, the son of David, Levi begat Melchi and Panther: Panther begat Barpanther, so called. This Barpanther begat Joachim: Joachim begat the holy Mother of God. And of the line of Solomon, the son of David, Mathan had a wife of whom he begat Jacob. Now on the death of Mathan, Melchi, of the tribe of Nathan, the son of Levi and brother of Panther, married the wife of Mathan, Jacob’s mother, of whom he begat Heli. Therefore Jacob and Hell became brothers on tile mother’s side, Jacob being of the tribe of Solomon and Heli of the tribe of Nathan. Then Heli of the tribe of Nathan died childless, and Jacob his brother, of the tribe of Solomon, took his wife and raised up seed to his brother and begat Joseph. Joseph, therefore, is by nature the son of Jacob, of the line of Solomon, but by law he is the son of Heli of the line of Nathan”.

Epiphanius accepts the ancient tradition about the relation of Mary with Elizabeth<sup>26</sup>. Elizabeth and Mary were first cousins on the part of their mothers (Sobbi and Anna). The father of Elizabeth (who is an unknown name) was probably of the breed of Levi, while Mary (Joachim) of the tribe of Judah. This reminds of a similar case in Exodus 6, 23, which refers to Aaron's wife, Elisabeth, daughter of Aminadab and sister of Naasson, who was the leader of Judah<sup>27</sup>; like Elizabeth in Luke, 1.7, the wife of a priest of the Levi tribe and was associated with the royal throne of Judah at the same time. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, was one of the daughters of Aaron, but her cousin (Maria) from the David<sup>28</sup>. This is a view which Gregory of Nazianzen supported, too<sup>29</sup>.

*ii) The character of the Holy Virgin Mother*

The Holy Virgin Mother was described by Epiphanius as humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind, sparing of words, studious in reading, resting her hope not on uncertain riches, but on the prayer of the poor, intent on work, modest in discourse<sup>30</sup>. Also, Theotokos "was of medium height, or as some say, slightly taller than medium height; her hair was golden-like; her eyes quick, and olive colored; her eyebrows were arched and not too black, her nose elongated, her lips blossom-like, and filled with sweet speech; her face was neither round nor sharp, but slightly elongated; her fingers and toes long... She preserved good decency in her conversation with others, not laughing, never upset, and especially never angry; she was absolutely artless, simple; she never thought of herself in the least, and was far from comfort seeking, distinguishing herself by her total humility. As for the clothing she wore, she was content with their natural color, which her sacred head covering still shows. To say it briefly, she manifested especial grace in her every deed"<sup>31</sup>.

It is obvious that Epiphanius presents Mary as the model of Christian faithfulness and obedience for this reason God chose her to become the mother of His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit while Mary was still a virgin, in fulfillment of prophecy<sup>32</sup>.

*iii) Mary, the Theotokos.*

In this text, Epiphanius uses the term "Theotokos" for Mary, the mother of Christ. He uses this term for seventeen times, without making a special ref-

<sup>26</sup> Luke 1: 36.

<sup>27</sup> Num.1: 7.

<sup>28</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 189C.

<sup>29</sup> Some, such as Gregory Nazianzen, have inferred from this that Mary herself was also a Levite descended from Aaron, and thus kingly and priestly lineages were united in Jesus. Gregory Nazianzen, *Sectio I. Dogmatic Poems - XVIII poem: The genealogy of Christ*, PG 37, 481-482.

<sup>30</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 193A.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 193AB.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 196-197.

erence to the dogmatic meaning of the term. He connects directly the name “Theotokos” with the birth - incarnation of the second person of the Triune God, when he says that the Holy Virgin gave birth of Emmanuel<sup>33</sup>.

Epiphanius employs the title Theotokos, because he follows the Christian and byzantine tradition about the holy Virgin Mother. Also, he knows that the granting of this title confirmed Mary’s privileged role in salvation history and deepened understanding of the great mystery that occurred in her womb<sup>34</sup>. For this, he writes the adverb truly<sup>35</sup>, in the first sentence of his text near the noun Theotokos.

Through the text, Epiphanius analyzes the doctrine of the incarnation and explains that Mary is Theotokos because her son Jesus is one person who is both God and man, divine and human. Epiphanius employs the word *Theotokos* for the mother of Jesus, based on the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria<sup>36</sup>. For this reason, he refers to the person of Cyril of Alexandria<sup>37</sup>.

iv) *Mary, the Virgin*

Mary who is confessed as “ever-virgin”<sup>38</sup> became the mother of the incarnate Logos<sup>39</sup>. The ever-virginity of Mary is a non negotiable fact and its alternative unthinkable. According to the text, the virgin birth is understood as a necessity because the one who is born must not be merely a man like all others needing salvation. The Saviour of the world cannot merely be one of the race of Adam born of the flesh like all of the others. He must be “not of this world” in order to save the world<sup>40</sup>.

Epiphanius utters that only the Lord Jesus Christ is totally pure and free from all sin. All descendants of Adam were born with the original sin, and therefore, have the inclination towards sin. This means that the Virgin Mary, being conceived in the usual way was born with the original sin, although, with the grace of God and her great faith and virtue, she committed no personal sins of her own<sup>41</sup>.

It develops the question the fact that although Epiphanius describes the day of the Annunciation, he doesn’t refer to the words of the Archangel Gabriel told her: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”<sup>42</sup>. This was at this time that the Virgin was cleaned from the original sin. Of course the holy writer associates the silence of the words of

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 201A.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 201A.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 185A.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 188B.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*. Cf. E. Artemi, “The Virgin Mary, Theotokos, and Christ, true God and true man. The mystery of Incarnation according to Cyril of Alexandria”, *Mirabilia* 17 (2013/2), p. 52- 74.

<sup>38</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 185A.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 196B.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 197A-D.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 1:35.

the archangel with the phrase “He (Gabriel) told Her all the mysteries about the Only-Begotten Son of God, which are written in the gospels”<sup>43</sup>. So he implies the entire miraculous Annunciation and in another part of his text shows that Mary had been purified from the Holy Spirit, so She got rid of the original sin for this reason she gave birth of Christ painless<sup>44</sup> and remained virgin. She is the ever virgin<sup>45</sup>.

To sum up the virginity of Holy Mother tremendously important. It shows that the conception of Jesus in a virgin is owing to the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. And it shows that the divine sonship of Jesus depends on his virgin birth.

## 2. Mary's life before the Annunciation

Epiphanius underlines more details than the gospels for the life of the Holy Virgin Mother before the Annunciation. He bases on apocryphal texts. He narrates that the Holy Virgin Mother in the age of three years old went with her parents to the temple but she didn't remain. She returned with her parents to Nazareth. She went again in the temple in the age of seven years old. Then, she stayed in the temple and she didn't leave it day or night until the age of fourteen years old, who become engaged with Joseph<sup>46</sup>. Here, Epiphanius expresses the opinion of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*<sup>47</sup> which argues a different opinion from the teaching of the *Protoevangelium of James*. In the latter, it is said that the holy Virgin Mother went to temple in the age of three and stayed there until the age of twelve that she was engaged with Joseph<sup>48</sup>. Also in the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, there is an agreement with the *Protoevangelium of James* about the age that Mary went to the temple and stayed there and the age that she had the engagement with Joseph<sup>49</sup>.

Mary's father, Joachim died in the age of eighty years old. Her mother, Anna died two years after the death of her husband. She was seventy two years old<sup>50</sup>. This information isn't presented in the other two apocryphal texts. Also,

<sup>43</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 197A.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 198B, 200A.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 200A.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, PG 120, 192AB.

<sup>47</sup> The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew is a part of the New Testament apocrypha, and sometimes goes by the name of The Infancy Gospel of Matthew, but the actual name of the text in antiquity was The Book about the Origin of the Blessed Mary and the Childhood of the Savior. Cf. W. Barnstone, *The Other Bible*, HarperSanFrancisco 2005, p. 394.

<sup>48</sup> *The Protoevangelium of James*, 8 & 9. trans. by Al. Walker, *From Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8. ed. by Al. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886. Rev. and ed. for New Advent by K. Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0847.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> *The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, 6 & 7, trans. by Al. Walker, *From Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8. ed. by Al. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886. Rev. and ed. for New Advent by K. Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0849.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Epiphanius Monachus, *Speech on the life of Theotokos*, PG 120, 192B.

one other difference between the text of Epiphanius and these apocryphal passages is that Mary visited Elisabeth during her stay to the temple, if it was a necessity. This detail isn't known in the Holy Tradition.

So, it is understandable that Epiphanius used some other apocryphal texts which were not very known in the Church. Through this text, he explains that Mary was a person, who was living in a specific social environment, although she was brought up in the temple full of grace of God, she followed the rules of the society that she lived. Later her engagement and marriage, which took place according to God's plan, was the only way to protect the mystery of incarnation of the Word.

### *Conclusions*

Many scholars confuse the person of Epiphanius the Monk, who lived between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century with Epiphanius of Salamis of 4<sup>th</sup> century. Also, another misunderstanding about this monk is the era that he lived. In many scholar papers we will find the date 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> the century, but according the patrology, he lived in the centuries that we referred. Epiphanius creates a text for the life of Holy Virgin Mother. He refers to the name of Cyril of Alexandria, so he knows the dogmatic theology about the term *Theotokos* and the declaration of third Ecumenical Council in 431: "Christ was one person, not two separate "people": fully God and fully man, with a rational soul and body. The Virgin Mary is *Theotokos* because she gave birth not to a mere man but to God as a man. The union of the two natures of Christ took place in such a fashion that one did not disturb the other", Epiphanius doesn't analyze the theology about the term Theotokos.

He bases mainly on different apocryphal texts and writes about the life of Holy Virgin Mary until her Dormition. Perhaps, he wanted to write a hagiographic work for the most precious human being in Christianity, the all holy mother of Christ, Theotokos and incorporates a record of institutional and local history, and evidence of popular cults, customs, and traditions of Her era.

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ОНТОЛОШКИ И ГНОСЕОЛОШКИ ТЕРМИНИ ЗА БОГОРОДИЦУ У  
РУКОПИСИМА ЕПИФАНИЈА МОНАХА (1015. год.)

Епифаније монах (Епифаније Цариградски, 10 – 11. век) био је монах и свештеник у манастиру Калистрат у Цариграду и аутор обимних радова о Богородици и животу светог Андреја Апостола. У његовим радовима о Богородици он анализира теолошка учења о Богородици. У овом раду се не понављају дословно учења светих отаца већ се анализира терминологија у вези са терминима које Епифаније употребљава, посебно у вези са црквеном традицијом у 11. веку у Цариграду.