

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Mary intercedes for us as the Mother.
- Jesus and Mary share a strong connection.
- Mary's titles share unique aspects of who she is to us.



Mary

Mary's Song of Praise (The Magnificat)

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever"

Luke 1:46–55

Mary's beautiful song of praise to God is sometimes called Mary's canticle or the Magnificat. It is a statement of her faith in God—filled with hope and trust—at a time when her future seemed uncertain.

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary with the news of God's plan, Mary was a very young woman—not much older than you are now. At first, she was puzzled by the words of the angel (see Luke 1:29). Her plans hadn't included being the mother of the Son of God. At first, she responded to Gabriel with feelings of confusion and doubt: "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). By allowing herself to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit, she found the strength to ultimately respond with her fiat, or her great yes: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary was very much one of us. She was fully human. She felt all the emotions we feel—confusion, fear, doubt—and great joy. Despite her feelings of doubt and confusion, Mary chose to trust in God. She allowed God to change the course of her life forever, but the Bible makes it clear that the choice was not an easy one for her. Mary is someone we can relate to. Through her words and actions, she becomes a model for our lives.

- What are some areas in your life where you need help in saying "yes" to God?



- Read Mary's song of praise again. How do her words offer you hope for your life?

Why do Catholics honor Mary?

"By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity"

CCC 967

CCC 963–972

Gabriel called Mary “favored one” (Luke 1:28), and Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, upon seeing her, cried out, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42). Catholics throughout the ages have continued this tradition of honoring Mary. While Jesus Christ is the center of our faith, Catholics often look to Mary as the perfect example of Christian humility and trust in God.

It is important to understand the difference between worshipping God and honoring Mary. Even many Catholics confuse this point. To **honor** someone means to hold him or her in great respect or high regard. To **worship** means to show reverence for a god. Catholics worship only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Similarly, when Catholics pray the Hail Mary, we do not pray to Mary. We are honoring her with words taken directly from Scripture (Luke 1:28, 42) and then asking her to pray for us because of her unique closeness to our Lord.

God the Father honors Mary. In Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God (Luke 1:28, 30). God chooses Mary from among all women to be the Mother of Jesus, “the Word made flesh.” God entrusts this holy young woman with the Light of the World. Because of her “yes,” we would have a Savior.

Jesus honors Mary. Jesus shows special respect for his Mother by granting her requests as in the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:1–11) and by holding her up as an example of one who hears the word of God and lives it (Luke 8:21). At the time of his death, Jesus makes sure Mary will be cared for by his “beloved disciple” (John 19:26–27).

Even the friends and disciples of Jesus sometimes brought their problems to Mary, trusting in her closeness to her Son. At the wedding feast at Cana, Mary steps in to help when the wine begins to run low. Still, Mary reminds the disciples that they must rely only on Jesus with the words, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Mary also prayed with the disciples while they waited for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). These events take on an even greater significance when we understand that, at the time of Jesus, women had very little social standing.



Our Mother of Perpetual Help



Our Lady of Guadalupe

The early Christian Church honored Mary. Written within the century following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospels reflect the thinking of the early Church. As early as the year 150, Christian artists began painting pictures of Mary holding the Infant Jesus. The Catholic Church’s devotion to Mary is deeply rooted in tradition.

- What role does Mary play in your faith?
- How do you understand Mary’s role in the Church?



How do Catholics honor Mary?

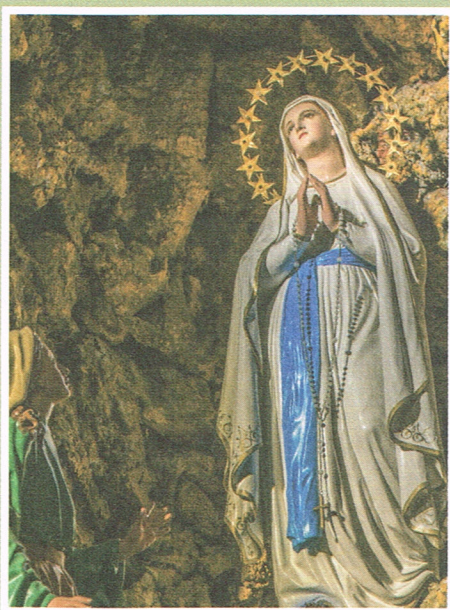
The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Just as we erect buildings, ballparks, and other special places in the name of respected public figures, so Catholics often name churches in Mary’s honor. And just as we fashion statues of great men and women, Catholics often use images of Mary to help them reflect on her holiness and pure, humble life. In doing this, we aren’t worshipping Mary, rather we’re holding her up as inspiration. Mary reminds us that when we simply say “yes,” we bring Christ to our world.



Pope and Pope Francis



Our Lady of Lourdes

What Else Does the Catholic Church Teach About Mary?

The word **dogma** refers to an official Church teaching. The dogma of the immaculate conception tells us that Mary was born free from original sin. Put another way, Mary was never controlled by hate, prejudice, greed, or selfishness. Her life was guided by love. Her motivation was love. Her decisions were based on love. There was no room in Mary's heart for sin.

This doesn't mean that Mary wasn't fully human or that she didn't feel the same emotions we feel. Actually, the opposite is true. Because sin had no power over her, there was nothing to keep her from understanding us and relating to us perfectly. Mary lived a life of faith and service, just as we strive to do.

Because she was the Mother of our Lord, neither sin nor death touched her soul or her body. The Church also teaches that, at her death, Mary was taken up, body and soul, into heaven. This is called the assumption.

Catholics also refer to Mary as ever-virgin, meaning that Mary chose to remain a virgin even after the birth of Jesus. Mary dedicated her life to the love of God.

When the Church calls Mary "the Mother of God," it does not mean that Mary was the source of Jesus' divine (godly) nature. Mary was the Mother of his human nature and there was no time when the human Jesus was not God. Mary said "yes" to being Mother to "God in the flesh."

Mary is also considered to be the "Mother of the Church." Just as she prayed with the first disciples of Jesus as they waited for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14), so she prays continually with and for the Church today. Through her loving example, she has led many believers to the grace of God.

In praise of all that God had done for her, Mary prayed her glorious Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55). Today we are proud to be numbered among the generations that call Mary blessed.

Catholics also consider Mary to be a powerful intercessor with God—one who will pray with us and for us. While it is not necessary to ask Mary to pray for us, when we call on her, we share in her holiness and have someone praying for us who is intimately connected to Jesus. Devotion to Mary never replaces dedication to God. God and Mary are not in competition. All power, all love, all healing, all graces, come from God alone. When we pray the Hail Mary, we are asking the Mother of Jesus to present our heartfelt needs to her Son.

Praying the rosary is another way Catholics have traditionally honored Mary. This form of devotion dates back to the ninth century. As we pray the rosary, we recall important events in the life of Jesus, many of which remind us of Mary's key role in the life of our Lord and in our own salvation.

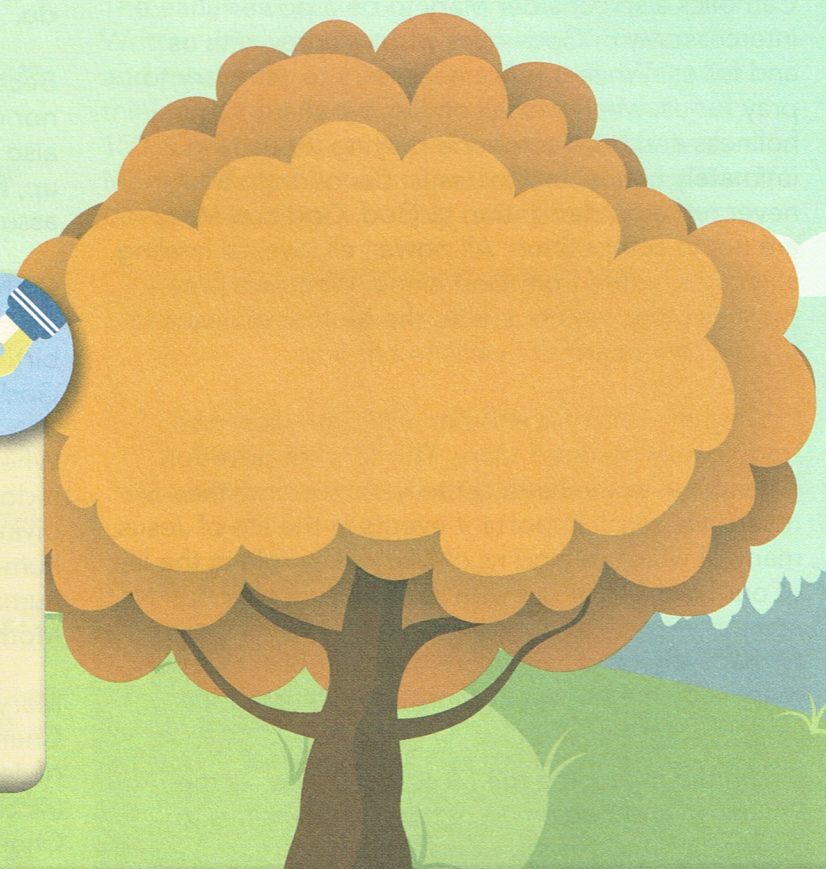
Perhaps the most important way Catholics can honor Mary is by the honest attempt to imitate her life.

"In the meantime the Mother of Jesus...is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come."

CCC 972

Mary has been given many titles as an intercessor of the Church including: Undoer of Knots, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Angels, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and many others.

With a partner or on your own, pick and research one title of Mary to share with your group. What about the title you chose resonated with you?



Our faith grows every time we give God our simple "yes."

Write about one situation in your life right now in which you can choose to do or say what is right or good. How can you, like Mary, say "yes" to God?

Journey of Faith for Teens: Inquiry, Q14 (826337)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

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