



MARY - MOTHER OF GOD

Texts from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church

‘CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY’ (art. 3)

The Annunciation

The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates the ‘fullness of time’, the time of the fulfilment of God’s promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the ‘whole fullness of deity’ would dwell ‘bodily’. The divine response to her question, ‘How can this be, since I know not man?’, was given by the power of the Holy Spirit: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you.’ (484) The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and ordered to that of her Son. The Holy Spirit, ‘the Lord, the giver of Life’, is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the Father in a humanity drawn from her own. (486)

Christ and Mary - the unity of the Catholic faith

What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ. (487)

Mary’s predestination

‘God sent forth his Son’, but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the 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’:

“The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined Mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.” (Vatican II, the Church) (488)

The Old Covenant preparation for Mary

Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women *prepared* for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was *Eve*; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be the mother of all the living. By virtue of this promise, *Sarah* conceives a son in spite of her old age. God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises: *Hannah*, the mother of Samuel; *Deborah*; *Ruth*; *Judith* and *Esther*; and many other women. *Mary* ‘stands among the poor and the humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is established.’ (489)

The Immaculate Conception

To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary ‘was enriched with gifts appropriate to such a role.’ The angel Gabriel at the moment of the Annunciation salutes her as ‘full of grace.’ In fact in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace. (490)

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses. (491)

Chosen before the foundation of the world

The ‘splendour of an entirely unique holiness’ by which Mary is ‘enriched from the first instant of her conception’ comes wholly from Christ: she is ‘redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son.’ The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person ‘in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ and chose her ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love.’ (492)

The All-Holy

The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God ‘the All-Holy’ (*Panagia*), and celebrate her as ‘free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.’ By the grace of God Mary remained free from every personal sin her whole life long. (493)

‘Let it be done to me according to your word...’

Mary responded [to the angel] with the obedience of faith, certain that ‘with God nothing will be impossible’: ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.’ Thus, giving her consent to God’s word, Mary becomes the mother of Jesus. Espousing the divine will for salvation wholeheartedly, without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the work of her son; she did so in order to serve the mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God’s grace:

As St Irenaeus says, ‘Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.’ Hence not a few early Fathers gladly assert....: ‘the knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.’ Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary ‘the Mother of the living’ and frequently claim: ‘Death through Eve, life through Mary.’ (494)

The Mother of God (Theotokos)

Called in the Gospels 'the mother of Jesus', Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as 'the mother of my Lord'. In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly '*Mother of God*' (*Theotokos*). (495)

Mary's virginity

From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived 'by the Holy Spirit without human seed'. The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it was truly the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. (496)

The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility: 'that which was conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit', said the angel to Joseph about Mary his betrothed. The Church sees here the fulfilment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son.' (497)

Mary's spiritual motherhood

Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save: 'The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, that is, the faithful in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love'. (501)

Mary's virginal motherhood in God's plan

The eyes of faith can discover in the context of the whole of revelation the mysterious reasons why God wanted his Son to be born of a virgin. These reasons touch both on the person of Christ and his redemptive mission, and on the welcome Mary gave that mission on behalf of all men. (502)

- Mary's virginity manifests *God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation*. Jesus only has God as Father. 'He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures.' (503)
- Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because he is the *New Adam*, who inaugurates the new creation: 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.' (504)
- By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the *new birth* of children adopted by the Holy Spirit through faith. The acceptance of this life is virginal because it is entirely the Spirit's gift to man. The spousal character of the human vocation in relation to God is fulfilled perfectly in Mary's virginal motherhood. (505)
- Mary is a virgin because her virginity is the *sign of her faith* 'unadulterated by any doubt', and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will.
- At once virgin and mother, *Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realisation of the Church*. 'The Church by receiving the word of God in faith becomes a mother...by Baptism she brings forth [children] to immortal life. She is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.' (507)

Truly the Mother of God

Against the Nestorian heresy the Council of Ephesus proclaimed in 431 that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her womb: 'Mother of God, not that the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of its existence from the Holy Virgin, but that, since the holy body, animated by a rational soul, which the Word of God united to himself according to the hypostasis [person], was born from her, the Word is said to be born according to the flesh.' (466)

Against the Monophysite heresy the Council of Chalcedon in 451 confessed: 'He [Jesus] was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.' (467)

IN BRIEF

- **From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. 'Full of grace', Mary is the most excellent fruit of redemption': from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life. (508)**
- **Mary is truly 'Mother of God' since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself. (509)**
- **The Virgin Mary 'co-operated through free faith and obedience in human salvation'. She uttered her yes 'in the name of all human nature'. By her obedience she became the new Eve, the mother of the living. (511)**

