



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

What does the Church teach about Mary's Assumption into Heaven?

In light of the 100th Anniversary of Our Lady's messages at Fatima, it is helpful to examine Church teaching about Mary. On August 15th, the Church celebrates the Feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven. Let us examine the evidence with which the Church assures us of the truth of this **revealed** teaching and try to understand its great significance and the personal implications it has for each one of us.

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII definitively declared the Assumption of Mary in these words:

"The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."

Very simply and practically stated, this means that at the end of Mary's life on earth, she experienced the "resurrection of the body" promised to all believers at the end of time who faithfully follow Jesus Christ.

Mary's Assumption is strongly connected to and is the natural result of both her Immaculate Conception – being conceived without Original Sin – and her sinless life. Physical death and, more specifically, corruption of the body are effects of Original Sin and personal sin. The Assumption, therefore, is the ultimate fulfillment and most beautiful expression of her preservation from Original Sin, her life-long adherence to God's will and her very personal, **freely chosen**, and lifelong cooperation with God's plan which **sustained** the fullness of grace given by Him at her conception (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 411).

Though first of all and uniquely she is a beneficiary of Christ's victory over sin in her Immaculate Conception, in her created human personhood she continues, "by a special grace of God," to commit "no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life" (CCC 411) and thus **becomes hope** for all the redeemed who seek the fullness of Christ's Resurrection, body and soul.

As the Immaculate Conception explains how Mary was saved by being "preserved" from sin by Jesus in a unique way, the Assumption proclaims that Mary likewise experienced, in

advance, the **fruit** of that freedom from sin: a glorified body and an immediate union of her whole being (body and soul) with God at the end of her earthly life.

The Scriptural foundation for Mary's Assumption is Genesis 3:15. As the papal document of Pope Pius XII explains, this Scripture foreshadows Mary as intimately sharing in the same absolute victory of her Son over Satan. The setting for this passage in Genesis takes place after the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, in which God speaks to Satan in these words: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed [Jesus Christ]; He will crush your head and you will strike His heel."

Dr. Mark Miravalle, a renowned professor of Mariology, states that Scriptural support for the Assumption includes Luke 1:28 as we consider the greeting of the Angel to Mary, "Hail, full of grace", "because a creature with a fullness of grace and no sin would not experience the effects of sin in the body—for example, a physical decay leading to death." He continues, "We also have the lovely reference to both Jesus' Ascension (something He does by His own divine power) and Mary's Assumption (something she passively receives from God) in Psalm 132:8, where the Psalmist says 'Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the Ark which you have sanctified.' As Mary is the 'New Ark' who carried Jesus inside of her, this passage also foreshadows her bodily Assumption into Heaven." (See *Introduction to Mary*, Queenship Publishing, 1993, p. 51 and *Meet Your Mother*, Lighthouse, 2014, p. 38)

The question is often asked: Did Mary die? How we answer this question depends on how we define death. If by death we mean the *separation of soul and body at the end of earthly life*, the answer is that the Church has never defined whether or not Mary experienced a temporary separation of soul and body at the end of her earthly life prior to her Assumption.

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By Francesco Granacci: Mary's Assumption into Heaven.

The Church, in her prudence, avoids “definition” when there is no clear revelation from God in Scripture or Tradition. A temporary separation (of soul and body), as long as it did not include material corruption of the body (the effect of sin), could have been experienced; this is the more common theological opinion in our Catholic tradition. What is certain is that Mary could not experience “material death” (corruption of the body) that comes as a result of Original Sin.

How is Mary’s Assumption into Heaven Important for Us?

Dr. Allen Schreck, in his book *Catholic and Christian: An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Beliefs*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Dynamic Catholic, p. 221) explains succinctly: “Belief in the Assumption is a source of **hope** for Christians because it foreshadows what will one day happen to each faithful Christian. The raising of Mary, body and soul, to the glory of heaven *anticipates* what will happen at the final judgment to all who are to be saved. It provides hope that Christians will one day experience the resurrection of the body that she has already experienced *through the grace* of her Son, Jesus Christ” (italics added).

The Second Vatican Council teaches that Mary “cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring the supernatural life of grace to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 61). It goes on to teach that “This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent

which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. **Taken up to Heaven** she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.” (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 62, bolding added).

This “manifold intercession”, this mediation—her prayer on our behalf—is always **secondary** and **subordinate** to that of **Christ**, the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5; See also *Lumen Gentium*, No. 62). Still, in accordance with His will and always dependent on Christ’s primacy, *we are continually inspired and assisted in all our “yeses”* along our faith journey by Mary’s ever present “yes” to God.

Continuing to speak of Mary, the document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium* no. 68) assures us that she is now in the glory of Heaven, and the glory that she possesses in body and soul “is the image and the beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come.” Significantly, it goes on to say, “so too does she shine forth **on earth . . . as a sign of hope and comfort** for the pilgrim people as we are still on our way.” What a marvelous role! How can we not eagerly invite – as did the visionary children of Fatima – this **wondrous help** that **God** has so graciously provided in the person of Mary?!

This bulletin insert was written by Carol Lankford, consecrated virgin and spiritual director, and is a shortened version of one of a series of six pamphlets. For access to all six pamphlets—which contain additional exposition, more detailed referencing—contact Ann Lankford, Director, Office for Catechesis and Evangelization, 608-791-2658

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