

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Catholics honor Mary as Jesus' first and most perfect disciple.
- Mary intercedes for us as Jesus' Mother and Mother of the Church.
- Mary's titles express aspects of her relationship with Jesus and with us.



- Think of a woman who has influenced your life. What makes her so special to you?



Mary

Jesus is at the center of the Catholic faith. This lesson is about Mary, his Mother, one of the most honored people in the faith. When Mary was asked to be the mother of the Son of God, she responded: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary accepted God's will for her life. She became the Christ bearer, the one through whom Jesus, our hope for salvation, entered the world, making our redemption possible.

So it makes sense that those who confess Jesus as their Lord would also respect and **venerate** (honor and revere) Mary. If we love Jesus, we love his mother because of her important role in his life. "Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it" (CCC 964).

"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Luke 1:42

Who First Honored Mary?

God the Father honored Mary by choosing her and allowing the fullness of divinity to take human form within her. The angel Gabriel, sent from God, announced: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). This greeting has become the first part of the Hail Mary prayer.

Jesus, the Son of God, honored Mary. He chose her to be his mother. At the beginning of his public ministry, he changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana because she requested it (John 2:1–11).

The first disciples honored Mary. She prayed with them as they waited for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). Just as Jesus was born of Mary, so the Christian Church was born at Pentecost with Mary present.

The early Church honored Mary. Saint Luke honored Mary in the stories of the annunciation, visitation, and birth of Christ. Mary was a popular figure for devotion among the first Christians. As early as AD 150 in the catacombs of Rome, people painted pictures of Mary holding the baby Jesus.

"Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did."

St. Maximilian Kolbe

How Do Catholics Honor Mary?

Catholics honor Mary by taking her as our Mother and learning to imitate her. Mary accepted God's will completely. She was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples, making her first among the **saints** (holy people in heaven). She shows us how to follow Jesus and share his gospel with others. In honoring and imitating Mary, we praise and thank God for all he has done through her.

Catholics also honor Mary by requesting her **intercession**, asking her to pray to God for us or to join her prayer with ours. Is it necessary to do this? No. We can pray directly to God. By calling on Mary's intercession, however, we have someone praying for and with us who is very close to Jesus.

Does devotion to Mary replace dedication to God? No. Mary is a created being and a servant of the Lord. She points us to Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. In praying to Mary, Catholics don't **worship** (adore or pay homage to) her. God alone is worthy of worship. We do, however, honor her for her important role in our salvation and for her acceptance of God's will.

"Mary hears the word of God and keeps it. In this, she is, as Pope Paul VI called her in Marialis Cultus, 'our sister' in faith."

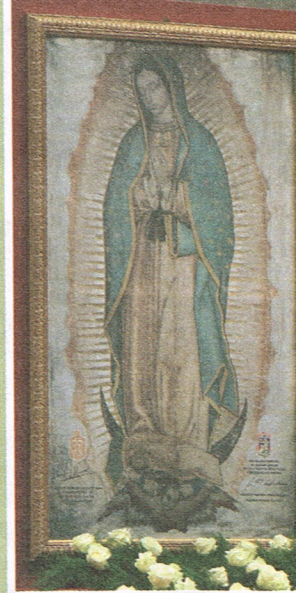
Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, In Search of the Real Mary

What Is the Immaculate Conception?

The **dogma** of the Immaculate Conception proclaims that Mary was free of original sin from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb and free of all personal sin throughout her life. In other words, God saved her from the inheritance of Adam and Eve's sin and prevented her from the corruption and burden of guilt. This allowed Mary to be the spotless vessel that received and carried the perfect and divine Son of God.



Our Mother of Perpetual Help



Our Lady of Guadalupe

Dogma: a doctrine (teaching) of the Church that cannot be disputed or denied. Its belief and acceptance by the faithful is necessary for salvation.

This sinless state both recalls our original existence in the Garden of Eden and foreshadows eternal life in God's kingdom. Just as Eve symbolizes our fallen human nature, Mary symbolizes the redeemed nature of the saints in heaven. For this reason, the Church refers to her as the "new Eve."

What Is the Assumption of Mary?

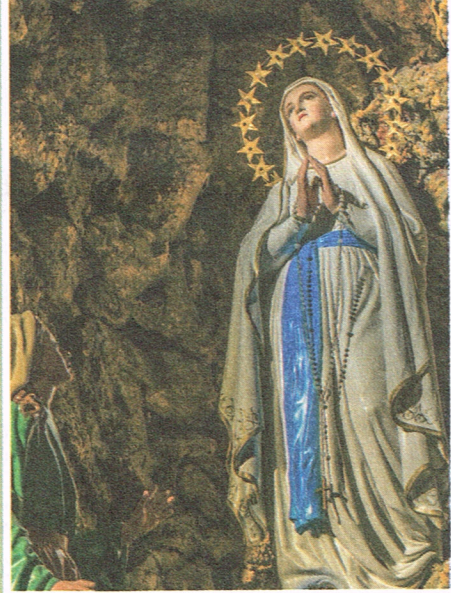
Mary's gifts and graces didn't end with her last breath. Pope Pius XII defined the dogma of the assumption in these words: "the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, 44, November 1, 1950).

We, too, are meant to be with God in heaven one day—body and soul. Just as Jesus' resurrection is our sign of hope, Mary's assumption is the first fruit of God's promise that the faithful will share in that resurrection.





Pope Francis



Our Lady of Lourdes

Why Do Catholics Call Mary Ever-Virgin?


Mary conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34–35). Catholic teaching and tradition affirm that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth as well. Mary's call to perpetual virginity enabled her to consecrate herself totally to the love of God and to her son.

Some Bible passages such as Mark 6:3 say that Jesus had siblings. Catholics don't interpret these to mean that Mary bore other children. In some Jewish accounts, all close relatives including cousins were referred to as brothers. A second-century tradition indicates that these were Joseph's children from a previous marriage. In John's Gospel, Jesus entrusted Mary to the beloved disciple (19:26–27). Saint Hilary of Poitiers taught that Jesus wouldn't have done that if Mary had other sons (*Commentary on Matthew*, 1:4 [AD 354]).

Why Do We Call Mary the Mother of God?

Mary is the Mother of God because Jesus is God, and his divine and human natures can't be separated. This doesn't mean Mary was the source of his divine nature; he received only his human nature from her. As the second person of the Trinity, the Son has existed for all eternity. Yet at the moment of his Incarnation, the Son became both human and divine in Jesus. Since Mary is the Mother of a divine person, it's proper to call her the "Mother of God."

"The One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly 'Mother of God.'"



Read the Gospel passages and quote below. Identify two qualities of Mary. Then reflect on how you can imitate Mary in your own life in your journal.

- Luke 1:26–38 (the annunciation)
- Luke 1:39–56 (the visitation)
- Luke 2:1–21 (the birth of Jesus)
- John 2:1–12 (the wedding at Cana)
- John 19:25–27 (standing by the cross)

"[Mary] was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed...a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile...a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ (see John 2:1–12), and whose maternal role was extended and became universal on Calvary."

Pope Paul VI, Marialis Cultus, 37

How Is Mary the Mother of the Church?

From the cross, Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, behold, your son" (John 19:26). Then he said to the beloved disciple, "Behold, your mother" (19:27). In that moment, Jesus presents Mary as a mother to all Christian disciples. For this reason, Mary is the "Mother of the Church."

Mary supported and remained with the early Church until she was assumed into heaven. She continues to intercede and care for us today.

What Are Marian Apparitions?

Many trustworthy and holy people have reported **apparitions**, or supernatural visions, of Mary and messages that have been the source of countless blessings. Shrines dedicated to these appearances are visited by millions each year—most notably Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Lourdes in France, and Fatima in Portugal.

The Catholic Church doesn't require belief in such appearances, but official declarations have stated that certain apparitions and the messages associated with them are worthy of belief and compatible with Catholic doctrine. Scripture affirms that God sent angels as messengers of his word; it's just as reasonable to believe that Jesus could send his Mother.

Hundreds of miracles at Marian shrines have been studied and declared to be beyond medical explanation. Those who study these miracles are amazed at the evident presence of God's power and grace working through the intercession of Mary as well as her maternal affection and care for us.

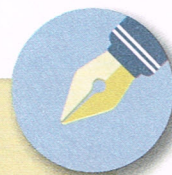
• Which Marian apparition most intrigues you? Why?



Mary responded to God's grace and blessings with humble acceptance, peaceful patience, and joyful praise.

How can you show Mary your gratitude for giving us Jesus?

How can you praise God and spread his salvation in your own life, family, and community?



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