

Catholicism 101

Who is Mary?

No figure outside of Jesus has captivated the Church more than Mary, the Mother of God. If you read through the history of the Church, examine her artwork, listen carefully to her liturgies, or listen to the lives of the faithful, Mary's role in the life of the Church is obvious. This session focuses on the role of Mary in the life of Jesus, her role in the life of the Church, and the main dogmas proclaimed by the Church that explain her role. The most important starting points are that Mary is not God and will never be God, and she is a human who was so faithful to God's will that she was given a special honor that no one else will ever get.

Who is Mary? Mary is a woman from Nazareth in Judea. Her parents are Sts. Ann and Joachim who were Jewish. According to tradition, Ann was barren and couldn't conceive a child. In her old age she was given a miracle child who was destined for something important. Some claim that Mary spent her early life as a temple virgin before she was released from that role at the standard age of 14. She was betrothed to Joseph of Bethlehem around the age of 14. During their betrothal period, God conceived his Son in the womb of Mary. Joseph and Mary were married sometime around or after Jesus' birth. She cared for Jesus, her son, during his lifetime. She was the one who encouraged the start of the ministry. She witnessed Jesus' passion, death, and Resurrection. Following Jesus' Ascension, she lived with the Apostles until she was Assumed body and soul into Heaven.

Mother of God: This title was given to Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 380. Some argued that she should be given the title "Mother of Jesus" to recognize that she only gave him a human body. The Church, however, decided differently. The title "Mother of God" recognizes that the divinity and humanity in Jesus cannot be separated. We cannot state that Mary is only responsible for half of Jesus and therefore can only be recognized for his human side. Jesus is both human and divine therefore Mary birthed the whole Jesus in his humanity and divinity. This declaration does not state that Mary is the mother of God the Father or higher than God. It states that Mary gave birth to Jesus who is God.

The Immaculate Conception: The Church declared that Mary was conceived without Original Sin, the only human to be conceived this way. Some argue that this is not possible because then she would not be human. Those who argue this idea forget that our humanity was created without Original Sin and we are destined to be without sin. Mary's Immaculate Conception is a foretaste of the future redemption brought through her son. She was given the grace that we all wish to receive caused by the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Mary's freedom from Original Sin was necessary for two reasons. First, God cannot dwell in a house of sin. Mary needed to be a holy dwelling that Jesus, God, could dwell in her womb. Second, freedom from Original Sin allowed Mary to make a free choice in accepting God. If she was hindered by sin, then any of the factors that affect us because of sin may have caused her to not be free enough to choose God fully.

Assumption of Mary into Heaven: The Church declared that at the end of Mary's life, she was taken into Heaven body and soul. The Latin Church declares that she didn't die but was taken

directly to Heaven like Enoch or Elijah. The Orthodox Church teaches that she went to sleep and then was assumed into Heaven. The basic teaching is that Mary, being without Original Sin and the holiest of all creatures, should not die. Death was the result of Original Sin. If Mary was free from Original Sin, she couldn't die. In the same way, she was preserved from death and the effect of death through her assumption. Jesus loves his mother so much that he would not allow her to experience death.

Mary as Queen of Heaven: The Book of Revelation is the best source of imagery and information that defends this dogma. Mary, being the Mother of God and the second most important in our salvation, should have a special role in Heaven as well. Thus she is given the role of "second in command" in Heaven. Technically this role is not that important in the interworking of Heaven. God is always in command and his will is always done by those in Heaven. Mary cannot go against God's will neither would she ever want to contradict him. Therefore her role as Queen of Heaven shows her importance in the grand scheme of everything. She is the most important human being, the one who greatly loves God, and wants to help everyone to come to know him and live in Heaven eternally.

Mary as Mediatrix: This title is complicated due to a more recent desire to expand upon the original declaration and declare Mary as Co-redeemer. As mediatrix she mediates graces from God to the faithful. She intercedes for the faithful and continues to pray for them and help them through the challenges of life. We have declared that she has this role of mediator of grace. The title that is causing confusion is co-redeemer: she joins Jesus in redeeming the world. The Church is reluctant to give her such an exalted title because it diminishes the role of Jesus in saving the world.

Mary Mother of the Church: this title was recently given a feast day by Pope Francis as the Monday after Pentecost. Mary is the one who birthed the Church, who is Jesus. The Church is also seen as feminine complementing Mary's role. The other side of this title showcases her role at Pentecost. She was there with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit came upon them and the Church was born. Therefore, we cannot dismiss her role in the Church and the life of the Church.

Mary's role in the Church

The role that Mary has played in the life of the Church cannot be understated. Not only did she birth and raise the Savior but she continually works for the salvation of the world. Mary appears more often than any of the other Saints even including God. Her maternal care has captivated the world and brought a deeper sense of God's action and care to the world. Mary has appeared to people of every continent and almost every country. Her messages are always the same: pray, pray the Rosary, do penance, fast, and return to God. We like to dismiss her words and focus on her care but she cares about our salvation and gives specific instruction to the faithful during her apparitions. The power of the Rosary has captivated generations of people. What other prayer is known to stop the Nazis from invading a country? What other prayer can change the lives of countless people and help them to know God's mercy? The Rosary is the strongest prayer associated with Mary and the one that has guided Christians for centuries.