



# Mary, Mother of God

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## **Mary Mother of God**

The early Church recognised Mary as being the Mother of God. A few examples from surviving texts are as follows:

### **Irenaeus**

"The Virgin Mary, being obedient to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she would bear God" (*Against Heresies*, 5:19:1 [A.D. 189]).

### **Ephraim the Syrian**

"Though still a virgin she carried a child in her womb, and the handmaid and work of his wisdom became the Mother of God" (*Songs of Praise* 1:20 [A.D. 351]).

### **Cyril of Alexandria**

"I have been amazed that some are utterly in doubt as to whether or not the holy Virgin is able to be called the Mother of God. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how should the holy Virgin who bore him not be the Mother of God?" (*Letter to the Monks of Egypt* 1 [A.D. 427]).

## Mary Ever Virgin

An important historical document which supports the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity is the *Protoevangelium of James*, which was written probably less than sixty years after the conclusion of Mary's earthly life (around A.D. 120), when memories of her life were still vivid in the minds of many.

To begin with, the *Protoevangelium* records that when Mary's birth was prophesied, her mother, St. Anne, vowed that she would devote the child to the service of the Lord, as Samuel had been by his mother (1 Sam. 1:11). Mary would thus serve the Lord at the Temple, as women had for centuries (1 Sam. 2:22), and as Anna the prophetess did at the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:36–37). A life of continual, devoted service to the Lord at the Temple meant that Mary would not be able to live the ordinary life of a child-rearing mother. Rather, she was vowed to a life of perpetual virginity.

However, due to considerations of ceremonial cleanliness, it was eventually necessary for Mary, a consecrated "virgin of the Lord," to have a guardian or protector who would respect her vow of virginity. Thus, according to the *Protoevangelium*, Joseph, an elderly widower who already had children, was chosen to be her spouse. (This would also explain why Joseph was apparently dead by the time of Jesus' adult ministry, since he does not appear during it in the gospels, and since Mary is entrusted to John, rather than to her husband Joseph, at the crucifixion).

According to the *Protoevangelium*, Joseph was required to regard Mary's vow of virginity with the utmost respect. The gravity of his responsibility as the guardian of a virgin was indicated by the fact that, when she was discovered to be with child, he had to answer to the Temple authorities, who thought him guilty of defiling a virgin of the Lord. Mary was also accused of having forsaken the Lord by breaking her vow. Keeping this in mind, it is an incredible insult to the Blessed Virgin to say that she broke her vow by bearing children other than her Lord and God, who was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The perpetual virginity of Mary has always been reconciled with the biblical references to Christ's brethren through a proper understanding of the meaning of the term "brethren." The understanding that the brethren of the Lord were Jesus' stepbrothers (children of Joseph) rather than half-brothers (children of Mary) was the most common one until the time of Jerome (fourth century). It was Jerome who introduced the possibility that Christ's brethren were actually his cousins, since in Jewish idiom cousins were also referred to as "brethren." The Catholic Church allows the faithful to hold either view, since both are compatible with the reality of Mary's perpetual virginity.

Many people are unaware of these early beliefs regarding Mary's virginity and the proper interpretation of "the brethren of the Lord." And yet, the Protestant Reformers themselves—Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli—honored the perpetual virginity of Mary and recognized it as the teaching of the Bible, as have other, more modern Protestants.

Many of the early Church Fathers attest to the virginity of Mary:

### **Athanasius**

"Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that he took true human flesh from the ever-virgin Mary" (*Discourses Against the Arians* 2:70 [A.D. 360]).

### **Epiphanius of Salamis**

"We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and took flesh, that is, was born perfectly of the holy ever-virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit" (*The Man Well-Anchored* 120 [A.D. 374]).

### **Council of Constantinople II**

"If anyone will not confess that the Word of God . . . came down from the heavens and was made flesh of holy and glorious Mary, mother of God and ever-virgin, and was born from her, let him be anathema" (*Anathemas Against the "Three Chapters"* 2 [A.D. 553]).

## Hail Mary Full of Grace

The Fathers of the Church taught that Mary received a number of distinctive blessings in order to make her a more fitting mother for Christ and the prototypical Christian (follower of Christ). These blessings included her role as the New Eve (corresponding to Christ's role as the New Adam), her Immaculate Conception, her spiritual motherhood of all Christians, and her Assumption into heaven. These gifts were given to her by God's grace. She did not earn them, but she possessed them nonetheless.

The key to understanding all these graces is Mary's role as the New Eve, which the Fathers proclaimed so forcefully. Because she is the New Eve, she, like the New Adam, was born immaculate, just as the First Adam and Eve were created immaculate. Because she is the New Eve, she is mother of the New Humanity (Christians), just as the first Eve was the mother of humanity. And, because she is the New Eve, she shares the fate of the New Adam. Whereas the First Adam and Eve died and went to dust, the New Adam and Eve were lifted up physically into heaven.

Of particular interest in the following quotations from the Fathers are those that speak of Mary's immaculate nature. We will all one day be rendered immaculate (sinless), but Mary, as the prototypical Christian, received this grace early. God granted her freedom from sin to make her a fitting mother for his Son.

Even before the terms "original sin" and "immaculate conception" had been defined, early passages imply the doctrines. Many works mention that Mary gave birth to Jesus without pain. But pain in childbearing is part of the penalty of original sin (Gen. 3:16). Thus, Mary could not have been under that penalty. By God's grace, she was immaculate *in anticipation* of her Son's redemptive death on the cross. The Church therefore describes Mary as "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (CCC 508).

### **The Ascension of Isaiah**

"[T]he report concerning the child was noised abroad in Bethlehem. Some said, 'The Virgin Mary has given birth before she was married two months.' And many said, 'She has not given birth; the midwife has not gone up to her, and we heard no cries of pain'" (*Ascension of Isaiah* 11 [A.D. 70]).

### **The Odes of Solomon**

"So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies. And she laboured and bore the Son, but without pain, because it did not occur without purpose. And she did not seek a midwife, because he caused her to give life. She bore as a strong man, with will . . ." (*Odes of Solomon* 19 [A.D. 80]).

## [The Immaculate Conception and Assumption](#)

### **The Immaculate Conception**

It's important to understand what the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is and what it is not. Some people think the term refers to Christ's conception in Mary's womb without the intervention of a human father; but that is the Virgin Birth. Others think the Immaculate Conception means Mary was conceived "by the power of the Holy Spirit," in the way Jesus was, but that, too, is incorrect. The Immaculate Conception means that Mary, whose conception was brought about the normal way, was conceived without original sin or its stain—that's what "immaculate" means: without stain. The essence of original sin consists in the deprivation of sanctifying grace, and its stain is a corrupt nature. Mary was preserved from these defects by God's grace; from the first instant of her existence she was in the state of sanctifying grace and was free from the corrupt nature original sin brings.

When discussing the Immaculate Conception, an implicit reference can be found in the angel's greeting to Mary. The angel Gabriel said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). The phrase "full of grace" is a translation of the Greek word *kecharitome*. This word represents the proper name of the person being addressed by the angel, and it therefore expresses a characteristic quality of Mary.

The traditional translation, "full of grace," is more accurate than the one found in many recent versions of the New Testament, which give something along the lines of "highly favoured daughter. The grace Mary enjoyed was not a result of the angel's visit, and was only as "full" or strong or complete as possible at any given time, but it extended over the whole of her life, from conception onward. She was in a state of sanctifying grace from the first moment of her existence to have been called "full of grace."

Like all other descendants of Adam, she was subject to the necessity of contracting original sin. But by a special intervention of God, undertaken at the instant she was conceived, she was preserved from the stain of original sin and its consequences. She was therefore redeemed by the grace of Christ, but in a special way—by anticipation.

The objection is also raised that if Mary were without sin, she would be equal to God. In the beginning, God created Adam, Eve, and the angels without sin, but none were equal to God. Most of the angels never sinned, and all souls in heaven are without sin. This does not detract from the glory of God, but manifests it by the work he has done in sanctifying his creation. Sinning does not make one human. On the contrary, it is when man is without sin that he is most fully what God intends him to be.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was officially defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854. When Fundamentalists claim that the doctrine was "invented" at this time, they misunderstand both the history of dogmas and what prompts the Church to issue, from time to time, definitive pronouncements regarding faith or morals. They are under the impression that no doctrine is believed until the pope or an ecumenical council issues a formal statement about it.

Actually, doctrines are defined formally only when there is a controversy that needs to be cleared up or when the magisterium (the Church in its office as teacher; cf. Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Tim. 3:15, 4:11) thinks the faithful can be helped by particular emphasis being drawn to some already-existing belief. The definition of the Immaculate Conception was prompted by the latter motive; it did not come about because there were widespread doubts about the doctrine. In fact, the Vatican was deluged with requests from people desiring the doctrine to be officially proclaimed. Pope Pius IX, who was highly devoted to the Blessed Virgin, hoped the definition would inspire others in their devotion to her.

## The Assumption

The doctrine of the Assumption says that at the end of her life on earth Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven, just as Enoch, Elijah, and perhaps others had been before her. It's also necessary to keep in mind what the Assumption is not. Some people think Catholics believe Mary "ascended" into heaven. That's not correct. Christ, by his own power, ascended into heaven. Mary was assumed or taken up into heaven by God. She didn't do it under her own power.

The Church has never formally defined whether she died or not, and the integrity of the doctrine of the Assumption would not be impaired if she did not in fact die, but the almost universal consensus is that she did die. Pope Pius XII, in *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), defined that Mary, "after the completion of her earthly life" (note the silence regarding her death), "was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven."

The possibility of a bodily assumption before the Second Coming is suggested by Matthew 27:52–53: "[T]he tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Did all these Old Testament saints die and have to be buried all over again? There is no record of that, but it is recorded by early Church writers that they were assumed into heaven, or at least into that temporary state of rest and happiness often called "paradise," where the righteous people from the Old Testament era waited until Christ's resurrection (cf. Luke 16:22, 23:43; Heb. 11:1–40; 1 Pet. 4:6), after which they were brought into the eternal bliss of heaven.

## No Remains

There is also what might be called the negative historical proof for Mary's Assumption. It is easy to document that, from the first, Christians gave homage to saints, including many about whom we now know little or nothing. Cities vied for the title of the last resting place of the most famous saints. Rome, for example, houses the tombs of Peter and Paul, Peter's tomb being under the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In the early Christian centuries relics of saints were zealously guarded and highly prized. The bones of those martyred in the Coliseum, for instance, were quickly gathered up and preserved—there are many accounts of this in the biographies of those who gave their lives for the faith.

It is agreed upon that Mary ended her life in Jerusalem, or perhaps in Ephesus. However, neither those cities nor any other claimed her remains, though there are claims about possessing her (temporary) tomb. And why did no city claim the bones of Mary? Apparently because there weren't any bones to claim, and people knew it. Here was Mary, certainly the most privileged of all the saints, certainly the most saintly, but we have no record of her bodily remains being venerated anywhere.

## Mary's Cooperation

Mary freely and actively cooperated in a unique way with God's plan of salvation (Luke 1:38; Gal. 4:4). Like any mother, she was never separated from the suffering of her Son (Luke 2:35), and Scripture promises that those who share in the sufferings of Christ will share in his glory (Rom. 8:17). Since she suffered a unique interior martyrdom, it is appropriate that Jesus would honour her with a unique glory.

All Christians believe that that one day we will all be raised in a glorious form and then caught up and rendered immaculate to be with Jesus forever (1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 21:27). As the first person to say "yes" to the good news of Jesus (Luke 1:38), Mary is in a sense the prototypical Christian, and received early the blessings we will all one day be given.

### **The Bible Only?**

Since the Immaculate Conception and Assumption are not explicit in Scripture, Fundamentalists conclude that the doctrines are false. Here, of course, we get into an entirely separate matter, the question of *sola scriptura*, or the Protestant "Bible only" theory. There is no room in this tract to consider that idea. Let it just be said that if the position of the Catholic Church is true, then the notion of *sola scriptura* is false. There is then no problem with the Church officially defining a doctrine which is not explicitly in Scripture, so long as it is not in contradiction to Scripture.

The Catholic Church was commissioned by Christ to teach all nations and to teach them infallibly—guided, as he promised, by the Holy Spirit until the end of the world (John 14:26, 16:13). The mere fact that the Church teaches that something is definitely true is a guarantee that it is true (cf. Matt. 28:18-20, Luke 10:16, 1 Tim. 3:15).

## Mary in the New Testament

"God sent his only Son, born of a woman . . ." (Gal. 4:4) Except for this reference, no mention is made of Mary in the earliest Christian writings -- the letters of St. Paul. Only the four Gospels, written between 65 and 100 A.D. give any details of her life. They are the prime sources for later Christian devotion to Mary.

Mark's Gospel says simply that Jesus is "the Son of Mary," yet relates nothing about the events of his birth and family life. For Mark, being a disciple who believes in Jesus is more important than any ties of flesh and blood. He recalls Mary as a believer, a disciple of her Son, who does the will of God. (Mk. 3:31-35)

Luke's beautiful narration of the events surrounding the birth of Christ portrays Mary as "the handmaid of the Lord." Drawing, probably, on early Jewish-Christian devotion to the mother of Jesus, his Gospel presents her as one of the faithful remnant of Israel, "the Anawim," "the people of the land" who, despite the hardships they experienced from one conqueror to another, remained faithful to their God. Complete trust in God, no matter what comes, is their strength. Luke's Gospel pictures Mary as a believer who is a model for every ordinary Christian. Life can be transformed when someone says to God, as she did: "Be it done to me according to your word."

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;  
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant,  
from now on will all ages call me blessed." (*Lk. 1:16-18*)

Matthew's Gospel, intent on tracing Jesus' descent from David through Joseph, presents Mary less conspicuously than Luke. This Gospel, however, strongly insists on Mary's unique virginal conception: ". . . before they lived together she was found with child through the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 1:18) Later, this belief in her virginal conception would bring Mary an honoured title: the Mother of God.

John's Gospel, the last of the four, speaks twice of Mary. At Cana in Galilee she intercedes with her son for a newly married couple and he changes the water into wine. (Jn 2:1-12) On Calvary she stands beneath the cross at Jesus' death. (Jn 19:25-27) At Cana and on Calvary Jesus calls his mother "Woman," which early Christian tradition saw as an allusion likening her to the first woman, Eve. In God's plan, Mary, by her faith, reversed the failure of Eve and so became the new "mother of all the living." Through the centuries the stories of Cana and Calvary have led Christians to seek Mary's intercession with her Son and to rely on her as a mother with compassion for those in need.

## The Rosary

The rosary is a wonderful devotion, combining spoken prayers with meditation of the lives of Jesus and Mary.

Your Rosary has several parts to it, if you look at it. At the bottom, there is a crucifix, then a short string of beads and then a large circle of beads.

### How to pray the Rosary:

- Begin with a sign of the cross on the Crucifix and then the "Apostles' Creed";
- An "Our Father" on the first large bead;
- A "Hail Mary" on each of the three small beads with the following intentions (the theological virtues):
  - ❖ For the increase of faith
  - ❖ For the increase of hope
  - ❖ For the increase of charity
- A "Glory Be to the Father" on the next large bead;
- Announce the Mystery
- An "Our Father" on the large bead;
- A "Hail Mary" on each of the adjacent ten small beads;
- A "Glory Be to the Father" on the next large bead;
- Again an Our Father, ten Hail Marys, the Glory Be to the Father, and Fatima Prayer for each of the following decades;
- A "Hail Holy Queen" and a sign of the cross.

### **Prayers during the Rosary:**

#### **The Apostles' Creed:**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

#### **Glory be to the Father:**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

#### **The Fatima Prayer:**

O My Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, take all souls to Heaven, and help especially those most in need of Your mercy.

### **Prayers after the Rosary:**

**Hail! Holy Queen**, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, O most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement! O loving! O sweet Virgin Mary!

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

**O God**, whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech Thee, that, meditating upon these mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

# The Sacred Mysteries

## Joyful Mysteries

- The Annunciation.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Humble / Humility
- The Visitation.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Love of Neighbour
- The Nativity.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Poverty / Poor in Spirit
- The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Obedience
- The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Joy in Finding Jesus or Zeal

## Luminous Mysteries

- The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Openness to the Holy Spirit
- The Wedding at Cana.  
Fruit of the Mystery: To Jesus through Mary
- Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Repentance and Trust in God
- The Transfiguration.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Desire for Holiness
- The Institution of the Eucharist.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Adoration

## Sorrowful Mysteries

- The Agony in the Garden.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Sorrow for Sin
- The Scourging at the Pillar.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Purity
- The Crowning with Thorns.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Courage
- The Carrying of the Cross.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Patience
- The Crucifixion.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Perseverance

## Glorious Mysteries

- The Resurrection.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Faith
- The Ascension.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Hope
- The Descent of the Holy Spirit.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Love of God
- The Assumption of Mary.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Grace of a Happy Death
- The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
Fruit of the Mystery: Trust in Mary's Intercession