

Catechist
Background
Information

God Chose Mary (for catechists)

Our Catholic faith teaches us that Mary was a virgin her entire life, both before and after the birth of Jesus. Virgins were looked down on in the Jewish society of that time. The birth of the Savior to a virgin living in an obscure village was a powerful sign of God's special love for the lowly people of the world.

When Mary was asked to be the mother of the Savior, she was completely free to accept or reject the offer. Her response, "Let it be done to me," was a great act of faith. Because she did not understand what was happening, she must have known that there would be difficulties ahead.

Because she replied yes to the angel's announcement and agreed to become the mother of Jesus, the Church has declared Mary to be the Mother of God. Because she was the first to say yes to the Messiah, the Church has declared her to be the Mother of the Church.

Mary is very special to Catholics. We feel a closeness to her because of her role in salvation history and because of her closeness to Jesus. We venerate Mary because we know that she can bring us closer to God.

Immaculate Conception

The Immaculate Conception is the doctrine that Mary was preserved free from original sin from the first moment of her conception. Prior to the Middle Ages, there was no discussion of this idea. When the idea was suggested, prominent theologians, including Saints Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, opposed it.

Gradually, however, the idea took hold, and the 16th-century Council of Trent excluded Mary when it talked about original sin. On December 8, 1854, Blessed Pope Pius IX defined the Immaculate Conception as a dogma of the Catholic Church. Eight years earlier, the bishops of the United States had chosen Mary under the title of her Immaculate Conception to be patroness of their country. Thirty-one dioceses in the United States have adopted Mary of the Immaculate Conception as their patroness. Today the largest Catholic church in the Americas is the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Feast day December 8

If you were given a saint's name at baptism, that saint is your patron saint. Countries also have patron saints. Who is the patron saint of the United States?

If you answered, "Mary, the mother of Jesus," you are correct. In 1846, the bishops of the United States were asked to watch over our country in a special way. They also chose one particular title and feast of Mary—her Immaculate Conception.

The title of the Immaculate Conception recognizes Mary's privilege of coming into the world free from sin. Through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, every human being can be freed from sin at Baptism. Through that same power, Mary was always free from sin, even from that very first moment of life.

On December 8, the Church celebrates this special privilege given to Mary. At the liturgy we thank God for all his blessings he has given to the people of our country. And we can thank Mary for watching over and protecting our people.

The Assumption of Mary

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that "The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven" (CCC 974).

It goes on to tell us that Mary's Assumption is an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians. While Scripture tells us nothing of Mary's death, the celebration of Mary's Assumption into heaven has been part of Church tradition since the earliest days of the Church and has been in all Christian countries since the Middle Ages.