



THEOLOGY CORNER

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“What do we mean when we call Mary the ‘Queen of Heaven?’”

As we approach the celebration of the Queenship of Mary on August 22, let us reflect on the reasons why we refer to Mary as the “Queen of Heaven.” Many of you are probably familiar with the *Regina Caeli* prayer (Latin for “Queen of Heaven”) that is chanted during the Easter season or recited in place of the *Angelus* every day of Easter at noon. The “Queen of Heaven” title has been used in Christian prayer dating back to at least the fourth century, though it became extremely popular in the Middle Ages. In this day and age, this title commonly confuses many people since it seems odd to say that Mary is the Queen if Christ (her son!) is the King. To contemporary ears, this is admittedly confusing, but it is actually quite fitting if you know the royal court structure in the Davidic Kingdom.

While it was the intention of God to be the King of his people, the people sought an earthly king to rule them since that is how all of the other gentile nations were ruled (1 Samuel 8:19-20). In response, God permitted the people to have their earthly king. During this time, polygamy was a gentile cultural norm and this norm continued in Israel’s monarchy. Thus, as a matter of practicality, (since it was difficult to choose which wife would rule with the king) instead of the king’s wife, it was the king’s *mother* who served as queen. There are many biblical accounts of this, but to quote a couple of the most explicit accounts:

“Say to the king and to the queen mother [*gebirah*], “Come down from your thrones...” (Jer: 13:18).

“...and the king [Solomon] rose to meet her [Bathsheba], 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.” (1 Kings 2:19)

The Hebrew term “*gebirah*” literally means “great lady” (the female equivalent of “Lord”) but since this title was given almost exclusively to the queen mother in the Davidic Kingdom, most translations are rendered as “Queen Mother.” It is interesting to note that as our Queen Mother, we call Mary “Our Lady” for this very reason! The Queen Mother in the New Covenant, would unequivocally be Mary since she is the mother of Jesus, the King of Kings, the Davidic heir. Biblical scholars have also noted that Matthew chooses to omit Joseph to focus specifically on Mary during the visit by the Magi in which he uses the Davidic Kingdom context (which was set up in Matthew 1) and writes that they “saw the child with *Mary his mother*, and they fell down and worshipped him.” (Matt 2:11). Matthew links the royal child with his mother, bringing to mind this queen-mother tradition as Mary presents her son to be adored — which was one of the specific duties of the *Gebirah*. This is not even to mention the fact that Elizabeth calls Mary “the mother of my Lord” in Luke 1:43, which was another expression for the Queen Mother! Moreover, we see more hints of the *Gebirah* connection in the Gospel of John from the fact that it is not until the intercession and mediation of Mary at the wedding at Cana that Christ performs his first sign (Jn 2:5).

What, then, does Mary being the Queen Mother mean for us? It means that just as Bathsheba sat at the right hand of Solomon pleading on behalf of his people, so too does Mary sit at the right hand of Jesus pleading on behalf of the Church. We see Jesus himself give his mother to the Church as he tells the beloved disciple “behold your mother” in John 19:27. We should, therefore, come to her as children asking our Blessed Queen Mother to intercede on our behalf and to lead us ever closer to her Son. Not only is she the Queen of Heaven sitting at the right hand of Christ, but she is also the Queen of earth by grace as she plays a significant intercessory role in the Christian life. Mary’s queenship in no way detracts from Christ’s glory; rather, he is glorified even more in recognition of the great work God has accomplished in and through Mary. Let us, therefore, take our petitions to the Blessed Mother to advocate for us and carry our petitions to her Son who will respond like Solomon did to his queen mother, Bathsheba, “Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you.” (1 Kings 2:20)