

**Ask a Priest!**  
**June 14, 2021**

***Question: Did Mary and Joseph have other children other than Jesus? I think the Bible mentions Jesus having brothers?***

**Answer:** First, we must understand that the term brother has a wide semantic range in Scripture. It can mean not only a blood brother but an extended relative or even a spiritual brother. Abraham and Lot are classic examples of “brother” being used for an extended relation (see Genesis 13:8 and 14:12). Though they were actually uncle and nephew, they called one another “brother.”

Moreover, in the New Testament, Jesus told us to call one another “brothers” (see Matthew 23:8). Obviously, this doesn’t infer that all Christians have the same physical mother. Second, if we examine more closely the example of James, one of these four “brothers” of the Lord mentioned in Matthew 13:55, we discover him to actually be a cousin or some other variety of relative of Jesus rather than a blood brother. For example, St. Paul tells us: Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:18-19). Notice, the James of whom St. Paul speaks was both a “brother of the Lord” and an “apostle.” There are only two apostles named James among the twelve. The first James is revealed to have been a son of Zebedee. He would most likely not be the James St. Paul speaks of in Galatians, because this James, the brother of John, was martyred early on, according to Acts 12:1-2. And even if it were him, his father was Zebedee. If he were the blood brother of the Lord, his father would have been Joseph. The second James who was an apostle, according to Luke 6:15-16, is most likely to whom St. Paul refers, and his father was Alphaeus, not Joseph. Thus, James the apostle and Jesus were not blood brothers.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church uses another line of reasoning: The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact James and Joseph, “brothers of Jesus,” are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls “the other Mary.” They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression (CCC 500). The Catechism here refers to the fact that, fourteen chapters after we find the “brothers” of the Lord listed as “James, Joses, Simon and Judas,” we find “James and Joses” mentioned again, but this time their mother is revealed as being named Mary - but not Mary the mother of Jesus. The conclusion becomes apparent: “James and Joses” are “brothers” of Jesus, but they are not blood brothers.

In addition, Jesus in his dying words from the cross entrusts his Mother to John the disciple and son of Zebedee, and not to another son of Mary: “Behold, your mother” (John 19:26-27). Had she had other sons, it would not be appropriate for Jesus to introduce her to John as to her son. Yet he did so, inferring that she had no other son who might take care of her. He was her only son, and now he was being taken from her. As her faithful son, he was entrusting her to another in his place—John, and through John to all of us as brothers & sisters in the Body of Christ.

Here’s a helpful article that probably explains this better than I would - and shorter



<https://catholicproductions.com/blogs/blog/the-brothers-of-jesus-a-fresh-look-at-the-evidence>

And at Catholic Answers:

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/marital-relations-between-mary-and-joseph> and  
<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/how-we-know-mary-was-a-perpetual-virgin-0>