

Mary

The Mother of God

To come to a fuller understanding of Mary, the Mother of God we need to seek insights from several sources including Tradition, History and Scripture.

The Historical Mary

Much of what is known about the Historical Mary comes from tradition and non-canonical sources. Two of the major sources are:

- Protoevangelium of James (125-145 AD)
- Early Church Fathers (Patristics)

Place of Mary's Birth

We believe that Mary was born to Joachim and Anne. Joachim belonged to the royal family of David. Anne was a descendant from the priestly family of Aaron.

Therefore, Christ the Eternal King and Priest, came from both kingly and priestly family lines.

This tradition seems to rest ultimately on the so-called "*Gospel of James*", the "*Gospel of the Nativity of the Blessed Mary*", and the *Pseudo-Matthew*, or "*Book of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Childhood of the Savior*."

The place of Mary's birth is surrounded by controversy.

Tradition maintains that she was conceived and born in the same house in which the Word became flesh. This would be in Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 1:26 – The Annunciation.)

The Gospel of James cites the place of her birth as Sephoris a small town approximately 3 miles north of Bethlehem.

St Sophronius of Jerusalem in the 6-7th century stated that her place of birth was the Probatika in Jerusalem.

The Probatika are the Pools of Bethesda mentioned in the Gospel of John.

The term Probatika was derived from the tradition that the angel of God every day troubled the water, and whosoever first entered the water after its movement was cured of every kind of infirmity.

The Probatika was approximately 400 feet from the Temple just outside Stephen's Gate (The Sheep Gate.)

We don not know conclusively where Mary was born.

The Presentation of Mary in the Temple

The Protoevangelium of James and other apocryphal works told the story of Mary's presentation at the Temple at the age of three. In gratitude for being granted a child after years of infertility, Mary's parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, had vowed to dedicate Mary to the service of God at the Temple. When they presented her at the Temple at the age of three, she stayed willingly, showing her dedication to God even at that young age.

It was at the presentation that a vow of virginity was made.

As stated above, one tradition states that Mary remained in the Temple after her presentation in order to be educated with other Jewish children. Tradition proposes that Mary served in the Temple where she was fed miraculously by the angels until she was twelve.

During the time of the Blessed Virgin Mary, all of the children who were dedicated to the Temple were taken by the holy men of the Temple and given the finest education possible. The education of the children was conducted over a period of twelve years, following the education, the children were returned to their homes.

At the age of 12, Zachariah (High Priest), prompted by the message of an angel, betrothed Mary to one of the widowers (Joseph) who was indicated by the Lord.

All of this would have been highly irregular in the first century Temple for a female.

The Church has remained silent on this issue

The house of Joachim and Anna was not far from the Temple, it is possible that the holy child Mary was often allowed to visit the sacred buildings in order to satisfy her devotion.

The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated every year on November 21.

Marriage to Joseph

According to Jewish custom, the union between Joseph and Mary had to be arranged by the parents of St. Joseph. The Protoevangelium of James, while an extra biblical document, is the source of many details of Mary's life that became universally accepted by the Church, including the names of her parents, the story of her birth, her age at her betrothal to Saint Joseph, and Saint Joseph's advanced age and his status as a widower with children by his first wife.

As she had obeyed God's inspiration in making her vow, so she obeyed God's inspiration in becoming the bride of Joseph.

Mary trusted the Divine guidance implicitly, and thus was certain that her vow would be kept even in her married state.

What more do we know about the historical Mary?

- Mary was born during the reign of Herod the Great
- Mary, like her son Jesus, spoke Aramaic but she would have also been exposed to Latin (Roman occupiers), Hebrew (synagogues) and Greek (language of commerce)
- Most Jews lived as members of an extended family (as did Mary most likely)
- Most women of her day married around the age of thirteen

As with other facts concerning her life there is disagreement about where Mary lived following the death of Jesus.

She probably lived in or near Jerusalem, though she may have lived with John in Ephesus temporarily. If this were the case, she would have been Assumed before John's exile to Patmos.

Mary's Death

Many of the Church Fathers cite the year of her death as 48 AD (Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Apollonius)

Since the middle Ages the view prevails that she "died of love, her great desire to be united to her Son."

Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion marks the site where the Virgin Mary is said to have died, or fell into 'eternal sleep'

Pope Pius XII, in the text explaining his definition of the dogma of the

Assumption, refers repeatedly to the Blessed Virgin's death before her Assumption, and the consistent tradition in both the East and the West holds that Mary did die before she was assumed into Heaven. However, since the definition of the Assumption is silent on this question, Catholics can legitimately believe that Mary did not die before the Assumption.

But Pope Pius XII, in *Munificentissimus Deus*, his November 1, 1950 declaration of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, cites ancient liturgical texts from East and West, as well as the writings of the Church Fathers, all indicating that the Blessed Virgin had died before her body was assumed into Heaven. Pius echoes this tradition in his own words:

"This feast shows, not only that the dead body of the Blessed Virgin Mary remained incorrupt, but that she gained a triumph out of death, her heavenly glorification after the example of her only begotten Son, Jesus Christ . . ."

Still, the dogma, as Pius XII defined it, leaves the question of whether the Virgin Mary died open.

What Catholics must believe is that 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.

The Scriptural Mary

Mary is mentioned or alluded to numerous times in the Christian scriptures. She is also believed to be the fulfillment of numerous Old Testament prophecies.

Gospel References:

Mark 3: 31-35	<i>"Your mother and your "brothers and your sisters" are outside asking for you"</i>
Mark 6:1-6a	<i>Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary...?</i>
Matthew 1:1-17	The Genealogy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ <i>"...Mary, of her was born Jesus... the Messiah"</i>
Matthew 2:1-12	The Visitation of the Magi

("...and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage.")

Matthew 2:13-18 Flight to Egypt
The Lord appeared to Joseph...and said, "...take the child and his mother...into Egypt"

Luke 1:39-45
, Mary visits Elizabeth
"...And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb".

Luke 1:46-56 The Magnificat:
"...Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed"

There are numerous other scriptural references:

Luke 2:1-7: Jesus' Birth

Luke 2:8-20: Shepherds /Angels

Luke 2:21-40: The Naming of Jesus/The Presentation in the Temple

Luke 2:41-52: Jesus in the Temple

Luke 8:19-21: Jesus' Relatives; [Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35]

Luke 11:27-28 Blessed is the womb that carried you...

John 1:13 Born ...not by a man's decision but of God

John 2:1-12: the Wedding at Cana

John 6:42: Is this not the Son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother...

John 7:41-43; 8:41 The origin of the Messiah

John 19:25-28a: Mary at the foot of the Cross

Other New Testament references:

Acts 1:12-14

"All those devoted with one accord to prayer, themselves together with some women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus..."

Galatians 4:4

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman..."

Revelation 12: 1-2

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet..."

She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth"

There are several Old Testament prophecies, which we as Catholics believe to be fulfilled in Mary.

1st Prophecy: Genesis 3:15

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;
He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."*

2nd Prophecy of Mary: Isaiah 7:14

TM "Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

3rd Prophecy of Mary: Micah 5: 2-3

“But you Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, From you shall come forth ... one who is to be ruler of Israel...”

TM*“Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne...”*

4th Prophecy of Mary: Jeremiah 31:22

“The Lord has created a new thing upon the earth; the woman must encompass the man with devotion...”

St Jerome understood this verse to speak of Mary's virginal conception of Christ; The Lord has created a new thing on the earth, without the seed of man, without carnal union and conception, “a woman will encompass a man” within her womb

There also other extra biblical sources that speak of Mary that may be quite surprising.

These include the three leaders of the Protestant Reformation:

- Martin Luther
- John Calvin
- Ulrich Zwingli

All three never doubted that Mary was truly the Mother of God.

Another source is the sacred text of Islam, the Quran

The Quran speaks of Mary (called *Miriam in Arabic*) not only as the mother of Jesus, but as a righteous woman in her own right

Quran devotes a whole chapter to Mary (Chapter 19)

Angel to Mary: *“I am only a messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a holy son.” She said, 'How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?’ He said, 'So (it will be). Your Lord says, 'That is easy for Me, and (We*

wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men, and a Mercy from Us. It is a matter (so) decreed"" (19:16-21, the Chapter of Mary)

Mary is honored in additional chapters of the Quran:

"Behold! The angels said, 'Oh Mary! God has chosen you and purified you, chosen you above the women of all nations. Oh Mary! Worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down'" (3:42-43).

"And (remember) she who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples (21:91).

And Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity. And We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit. She testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants)" (66:12).

There are many erroneous beliefs concerning the relationship between Catholics and Mary.

An important question to entertain at this point is:

What Do Catholics Believe about Mary?

- God chose Mary, a virgin, to be the Mother of God
- We do NOT hold Mary to be divine
- We do NOT worship Mary.
Worship is withheld for God and God alone
- Mary is subordinate to Jesus but is above all other creatures
- We honor Mary because Mary was honored by God and to her a special grace was bestowed (see Luke 1:28)

The Catholic Church holds four beliefs about Mary as Dogma. In other words, as Catholics we must believe these Dogmatic statements

- Divine Motherhood
- Immaculate Conception
- Perpetual Virginity
- The Assumption

Let us look at each of the Dogma in more detail

Divine Motherhood

Mary's Divine Motherhood is expressed in various titles:

Mother of God

Theotokos (Greek):

- God bearer
- Birthgiver of God

Theotokos

In the 5th Century, Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, stated that Mary was more accurately *Christotokos* and NOT *Theotokos*. By this he meant that Mary had given birth to the Human aspect of Jesus but NOT the Divine.

Nestorius was in essence denying the Hypostatic Union of Jesus' two natures: God/man; Divine/human in One Person

In 431 AD the Council of Ephesus 431 AD convened to declare this heresy.

- They stated that Mary was truly *Theotókos*.
- She gave birth to the person of Jesus, both Divine and human natures
- Mary is not responsible for the Divinity of Jesus
Jesus was eternally begotten of God the Father

Theotókos refers to the Incarnation, when the Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on human nature in addition to his pre-existing divine nature, this being made possible through the cooperation of Mary.

Immaculate Conception

We honor Mary because Mary was honored by God and to her a special grace was bestowed (see Luke 1:28)

In Luke we see Gabriel greeting Mary with, “**Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you**”. Using the word “*kecharitomene*” Gabriel was conveying an abundance or plenitude of grace

This grace extended from the time of her conception and throughout her life

Thus is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception

It is important to note that the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary **NOT** Jesus. This mistake is made by many, Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

The Immaculate Conception was proclaimed as dogma by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception states “***that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege from Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, was kept free of every stain of original sin.***”

The dogma declares that from her beginning Mary was exceptionally holy and in constant union with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

™The dogma stresses the dignity and holiness required to become "Mother of God."

™The privilege of the Immaculate Conception is the source and basis for Mary's all-holiness as Mother of God.

Perpetual Virginity Mary Ever-Virgin

The early baptismal formulae (since the 3rd century) state Mary's virginity.

The Council of the Lateran, 649 AD, stated that Mary was conceived "*without any detriment to her virginity, which remained inviolate even after his birth*". The Catholic Church holds as dogma that Mary was and is Virgin before, in and after Christ's birth.

Vatican II reiterated the teaching about Mary, the Ever-Virgin, by stating that Christ's birth did not diminish Mary's virginal integrity but sanctified it.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (499-507) maintains that Jesus Christ was Mary's only child. The so-called "brothers and sisters" are close relations.

The early Church held that Mary had but one child, Jesus
Their belief stemmed from witness and tradition
This truth is found in the writings of the early Church fathers.
In the days of St. Augustine, those who denied the virginity of Mary were labeled Heretics.

Patristic fathers of the church call her:

Hippolytus

...the tabernacle exempt from defilement and corruption

St Ephraem

...as innocent as Eve before her fall, a virgin most estranged from every stain of sin, more holy than the Seraphim, the sealed fountain of the Holy Spirit, the pure seed of God, ever in body and in mind intact and immaculate

Athanasius: (Discourses Against the Arians 2:70 [A.D. 360])

Augustine: (Heresies 56 [A.D. 428])

Others: Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, Didymus the Blind, Ambrose of Milan, Pope Siricius I, Leporius, Cyril of Alexandria, Pope Leo I

The perpetual virginity of Mary has been questioned because scripture attests to the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Matthew 12:46 :

“While he was still speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers appeared outside wishing to speak to him”

The culture at the time of Jesus was to have extended families living in one home

The word translated as “brothers and sisters” is *Adelphoi* (Greek). Its use in the scriptures implies a broader sense of the term than simply siblings. *Adelphoi* = Brethren.

The brothers to whom Matthew refers were probably the sons of Joseph from a previous marriage or perhaps cousins.

The early church took for granted the lone status of Jesus as the only son of Mary

Jerome rebutted the proposal of Helvidius [A.D. 380] who held that the brothers in Matthew 13:55 meant Mary had other children. The major reformers concurred with St Jerome.

- Calvin agreed with Jerome adding, “Helvidius has shown himself too ignorant...”
- Luther agreed in the perpetual virginity of Mary by agreeing with Calvin’s assessment of Helvidius

- Zwingli remarked, “ I esteem immensely the Mother of God, the ever chaste, immaculate Virgin Mary”

Even more proof of Mary’s perpetual virginity and lack of other children can be found in John 19: 26-27

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

This act would conflict with 1st Century Jewish custom if Jesus had living brothers. It would have been the obligation of other children of Mary to care for her in the absence of Jesus. Scripture reveals that James, the Brother of Jesus, was still alive as late as 49 AD. If he was indeed her son he would have cared for her.

The Assumption

The Assumption was proclaimed dogma by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950.

The dogma of the Assumption states that "Mary, Immaculate Mother of God ever Virgin, after finishing the course of her life on earth, was taken up in body and soul to heavenly glory."

We should not confuse Assumption with Ascension

Jesus Christ, Son of God and Risen Lord, ascended into heaven, a sign of His divine power.

Mary, on the contrary, was elevated or assumed into heaven by the power and grace of God.

This dogma has no direct basis in scripture.

It was nonetheless declared "divinely revealed," meaning that it is contained implicitly in divine Revelation.

Although this was not proclaimed as dogma until 1950 the belief in the Assumption was part of Catholic tradition dating back to the early Church.

The definition of the dogma does not say how the transition from Mary's earthly state to her heavenly state happened. However, the opinion that Mary passed through death as her Son did, has the stronger support in tradition.

There are numerous Marian titles used in English speaking countries:

The Virgin Mary
The Blessed Virgin Mary
The Blessed Mother
Mother of God
Immaculate Mary
Saint Mary
Holy Mary
Holy Virgin
Our Lady
The Madonna
Notre Dame
Queen of Heaven

The Hail Mary (Ave Maria) is one of the most frequently prayed prayers of our Church.

“Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee
Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death
Amen”

This prayer is scriptural taken from the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 1: 28

“Hail favored one. The lord is with you “

Luke 1:42

“Most Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb”

