

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

by Fr. Antony

The Blessed Mother

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Eve is considered the mother of humanity, but Mary is the “new Eve” and thus she is the mother of New Humanity. The fathers of the church taught that Mary received a number of distinctive blessings in order to make her a more fitting mother for Christ. The church describes her as “the most excellent fruit of redemption”. The following are some of the teachings of the church on Mary.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

It is important to understand what the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is, and what it is not. Some people think the term refers to Christ’s conception in Mary’s womb without the intervention of a human father; but that is the Virgin Birth. Others think that Mary was conceived “by the power of the Holy Spirit,” in the way Jesus was, but that, too, is incorrect. The Immaculate Conception means that Mary, whose conception was brought about the normal way, was conceived without original sin or its stain—that’s what “immaculate” means: without stain. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was officially defined by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854.

THE ASSUMPTION

The doctrine of the Assumption says that at the end of her life on earth, Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven. We have some good examples like, Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament. Some people think Catholics believe Mary “ascended” into heaven which is not correct. Christ, by his own power, ascended into heaven. Mary was assumed, or taken up into heaven by God. She didn’t do it under her own power. Pope Pius XII, in 1950, defined that Mary, “after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven. The Catholics honor her as the queen of heaven, and “a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun and moon was under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (**Rev 12:1**).

THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

There are people who claim that Mary bore children other than Jesus. To support their claim, they refer to the biblical passages which mention the “brethren of the Lord.” But this does not give us a clear notion that Mary bore other children besides Jesus. The term “brethren” comes from the Hebrew word “ACH” (Gk. Adelfhos) which means, sons of the same father or all the male members of the same clan or tribe. The Catholic Church believes the second meaning through the witness of Scripture and Tradition, and teaches that Jesus was Mary’s only child and that she remained a lifelong virgin.

An important historical document which supports the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity is the Protoevangelium of James, which was written probably around A.D. 120, when memories of her life were still vivid in the minds of many. According to this, Mary remained virgin before, in, and after the birth of Christ and this is the official teaching of the church today.

MARY MOTHER OF GOD (THEOTOKOS)

'Theotokos' comes from a Greek word meaning "God Bearer". Here Mary is the God Bearer, because St. John's Gospel says "and the Word was God" (**John 1:1**), "and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (**John 1:14**). So it is very clear that Mary gave birth to the Son of God, who is the second person of the Trinity. Thus, she becomes the "Theotokos", the 'GOD Bearer', the 'Mother of GOD'. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, called Mary the 'Mother of my Lord' (**Lk 1:41-43**). Through this, the Holy Spirit also give witness that Mary is the 'Bearer OF God'.

MARY: MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Jesus built His Church on Peter, but He remains its head. And if he is the head, then the entire Church is his Body (Colossians 1:18). At the foot of the cross, Jesus entrusted the followers of Jesus to Mary's care, and asked the faithful to accept Mary as our mother (**Jn 19:26**). Since the Son is the Church, along with rest of us, then His Mother is rightfully the Mother of the Church.