

**Why do Catholics consider Mary to be so important?
The Church's principal teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Presentation by James F. Gontis

Chief reasons that it is important to know the truth about Mary are that:

- Knowing the truth about the Blessed Mother helps us to know the truth about her Son, Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind.
- Mary always leads us to Jesus.
- To help people, be they your children, other family members, students in your classes or programs, other Catholics, non-Catholics, etc. deepen in the truth and can help them along on the path to salvation.

- I. What are the four Marian dogmas?
 - A. Mother of God
 - B. Immaculate Conception
 - C. Perpetual Virginity
 - D. Assumption
- II. Mother of God
 - A. Jesus is God, Mary is Jesus' mother, thus Mary is the Mother of God.
 - B. This dogma was first defined at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. This is an example of the Church protecting the whole truth about Christ, which had been denied by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople.
 - C. Patriarch/Bishop Nestorius claimed that Mary only gave birth to the human Jesus, but not the divine Jesus and therefore should not be called the Mother of God. This essentially makes Jesus into two persons rather than one person. You can see how distorting the truth about Mary, even more importantly distorts the truth about Jesus.
 - D. Mary gave birth to the person of Jesus. Jesus is a divine person with two natures – divine and human. What is the difference between person and nature?
 - E. Mary did not give Jesus His divinity. He always was God, is God now, and always will be God. He did take his humanity from Mary. Because He fully possesses the divine nature and the human nature, Jesus is true God and true man.

- F. However, Mary did not merely give birth to a nature, but rather, to the one Person of Jesus, Who is a Divine Person (2nd Person of the Trinity) with two natures (divine and human). When a woman gives birth, you won't hear her say, "Look at this little nature in my arms," but she might say, "Look at this little person in my arms," or something close to that.
- G. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity honored this woman above all women by becoming her Son. Jesus is Son of God and Son of Mary. If he honored her so, then we should honor her and love her.
- H. God the Son is the only Person who ever lived who chose His birth mother. She becomes His mother the moment He becomes incarnate in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- I. Mary as the "Ark of the New Covenant"
 - 1. 2 Samuel 6: 14-15 – David "danced" before the Ark
 - 2. Luke 1: 43-44 – Same word as that used in Septuagint (John the Baptist "leaped", but same word is used in the Greek "danced." Thus the infant John, "danced" in Elizabeth's womb before the new ark).
 - 3. The Old Ark carried the stone tablets of the law, the 10 commandments, the New Ark carries the Lawgiver Himself. The Old Ark carried the staff of Aaron the High Priest, the New Ark carries the Eternal High Priest. The Old Ark carried manna from the desert, the New Ark carries the Bread of Life.
- J. We can never love Mary more than Jesus does.

III. The Immaculate Conception

- A. "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin." - Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854
- B. Belief in the Immaculate Conception dates to the early centuries of the Church, but was not defined until 1854.
- C. In her apparitions to St. Bernadette at Lourdes in 1858, the Mother of God referred to herself by saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."
- D. She was redeemed / saved by Jesus, too, but her redemption was anticipatory. That is, God applied the merits, which Jesus

gained for us on the Cross, prior to the historical act of the crucifixion. Analogy – 2 ways to be saved from fire:

1. To be pulled out of a burning building – us
2. To be prevented from entering the burning building -
Mary

- E. The fruit of Christ's redemption was applied to Mary to preserve her from original sin. It is applied to us to remove sin (which ordinarily God first does for each of us when we are baptized). We need to do all that we can to teach that Baptism is not merely a symbolic act, but has life-giving and life-changing effects. We are changed ontologically by Baptism, that is, we are changed in our very being. By God's grace and her willing cooperation with His grace, Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.
- F. Genesis 3: 14 -15 – "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." Enmity = complete opposition. Genesis 3:15 is the protoevangelion.
- G. It is appropriate that the all-Holy God would take his human nature from one un-tainted by sin.
- H. Immaculate Conception often confused with the Virgin Birth. The distinction?
1. Immaculate Conception = Mary preserved from original sin from the first moment of her conception by the anticipated merits won for us by Jesus' sacrifice.
 2. Virgin Birth = The Blessed Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus

IV. Mary's Perpetual Virginity

- A. Mary is virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus.
- B. Mary's virginity is in no way to be understood as the Church saying that sex is evil or bad. To the contrary, sexual union, in its proper context, is good, even holy. The marital act is created by God for procreation and the union of spouses and sanctified by Christ through the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- C. Mary's virginity is the sign of her undivided gift of herself to God.
- D. Mary, as virgin and mother is model both to those who are married and to those who have been called to live out the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in

consecrated virginity, for those who have chosen, virginity “for the sake of the Kingdom,” cf. Mt. 19:12.

- E. Mary’s virginity shows forth God’s absolute initiative in the Incarnation. She was impregnated by the power of God the Holy Spirit in a holy unique way, cf. Lk. 1:35.
- F. The Church has traditionally seen Jesus’ “brothers” mentioned in the Gospel to be close relatives.
 - 1. Original language – terminology “brother” and “sister” was often used to refer to close relatives.
 - 2. In some languages and cultures this is still the case today.

V. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- A. “Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, and conqueror of sin and death.” - Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950.
- B. Mary’s Assumption is a result of her perfect obedience and cooperation with her Son.
- C. Though not defined until 1950, the Assumption of the Mother of God has been believed from the time of the early Church.
- D. The “woman clothed with the sun...” – Revelation 12:1
 - 1. Refers to the Church and Mary, Mother & Model of the Church.
- E. Mary’s Assumption is a singular participation in the resurrection of Jesus.
- F. At the same time, it is an anticipation of the glorious resurrection of all those who have died and will die in a state of sanctifying grace. Everyone will experience the Resurrection of the Body when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. Our risen body will be united to our soul. For those who are with God in heaven, their risen bodies will be glorified bodies, possessing magnificent characteristics, and will be beautiful beyond our imagining.
- G. The Assumption is often confused with the Ascension. The difference?
 - 1. The Ascension refers to Jesus going to “sit” at the right hand of the Father. He ascends by His own power.

2. The Assumption refers to Mary, at the end of her earthly life, being taken up body and soul into heaven. She was not assumed by her own power, rather, she was assumed into heaven by God.
- H. Did Mary die or not? The Church has not answered this question definitively. Look closely at the language used by Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* - "...when the course of her earthly life was finished..."
- VI. Our Blessed Mother is First in the Order of Grace – What does this mean?
- A. That she powerfully protects us and intercedes for us before her Son.
 - B. Motherhood in the order of grace – cf. *Lumen Gentium* 59
 1. Begins w/ her consent at the Annunciation
 2. Continues unwaveringly at the foot of the Cross
 3. Until eternal fulfillment of all the elect
 - C. She is Mother of the Church, cf. John 19: 26-27.
 - D. She is the handmaid of the Lord. She gives her complete fiat (complete consent) to God and to His plan. Her love and service for the Lord are also exemplified in her advice at Cana – “Do whatever He tells you.” Cf. Jn. 2: 1-12, Mt. 12: 46-50.
- VII. The Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- A. “Contemplation of the face of Christ in the school of Mary.”
Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*
 - B. Loved by the saints.
 - C. Favorite prayer of Pope John Paul II.
 - D. Pray the Rosary for families and for peace in the world.
 - E. “Quiet rhythm and a lingering pace”
 - F. Luminous Mysteries – Focus is on the public ministry of Jesus Christ.
 - G. “O Blessed Rosary of Mary...sweet chain which unites us to God...” – Blessed Bartolo Longo
- VIII. Questions

Note: Please see paragraph numbers 484 – 511, 966, and 974 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for more on the four Marian dogmas.

