



## Introduction: A Debate with Deep Roots

One of the most common questions among Christians and non-Christians alike is whether Jesus had biological brothers. The Gospels mention the “*brothers of Jesus*” on several occasions, leading some Protestant and modernist interpretations to claim that Mary had other children. But what does the original Greek text of the New Testament actually say?

The answer not only clarifies a historical detail but also deepens our understanding of Marian theology, the purity of the Virgin, and God’s plan for the Holy Family. To grasp this, we must examine two key Greek words: “**adelphoi**” and “**suggenes**.”

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### 1. “**Adelphoi**”: Blood Brothers or Close Relatives?

In the Gospels, the Greek word “**adelphoi**” (ἀδελφοί) appears in passages such as:

- “*Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?*” (Matthew 13:55)
- “*His brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea...’*” (John 7:3)

At first glance, this seems to indicate biological brothers. However, in the biblical and Semitic context, “**adelphoi**” **has a much broader meaning**:

- **In the Old Testament (Septuagint)**, “adelphoi” is used to refer to close relatives, not necessarily siblings. For example:
    - Lot is called Abraham’s “brother” (Genesis 14:14), though he was actually his nephew.
    - Jacob refers to Laban as his “brother” (Genesis 29:15), even though Laban was his uncle.
  - **In first-century Jewish culture**, there was no specific word for “cousin,” so “**adelphoi**” **could mean cousins, nephews, or other close relatives**.
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## 2. “Suggenes”: The Greek Word for Blood Relatives

The New Testament does have a term for more distant blood relatives: “**suggenes**” (συγγενεῖς), meaning “kinsmen” or “relatives.” For example:

- “And behold, your relative [suggenes] Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son...” (Luke 1:36). Here, the Evangelist specifies that Mary and Elizabeth were **relatives (cousins)**, not sisters.

If the so-called “*brothers of Jesus*” were Mary’s children, the text would have explicitly used “**huiós**” (**sons**) or “**tekna**” (**children, offspring**). But it never does.

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## 3. Who Were These “Brothers” of Jesus? Tradition Clarifies

The Catholic Church, based on Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition, teaches that Mary remained **ever-virgin** (“*aeiparthenos*”, as proclaimed by the Second Council of Constantinople). So, who were these “brothers”?

- **James and Joseph**: In Matthew 27:56, we read that Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, was “**the other Mary**” (distinct from the Virgin). This Mary was the **wife of Clopas** (John 19:25), possibly the Virgin Mary’s sister, making James and Joseph **Jesus’ cousins**.
  - **Judas (not Iscariot)**: In Jude 1:1, the author identifies himself as the “**brother of James**”, confirming that he belonged to the same extended family, not Mary’s son.
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## 4. The Witness of the Church Fathers

The early Christians, who inherited the Apostles’ teachings directly, never doubted Mary’s perpetual virginity:

- **St. Jerome** (4th century) argued in “*Against Helvidius*” that Jesus’ “brothers” were cousins, refuting the idea that Mary had other children.



- **St. Epiphanius** (4th century) suggested that James and the others were children of **Joseph from a previous marriage** (a tradition held in some early Christian circles).
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## 5. Conclusion: Mary, Ever-Virgin

Linguistic and theological analysis confirms that:

- **“Adelphoi” does not necessarily mean blood brothers** but can include close relatives.
- **The term “suggenes” is used for cousins**, as in Elizabeth’s case.
- **Apostolic Tradition has always upheld Mary’s perpetual virginity**, a sign of her purity and unique role in salvation history.

Far from being a minor detail, this truth strengthens our devotion to the **Holy Family**, where Jesus, the Only Begotten Son, was raised by a ever-faithful Mother and a chaste, holy foster father.

### Final Reflection

If Mary had other children, why would Jesus entrust her to St. John at the Cross (John 19:26-27)? This act reveals that **there were no other biological sons** to care for her.

**Mary is the New Eve, the spiritual Mother of all believers**, and her perpetual virginity is a mystery that invites us to deepen our love and reverence for the Woman who brought the Savior into the world.

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