

# CATHOLICISM UNPACKED



## DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER

EDUCATION SERVICE



# MARY



# MARY – CONTENTS

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Mary was born in the north of Palestine, in a small village called Nazareth. Her parents, St Anne and St Joachim, are not mentioned in the canonical Gospels, but in apocryphal writings. These writings were written in the style of Scripture but not accepted by the Catholic Church as divinely inspired).

# WHO WAS MARY?

The first time we hear about Mary's parents is in the Gospel of St James, which was written around A.D.150, and they are described as an infertile couple who longed for a child. St Joachim fasted for forty days and nights to try to earn God's favour, and to their great joy Mary's birth was announced by an angel. At the age of three Mary was offered to God in the Temple to fulfil the promise St Anna made when she was childless. This demonstrates Mary's holiness and dedication to God throughout her life.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Mary had a relative, Elizabeth. The Greek does not tell us how exactly they were related, but Jesus and John, Elizabeth's son, are seen as cousins.



In March 2015, Pope Francis visited Naples. As he addressed his congregation, he told them that the best way to make sure Jesus remained at the centre of their lives was to “ask His mother to take you to him”. In this simple phrase, Pope Francis, captures Mary's role within the Church.

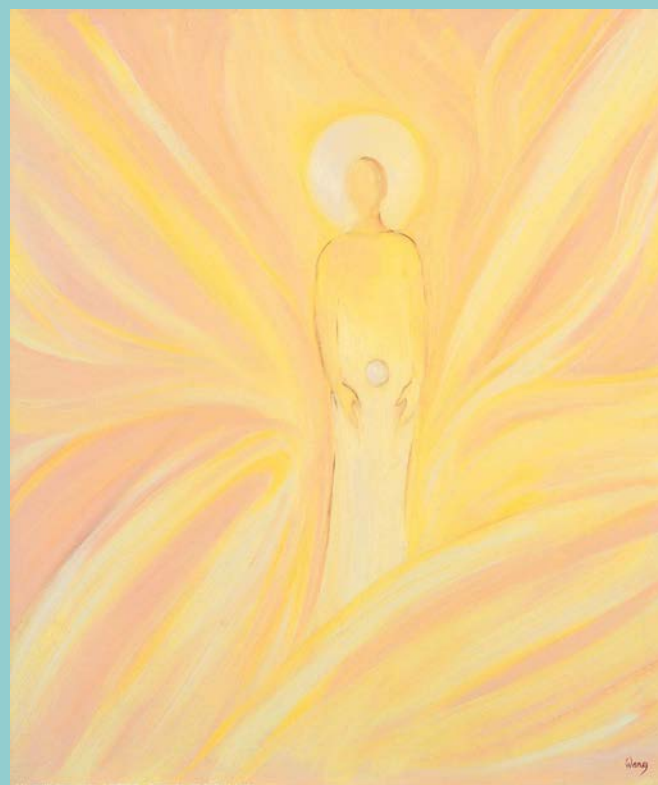
The key beliefs the Catholic Church holds about Mary can best be understood as expressions of what is believed about Christ, in particular about his humanity and his divinity.

As you read through this document and learn about how special Mary is, please also remember that she was a real person, whom you can get to know and who can help you in your life and work.

Many people think that the Immaculate Conception is about Mary conceiving Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Actually this is a mistake. The Immaculate Conception refers **not** to Jesus' conception, but in fact to Mary's. Catholics believe that Mary was conceived without original sin i.e. she was preserved without sin before she was born, so that she would be ready to carry Jesus in her womb. As with everything Catholics believe about Mary, it relates to how special Jesus is. Jesus was so holy and so divine that a perfectly pure woman was created so he could enter the world through her. So, the Immaculate Conception really reinforces how perfect Jesus is, and through God's grace, Mary was created sinless. Mary is, in a similar way to the Tabernacle of the Old Testament, a pure and spotless 'vessel'. She is the first living Tabernacle who carried the New Covenant – Jesus.

The Immaculate Conception, is not only about Mary being conceived without Original Sin, but also that she remained sinless throughout her life. “Mary benefited first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life” (CCC 411). Mary was given the special privilege of being free from sin by God. This ensured she was the most appropriate vessel for carrying, giving birth to and raising her sinless Son. “To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary was ‘enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role’ (CCC 490).

# WHAT IS THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION?



# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

## CONTINUED

The dogma (definitive article of faith) of the Immaculate Conception comes from Church tradition. The teaching evolved over a period of time and did not actually become a formalised doctrine until 1854. Although we cannot find the basis for this teaching in Scripture explicitly, the Annunciation (when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was chosen to bear God's Son) is consistent with this belief. The angel declares Mary to be "full of grace" (Luke 1:28) which in Greek (kekaritomene) means one who has been and continues to be "favoured" or "graced" by God. It was necessary for Jesus, fully human but sinless, to take his human nature from someone also free from sin (original and personal), and that that person be someone who is "full of grace".

'full of,  
grace'

Another common misunderstanding connected to the Immaculate Conception is that it means that Mary was conceived without sexual intercourse. This was not the case. Mary had ordinary parents who conceived her in the natural way.

Many ask why defining the dogma took so long, but the truth is that most Christian beliefs (including those about the Trinity, the Incarnation and even the canon of the New Testament) took centuries before they were made 'official' Christian beliefs. This doesn't mean they weren't true, but simply that it took time to define them properly. Many early Church fathers believed in the Immaculate Conception, but the priorities were to establish beliefs about the divinity of Jesus, rather than about Mary. Remember all of our beliefs about Mary, are rooted in our beliefs about her Son and in fact they only became a focus for Christians when they helped clarify and reinforce teaching about Jesus. It is important to realise that Mary was only sinless because she was graced by God. The Immaculate Conception was by God and for God.

At this point it is important to say that Mary is not equal to Jesus in any way simply because she was without sin. Jesus is without sin because he is God; Mary is without sin because God made her so. Therefore, when we see the Immaculate Conception, we actually see Christ's perfection, his love, and his divine greatness. It is also worth noting that Mary still needed to be saved through Jesus's death. It is hard to understand how an event (the Cross) that took place after her conception could still save her, but the cross of Christ transcends time and affects events that took place before it, as well as after!

"To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary was 'enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.'"



CCC  
490



'Let it be to  
me  
according  
to your  
word'

**Luke 1:38**

Mary was asked to be the mother of Jesus. It was Mary's free choice to cooperate with the will of God. When the angel appeared to Mary and said she would bear the Son of God, her response was 'Let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). Mary's free cooperation is necessary, as although God knew she would say 'yes', she was free to do so. Remember God is not a part of time, he doesn't have a before and after, so just because He knows what someone will freely do, it doesn't make them any less free.

Simply put, God chose to rely on the free 'yes' of one his humblest creatures, a teenage girl from an unremarkable village, to bring about salvation for all. Mary is the new Eve. The creation stories in Genesis tell us of a man and woman who, in the distant past, used their free will to disobey God. They could be said to represent all of us who since then have had to live in a world suffering from the consequences of human sin. The free 'Yes' to God of Mary is therefore often seen by the Church as giving the world a New Eve. Mary whole-heartedly accept God's will, and this opens the way for Christ to come into the world and save us from sin.

God sent forth his Son, but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, 'a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary'. CCC 488

**DID MARY  
HAVE A FREE  
CHOICE?**



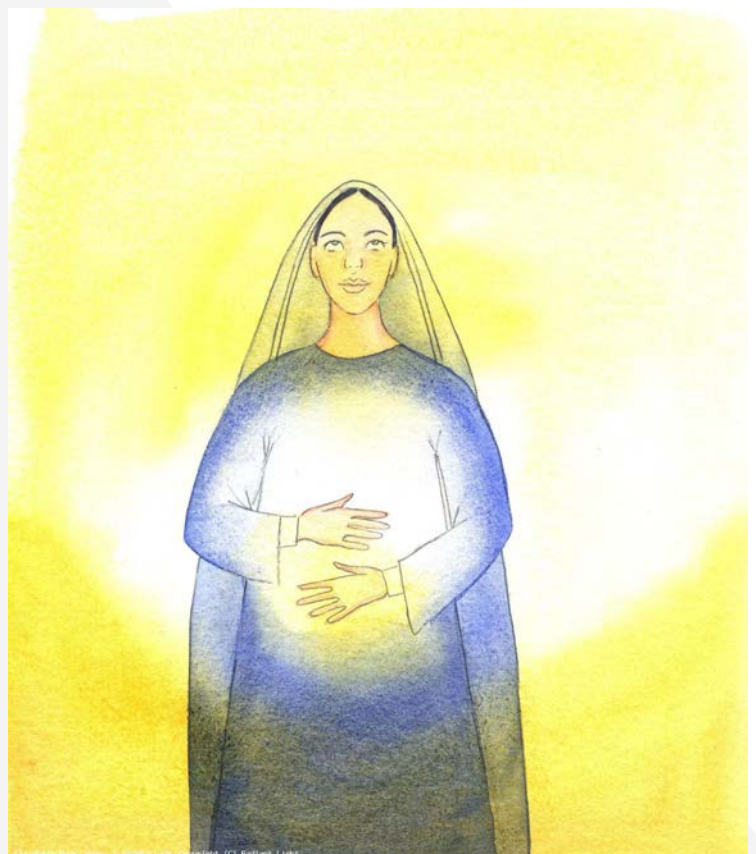
To discuss Mary's title as Mother of God, we need to spend some time looking at the words included within the term i.e. mother and God. Mary was certainly the mother of Jesus as she not only provided the genetic material for his body, but she also carried and gave birth to Him. Catholic understanding of the word God reflects a belief in the Holy Trinity i.e. that there is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. "The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire." (CCC 253). Mary's Son, Jesus, was fully human but also fully divine. He was the person of the Trinity known as God the Son, hence Mary's title as the Mother of God.

## Theotokos God-bearer

It is important to note that Mary is not the Mother of the entire Trinity, i.e. each person of the Trinity. She is not the mother of God the Father, or the Holy Spirit. Neither is Mary the source of her Son's divinity. She is the Mother of God because she carried in her womb Jesus who was both God and man. Some Christians claim, when objecting to the title 'Mother of God' being attributed to Mary, that Mary only carried Jesus' human nature in her womb, not his divine nature. But Catholics would assert that Mary carried the whole reality of Jesus within her, his whole person, human and divine and therefore Mary is rightly called the Mother of God (the Greek Theotokos means God -bearer).

Some people worry that calling Mary the 'Mother of God' implies she existed before God. This is not the case – it couldn't be – there is no 'before God'! So although Mary did not exist before Jesus' divine nature, his human nature came into being at a particular point in history. Therefore, the title 'Mother of God' is a way of stating our belief that Jesus was truly God, our belief in the Incarnation.

# HOW CAN MARY BE THE 'MOTHER OF GOD'?

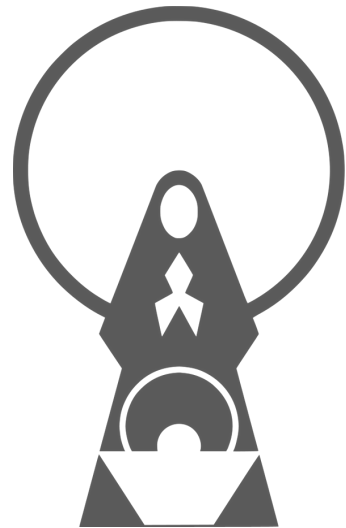


Some people worry that calling Mary the 'Mother of God' makes her somehow a part of God. But, God is the infinite, eternal, and unchanging act of being itself. When God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, nothing about the divine person of the Son or his fully divine nature changed. The Son assumed a human nature, which was made possible by Mary's 'yes'. Mary conceived and gave birth to God the Son, thus making her the Mother of God, but she did not change God's divine nature or his identity as a divine person, and so she is not a 'part of God' or divine in any way.

In 431, at the Council of Ephesus, the dogma of Mary as the Mother of God was proclaimed and became a part of Catholic doctrine. However it is important to note that Catholics are not the only Christians to call Mary the Mother of God. Surprisingly for some, even Luther and Calvin acknowledged that Mary was the Mother of God! Eastern Orthodox Christians honour Mary as the 'theotokos', the God-bearer.

# MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

c o n t i n u e d





# Why do Catholics call Mary 'ever virgin' if the Bible mentions Jesus' brothers and sisters?

According to Church teaching, Mary remained a virgin throughout her entire life i.e. she was a 'perpetual virgin'. Although not explained in detail, the Church believes Mary was Virgin before and after Christ's birth. This tradition can be challenging for some Christians but the belief is reflected in numerous early Church writings. As a counter to this belief, sometimes people highlight that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus. In Aramaic, Jesus' mother tongue, there is only one word for sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, niece and nephew. So, in Mark 3:31-35, when mention is made of Jesus' 'brethren', the Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of Mary, but in fact to Jesus' close relatives. The fact that Jesus entrusted Mary into the care of the apostle, John, at the foot of the Cross (John 19:26-27), also implies that Jesus did not have siblings – otherwise Mary would have been cared for by them.



# EVER VIRGIN

# WHAT IS THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY?

Considering that Mary was born without Original Sin and lived a sinless life, it is not difficult for Catholics to believe that she is in heaven. What may be more challenging however is that Mary's body was not left behind to rot or decay but that she was assumed body and soul into heaven. So there is no burial site for Mary, no shrine where her bones are believed to be, as is the case for many of Jesus' disciples. Catholics believe Mary's body is in heaven, not buried in the earth.

The Assumption of Mary is therefore the teaching that "having completed the course of her earthly life, Mary was assumed body and soul in to heavenly glory" Munificentissimus Deus 44. This belief is a long standing tradition of the Church and became a dogma defined by Pope Pius XIII in 1950, so it is something that Catholics are expected to believe. There is no firm teaching on whether Mary died before she was assumed into heaven. Pope Pius XII, who defined the dogma, deliberately left this question open. The common teaching is that Mary did die before she was assumed, however this is not considered a truth of the faith and does therefore not have to be held by the faithful of the Church.

It's important to note that Jesus *ascended* into heaven, but Mary was *assumed* into heaven. There is a difference! Jesus ascended through his own divine power, because he is God. Mary was taken into heaven, not through her own power, but by the grace and power of God.

Did  
Mary  
die  
?



By loving and honouring Mary, we can grow in the ability to emulate her life — to make a complete and total gift of ourselves to God, to give God our ‘yes.’ Through Mary we can grow to know and love her son, Jesus, more deeply because she continuously directs our hearts to Him.

**St  
Maximilian  
Kolbe**

Catholics are often criticised by other Christians for worshipping Mary. Let’s be clear, Catholics do not, under any circumstances, worship Mary. Only God is worthy of worship and it is forbidden for us to worship any creature. Mary was created by God and therefore she is not God and not worthy of worship. — “For no creature could ever be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer” (Lumen Gentium, No. 62). So, **Catholics do not worship Mary**, but they may venerate her. Veneration is completely different from the adoration of God. It is the honouring of a person and Mary, as the perfect model of faith, is undoubtedly worthy of honour.

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that an all-powerful God, could have saved humanity in many different ways, but He chose to do so by becoming incarnate of Mary. If God freely chose to redeem us by “being born of a woman,” then it follows that this woman is central to his plan to save us. St. Teresa of Calcutta put it very simply, ‘No Mary, no Jesus’.

In 787, the Second Council of Nicaea distinguished between the veneration of Mary and the worship that can only God is worthy of. Mary’s unique and special role as ‘Queen of the Angels’ and ‘Queen of the Saints’ affords her high veneration, but she will never be adored or worshipped in the way that only God alone can be.



**DO  
CATHOLICS  
WORSHIP  
MARY?**

Just as we ask members of our family or parish community to pray for us, we can also ask others to intercede for us too, including those in heaven such as Mary and the Saints. Many Catholics ask Mary in particular for help as she was so close to Jesus during his life on earth and can help to lead us to him. Just as she made requests to him to help at the wedding at Cana, she can intercede on our behalf now. So, when we turn to Mary it is always to help us find our way to Jesus. It is not because there is a belief that she is divine, it is simply to ask her to approach her Son, Jesus, on our behalf with a special need or concern. Mary is not a distraction from Jesus, on the contrary, she leads us to him.



Mary teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side

**Gaudete Exultate**

Mary is intimately connected to her Son. The Second Vatican Council described “the close and indissoluble tie” (Lumen Gentium 53) that unites Mary with her Son, Jesus. As our Mother too, Mary is naturally well placed to help bring us closer to her Son. She can do many things for us, she can intercede on our behalf, model a life of faith, draw us closer to him and indeed she can pray for us. Pope Francis wrote in *Gaudete et Exultate* (The Call of Holiness in Today’s World): “Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: ‘Hail Mary ...’”. Rather than praying *to* Mary, we instead pray *with* her and ask her to pray for us and for God’s grace to fall on us.

# DO CATHOLICS PRAY TO MARY?



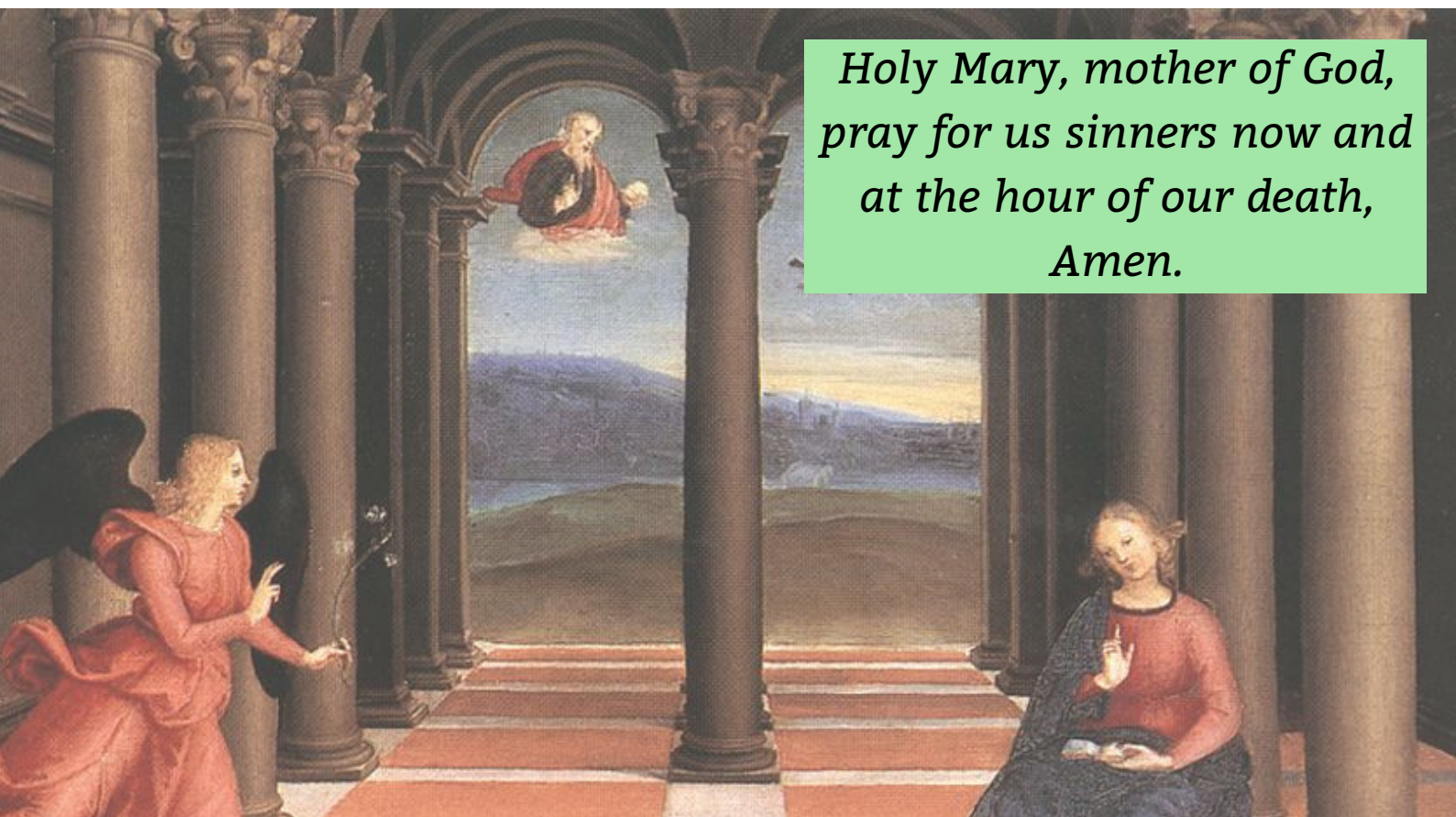
The Hail Mary is probably the most popular prayer to Mary and has its basis in Sacred Scripture. When the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary by the Father, he greeted her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:41-42). So here we have the first part of the Hail Mary prayer. St. Bernardine of Siena added the name of Jesus, clarifying who the fruit of Mary's womb is.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

# HAIL MARY

The second part of the prayer is in response to the first, asking Mary to pray for us and addressing her as the Mother of God. Of course, Elizabeth addressed her in much the same way: "Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). Since Gabriel's words were at the request of God, those words were actually God's words. So we are honoured to repeat them.

*Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.*







"No prayer is more meritorious for the soul and more glorious for Jesus and Mary than a well recited Rosary"

**St Louis  
de  
Montfort**

Some hold that the Rosary receives its name from the crown of thorns that believers used to wear in the early Church when on their way to be martyred. Others hold that the term comes from the Latin 'rosarium', meaning rose garden, and provides an image of a perfect garden of prayer.

The Rosary begins with the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father prayer, the Hail Mary prayer repeated three times followed by the Glory Be prayer. There are five decades which each begin and end with the Our Father and Glory Be prayers, ten Hail Mary's said in between. When you pray the Rosary, you meditate on the events in Jesus' life. There are the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries.

The Rosary is a devotion and is not something that Catholics have to do. However, it really is a very useful prayer as it is based in scripture, helping us to meditate on the life of Christ and open ourselves to strengthening our relationship with God.

The Rosary is one of the most popular forms of prayer. In various apparitions, Mary has appeared holding a Rosary and has asked that we continue to pray this prayer. Prayer is about developing a relationship with God and loving him more. It makes sense, therefore, to get to know God through meditating on the events of the life of Christ during the Rosary.



The Magnificat, taken from Luke's Gospel (1:46-55), is the Blessed Virgin Mary's hymn of praise to the Lord.

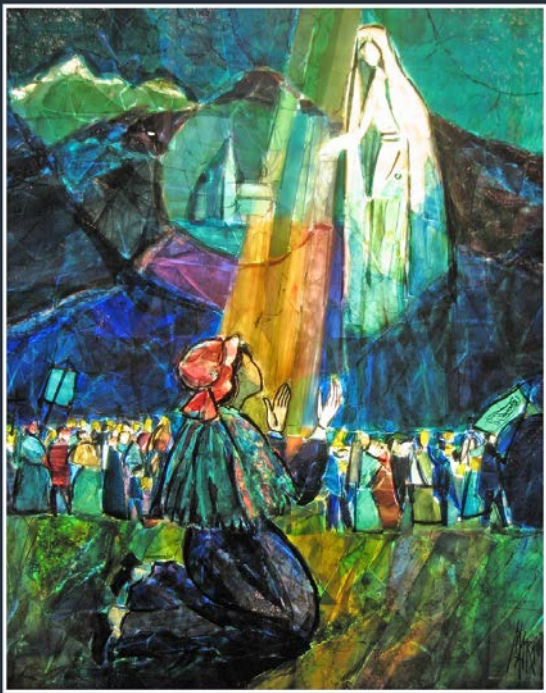
As opposed to detracting from the object upon which it is focused, a magnifying glass actually increases the object and allows the finer details to emerge. Mary is stating that her soul acts as a magnifying glass, showing her Son to others. Mary does not detract from Jesus, on the contrary, she magnifies him!

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once referred to Mary as being like "a magnifying glass that intensifies our love of her Son."

My soul glorifies the Lord,  
 My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.  
 He looks on his servant in her  
 lowliness;  
 Henceforth all generations will call me  
 blessed.  
 The Almighty works marvels for me.  
 Holy his name!  
 His mercy is from age to age,  
 on those who fear him.  
 He puts forth his arm in strength  
 And scatters the proud hearted.  
 He casts the mighty from their thrones  
 And raises the lowly.  
 He fills the starving with good things,  
 Sends the rich away empty.  
 He protects Israel, his servant,  
 remembering his mercy,  
 the mercy promised to our fathers,  
 to Abraham and his sons for ever.

# THE MAGNIFICAT





# WHAT ARE MARIAN APPARITIONS?

Over the centuries, Mary is believed to have made appearances in various places throughout the world. Some of the appearances have been accompanied by words of prophecies, and others simply were a call to prayer and conversion. It's worth noting that the Church considers Marian apparitions to be 'private revelation', and therefore not a required part of the Catholic faith: "Throughout the ages, there have been so-called 'private' revelations, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history" (CCC 67).

Countless claims are reported, but the Church exercises great caution when investigating such claims (similar to the canonisation process when a person is named a Saint). It is usually the local Bishop who initially investigates a claim, assisted by spiritual and medical experts.



## APPARITION

The name given to various kinds of supernatural visions of heavenly beings and frequently applied to the visions associated with Mary.

## PRIVATE REVELATION

A vision and communication from Mary or other heavenly beings. "Revelation" is the body of truths found in the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition of the Church. "Private revelations" are not dogmas of faith and are open for selective acceptance and devotion of the faithful.

## MESSAGES

Often in an apparition, a message is given to the seer (the person who beholds the vision). It may be a warning about the need for prayer and penance to avert a coming war or disaster. After apparitions at Fatima, Portugal, Our Lady of Fatima told Sister Lucia de Santos that a pope would be shot. This prophecy was verified on May 13, 1981, when Pope John Paul II was shot in Rome. Messages may also include a request that a church be built to honour Mary at the apparition site with the promise of blessing to all who come to pray there. For example, the basilicas in Lourdes, France, and Guadalupe, Mexico, were built in response to Mary's request and are visited by millions of pilgrims annually.

Source: [www.osv.com](http://www.osv.com)



# MARIAN APPARITIONS

## CONTINUED

# HOW IS MARY PORTRAYED IN SCRIPTURE?

**There are some that say that the Bible really says very little about Mary. However, that is quite contrary to the truth. There are actually a lot of references to Our Lady.**

*Adapted from [www.aboutcatholics.com](http://www.aboutcatholics.com)*

Isaiah's prophecy has long been understood as referring to the coming of Jesus as Messiah.

**Isaiah 7:14:** "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

However, naturally we find most of our references to Mary in the Gospels. Catholics hold that Mary was born free of sin thus making her fit enough to bear God's only Son. First, she is greeted by the angel Gabriel.

**Luke 1:28:** "Hail, full of Grace, the Lord is with you!"

We can know that the greeting was unusual and astounding because of Mary's reaction to it.

**Luke 1:29:** "But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be."

Gabriel said she was "full of grace" which means she was completely filled with sanctifying grace, with no blemish on her soul, i.e. she was the Immaculate Conception

Scripture also tells us that Mary is the Mother of God.

**Matthew 1:20:** "But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"





# MARY IN SCRIPTURE

continued

Adapted from [www.aboutcatholics.com](http://www.aboutcatholics.com)

The Bible shows us that Mary was the perfect example of obedience and humility.

**Luke 1:38:** "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

It tells us how Mary meditated on all of God's words and actions.

**Luke 2:19:** "But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."

It tells us that Jesus was obedient to her.

**Luke 2:51:** "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them."

It tells us how Mary was anguished when she could not find her Son for three days.

**Luke 2:46-49:** "After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when they saw Him they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.' And He said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"

It tells us that Jesus' first public miracle, even before his time, was performed because she asked it of him.

**John 2:3-10:** "When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.' Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.' So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water it now become wine, and did not know where it came from."

It tells us that she came to see him while he ministered.

**Matthew 12:46:** "While He was still speaking to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood outside, asking to speak to Him." \*Note: "brothers" here means blood relatives...e.g. cousins

# MARY IN SCRIPTURE

continued 2

Adapted from [www.aboutcatholics.com](http://www.aboutcatholics.com)

It tells us that a 'sword would pierce her soul' (her pain of Christ's passion), in order that the hearts of many would be revealed!

Luke 2:34-35: "...and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.'"

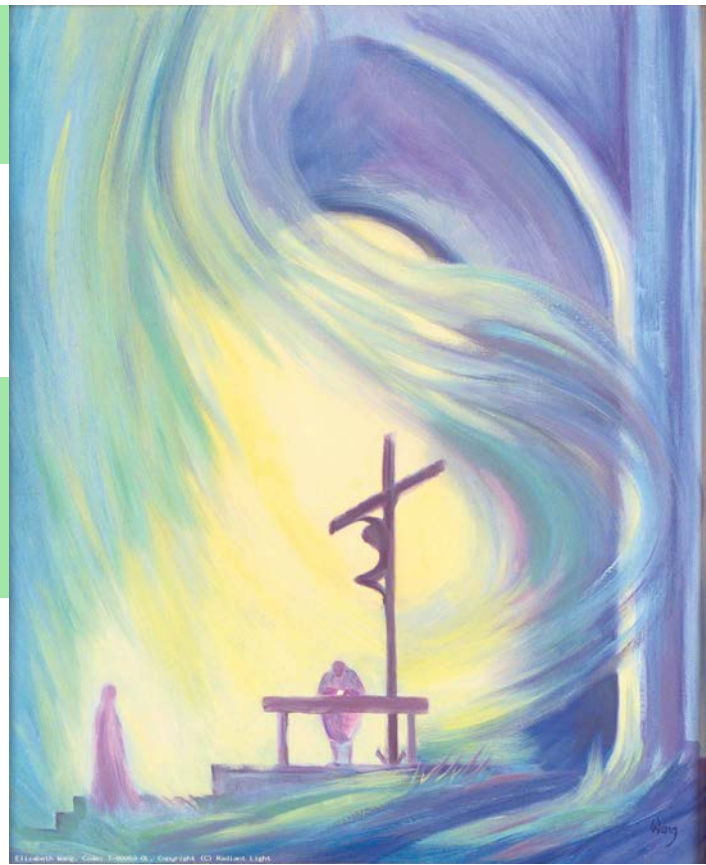
It tells us that 'all generations would call her "blessed"'.  
 Luke 1:48: "...for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed."

It tells us that Mary stood at the very foot of the cross as her Son died, and he gave her to us as a spiritual mother and mother of the Church.

John 19:25-27: "So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, 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 to his own home."

It tells us that when the apostles prayed in the upper room that, again, she was with them.

Acts 1:13-14: "...and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."



Mary is mentioned, yet again, by Paul.

Galatians 4:4: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..."

Finally, we reach the book of Revelation where she is shown most compellingly in chapters 11 & 12. It is here, that we are given an eye-opening view of just who she is. Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant. Everything in the old Covenant is a foreshadowing of the new. The Ark of the Covenant held the 'Word of God', both in the old Covenant (the Torah) and the new (Jesus). Jesus is the Word, the Word made flesh, and Mary is the Ark.

'God  
sent  
forth His  
Son,  
born of a  
woman'

**Galatians  
4:4**

Revelation 11:19-12:2: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery."

Revelation 12:5: "She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne..."

Revelation 12:17: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."

Interestingly, Mary's last words recorded in Scripture, in John's Gospel, are 'Do as He tells you'. They are said at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, when He performs this first miracle at the wedding at Cana. The words obviously have a significance as a guide for life, as well as signifying Mary's role in mediating for us with her Son.



**MARY IN  
SCRIPTURE**  
continued 3

**January 1** - Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God

**February 11** - Our Lady of Lourdes

**March 25** - Annunciation

**May 13** - Our Lady of Fatima

**May 31** - Visitation of Blessed Virgin Mary

**Monday after Pentecost** - Mother of the Church

**June 27** - Our Mother of Perpetual Help

**9 days after Corpus Christi** - Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary

**July 16** - Our Lady of Mount Carmel

**August 15** - Assumption

**August 22** - Queenship of Mary

**September 8** - Nativity of Mary

**September 12** - The Most Holy Name of Mary

**September 15** - Our Lady of Sorrows

**October 7** - Our Lady of the Rosary

**November 21** - Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**December 8** - Immaculate Conception

**December 12** - Our Lady of Guadalupe

# HOW DOES THE CHURCH HONOUR MARY?

The liturgical calendar of the Church is marked by days set aside as Feast, Solemnities and Memorials. These days are highlighted to celebrate the life of a particular Saint, or indeed an aspect of Mary or Jesus. The days dedicated to Mary are usually classified in the following way:

Some days are connected to particular teaching and beliefs about Mary, such as the Solemnity of the Mother of God, or the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Some days are connected to Marian Apparitions, such as the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, or the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Some days are connected to specific events that are featured within Scripture, such as the Annunciation or the Visitation.



The Month of Mary is May.



The Month of the Rosary is October.



The Feast of the Immaculate Heart is the Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost.



The First Saturday of each Month is also dedicated to Marian Devotions

# WHY DOES MARY HAVE SO MANY TITLES?



Mary has been given so many titles through history and they reflect various aspects of her life and nature

For example, she has titles connected to:

a) Events from her life e.g. Our Lady of Sorrows (suffering at the foot of the Cross)

b) Dogmas and beliefs about her e.g. The Immaculate Conception

c) Geographic places where she has appeared e.g. Our Lady of Knock

d) Associated imagery and symbolism e.g. Our Lady Star of the Sea (Mary can help orient us towards Christ)

*The extent of Mary's influence, and the breadth of her experiences are reflected in the many titles attributed to her.*

As previously explained, Catholics deem Mary worthy of honour and some of the titles she has been bestowed, reflect the esteem with which she is held.

In particular, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary provides us with many beautiful titles:

Holy Mother of God,	Singular vessel of devotion,
Holy Virgin of virgins,	Mystical rose,
Mother of Christ,	Tower of David,
Mother of the Church,	Tower of ivory,
Mother of divine grace,	House of gold,
Mother most pure,	Ark of the covenant,
Mother most chaste,	Gate of heaven,
Mother inviolate,	Morning star,
Mother undefiled,	Health of the sick,
Mother immaculate,	Refuge of sinners,
Mother most amiable,	Comforter of the afflicted,
Mother most admirable,	Help of Christians,
Mother of good counsel,	Queen of angels,
Mother of our Creator,	Queen of patriarchs,
Mother of our Savior,	Queen of prophets,
Virgin most prudent,	Queen of apostles,
Virgin most venerable,	Queen of martyrs,
Virgin most renowned,	Queen of confessors,
Virgin most powerful,	Queen of virgins,
Virgin most merciful,	Queen of all saints,
Virgin most faithful,	Queen conceived without original sin,
Mirror of justice,	Queen assumed into heaven,
Seat of wisdom,	Queen of the most holy rosary,
Cause of our joy,	Queen of families,
Spiritual vessel,	Queen of peace
Vessel of honor,	





We are convinced that all Christians share a basic reverence for the Mother of Jesus, a veneration deeper than doctrinal differences and theological disputes ...

Together we accept the Gospel respect for the Mother of Jesus, Handmaid of the Lord, woman of faith, model of prayer, servant of the Spirit.

## Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith

US Catholic Bishops

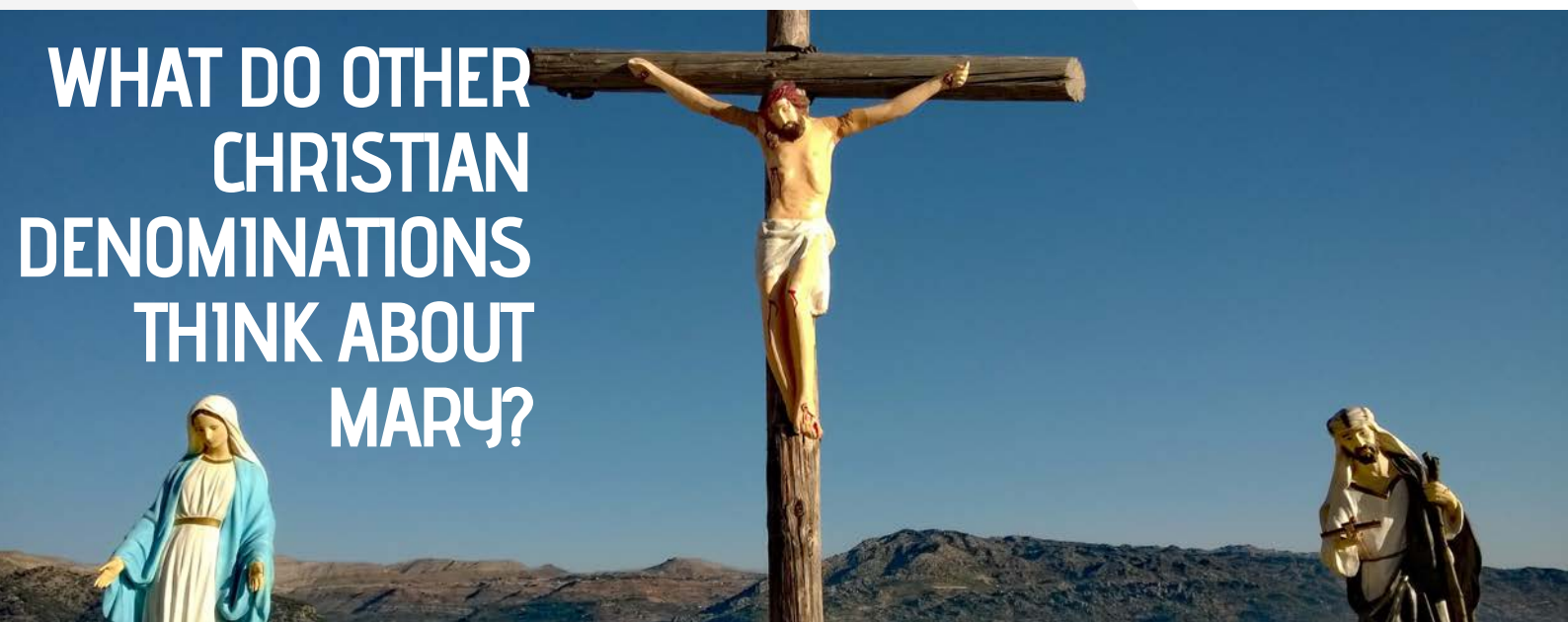
All members of the Christian Church believe that Mary was the Mother of Jesus. However, generally members of some Protestant denominations often place far less significance on the role and person of Mary than Catholicism does. In fact, some Christians view Catholic devotion to Mary as something that lacks a scriptural basis and detracts from the attention due to God. Others fear that Catholics elevate Mary to the level of God – although it is clear that Catholic devotion to Mary is Christ-centred.

There are certain beliefs that are part of the Catholic deposit of faith which may be rejected by some Protestant denominations, such as the Immaculate Conception (the belief that Mary was conceived without Original Sin), the Assumption (the belief that Mary was taken up into Heaven), Mary's perpetual virginity, and the role of Mary as intercessor.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians have similar beliefs in relation to Mary and both believe her worthy of veneration. The major difference lies in the Orthodox rejection of the concept of Original Sin and subsequently in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Despite the differences, attempts at unity in the Christian Church can focus on the beliefs that are common to all Christians, including those about Mary.

WHAT DO OTHER  
CHRISTIAN  
DENOMINATIONS  
THINK ABOUT  
MARY?



# WHY IS THE MONTH OF MAY DEDICATED TO MARY?

In the northern hemisphere and in classic western culture, May is when Spring begins and the earth blooms. In ancient Greece May was dedicated to the goddess of fertility, Artemis, and in ancient Roman culture, May was dedicated to Flora, the goddess of blooms, or blossoms. The ancient traditions celebrating May as a time of new life and fertility provided a connection to motherhood. This connection eventually led Christians to adopt the month of May as the time to celebrate our mother, Mary.

In 1965, Pope Paul VI published an encyclical, *Mense Maio* ("The Month of May") which details the Church's special devotion to Mary during May (see below).

It is common for parishes to have a daily recitation of the Rosary during this time, and many erect a special May altar with a statue or picture of Mary as a reminder of her special month. Additionally, it is a long-standing tradition to crown the statue of Mary during May – a custom known as May Crowning. Often, the crown is made of beautiful blossoms representing Mary's beauty and virtue. It is also a reminder to the faithful to strive to imitate our Blessed Mother's virtue in our own lives. May Crowning, in some areas, is a huge celebration and usually takes place outside of Mass, although Mass may be celebrated before or after the actual crowning.

*The month of May is ... a month which the piety of the faithful has long dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God. Our heart rejoices at the thought of the moving tribute of faith and love which will soon be paid to the Queen of Heaven in every corner of the earth. For this is the month during which Christians, in their churches and their homes, offer the Virgin Mother more fervent and loving acts of homage and veneration; and it is the month in which a greater abundance of God's merciful gifts comes down to us from our Mother's throne.*



## MENSE MAIO, POPE PAUL VI



The Book of Numbers indicated that The Levites are to “spread over the **Ark of the Testimony**... a cloth all of blue” (4:5-6). And further: ‘And over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall spread a cloth of blue’ (4:7)”. Mary is traditionally referred to as the new Ark of the Covenant, as she held within herself the Divine Presence of God – so the cloth of blue is appropriate for her.



In Byzantine art from around A.D 500, Mary's perceived royal dignity as queen was symbolised by her donning a dark blue mantle. The colour blue was generally linked to **royalty** in the ancient world.



Divinity, mystery and transcendence are all represented by the colour blue in iconography.. Blue is also perceived as a **heavenly** colour, as it is the colour of the sky.. However it is also associated with nature (sea and sky) which is fitting form Mary, the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

# WHY IS THE COLOUR **BLUE** ASSOCIATED WITH MARY?







Sometimes with a Crown and Lettering alone, and sometimes more ornate with lilies and either ferns, ivy or both.



The Lily, symbol of virginity and purity. There is also a white day lily which only blooms during the time of the Assumption in mid-August, known as the Assumption Lily.



The mystic rose, symbolises Mary's mystical participation in the Holy Trinity as Heaven's Rose or Mystical Rose.

## IMMACULATE HEART



Mary's heart is depicted as pierced with seven wounds or swords, and has roses or flowers wrapped around the heart. This image is one of the most popular images of the Immaculate Heart, attracting attention towards the love and virtues of the heart of Mary.

## FLEUR-DE-LIS



The Fleur-de-lis is a stylised lily that is used to decorate shrines, chapels, and grottos dedicated to Mary. It is used to symbolise the purity of Mary.

## THE IRIS



The iris or "Sword Lily" is an emblem of Our Lady's Seven Sorrows.

Adapted from  
[www.catholictradition.org](http://www.catholictradition.org)

## THE CROWN OF 12 STARS



A reference to Revelation 12:1-2, in which a pregnant woman is about to give birth, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head. The woman is believed to symbolise the Blessed Mother, because the child she delivers is "a male child who is to rule all the nations."

# WHAT ARE THE SYMBOLS ASSOCIATED WITH MARY?

Mary holds a special place in the life of the Catholic Church because she displayed exceptional qualities and is therefore an ideal role model to follow.

Mary's 'yes' made it possible for Jesus to enter the world. She was his first disciple and at the wedding in Cana we see that she was the first person to believe that he could perform miracles. At the cross when Jesus said to John "Here is your mother" Catholics believe he is presenting Mary as a Mother to us all, a spiritual Mother.

Mary lived a life of faith and trust in God, despite great suffering. She is an example for those who wish to follow Jesus, and as a Mother, she is honoured.

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