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10 Questions about the Virgin Mary

In this month dedicated in many places to the Mother of God, this article can help us to get to know and love Our Lady better.

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Summary

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1. How did the Son of God become man?

The historical moment, foreseen by God from all eternity, took place in a village of Galilee, in Nazareth, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, a young Jewish girl, "a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David; the virgin's name was Mary," says St. Luke in chapter 1 of his Gospel.

To come into the world God wanted the free cooperation of a creature, Mary, to be the mother of his Son. "The Father of mercies willed that the consent of her who was predestined to be the Mother should precede the Incarnation so that, just

as one woman contributed to death (Eve), so another woman might contribute to life." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 488-511)

2. How did God choose Mary? What did the Angel Gabriel say to Mary in Nazareth, and how did she respond?

St. Luke narrates in the first chapter of his Gospel how the Angel Gabriel says to Mary: "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you! When she heard these words, she was puzzled and wondered what this greeting could mean. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for God has favored you. You will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the

throne of his father David; he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom shall have no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know man?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God".

By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith. "How can this be?" Participation in the divine life arises "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." 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.
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
504)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- How would we have behaved if we had been able to choose our mother? I think we would have chosen the one we have, filling her with all graces. That is what Christ did: being Omnipotent, all-wise and Love itself, his power fulfilled all his will.
(*Christ is Passing By*, 171)
- Our Mother had meditated deep and long on the words of the holy men and women of the Old Testament who awaited the Saviour, and on the events that they had taken part in. She must have marvelled at all the great things that God, in his boundless mercy, had done for his people, who were so often ungrateful. As she considers the

tenderness shown time after time by God towards his people, Mary's immaculate Heart breaks out in loving words, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour, for he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid.' The early Christians, children of this good Mother, learned from her; we can, and we ought to do likewise. (*Friends of God*, 241)

3. Was Mary free to respond to God's plans for her?

Mary is invited to conceive the one in whom the fullness of the divinity will dwell bodily, and she asks what she does not understand, "How shall this be, since I know not man?" The divine answer to her question was,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."

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, mother of the living. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 484, 511)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- Don't forget, my friend, that we are children. The Lady of the sweet name, Mary, is withdrawn in prayer. You, in that house, are whatever you want to be: a friend, a servant, an onlooker, a neighbour... —I, at this moment, don't dare to be anything. I hide behind you; full of awe, I contemplate the scene: The Archangel delivers his message... *Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?* —How shall this be done since I

know not man? (Luke 1:34) Our Mother's voice brings to my memory —by contrast— all the impurities of men... mine too. And then how I hate the low, mean things of the earth...What resolutions! *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*— Be it done unto me according to Thy word (Luke 1:38). By the enchantment of this virginal phrase, the Word was made flesh. The first decade is about to end... I still have time to tell my God, before anyone else does: Jesus, I love You. (*Holy Rosary*, 1st Joyful Mystery)

- Mother, Oh Mother! With that word of yours — *fiat*, 'be it done' — you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his Glory. Blessed art thou! (*The Way*, 512)
- The Virgin did not merely pronounce her *fiat*; in every moment she fulfilled that firm

and irrevocable decision. So should we. When God's love gets through to us and we come to know what he desires, we ought to commit ourselves to be faithful, loyal — and then be so in fact. Because "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven." (*Christ is Passing By*, 173)

4. What does it mean that Jesus was conceived by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit?

It means that God became Man, without the intervention of man. Jesus has only God as Father (cf. Lk 2:48-49). It means that Mary was a Virgin.

Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . 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. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 503)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- When the days of the Mother's purification are accomplished, according to the Law of Moses, the Child must be taken to Jerusalem, to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:22). And this time it will be you, my friend, who will carry the cage with the doves (Luke 2:24). —Just think: She —the Immaculate!— submits herself to the Law as if she were defiled.

- Through this example, foolish child, will you learn to obey the Holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?
- Purification! You and I surely do need purification! — Atonement, and more than atonement, Love. — Love as a searing iron to cauterize our souls' uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretched tinder of our hearts.
- A just and God-fearing man has come to the temple led by the Holy Ghost —it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Christ. —He takes the Messiah in his arms and says to Him: Now, My Lord, Thou canst take Thy servant out of this world in peace, according to Thy promise... because my eyes have seen the Saviour (Luke 2:25-30). (*Holy Rosary*, 4th Joyful Mystery)

5. What is the relationship between Eve and 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. Against all human expectation 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 out among the poor and 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. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 489)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- If you and I had had the power, we too would have made her Queen and Lady of all creation. A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman with a crown of twelve stars upon her head. —Clothed with the sun. —The moon at her feet (Rev 12:1). Mary, Virgin without stain, has repaired the fall of Eve: and she crushed the head of the infernal serpent with her immaculate heel. Daughter of God, Mother of God, Spouse of God. (*Holy Rosary*, 5th Glorious Mystery)
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6. What does it mean that Mary is full of grace?

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.

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, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: "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, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of

original sin." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 490-491)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- There is no heart more human than that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense. Think of Holy Mary, who is full of grace, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Her Heart has room for all humanity and makes no distinction or discrimination. — Every person is her son or her daughter. (*Furrow*, 801)
- Mary, *Regina pacis*, Queen of Peace, because you had faith and believed that what the angel announced would in fact happen. Help us to grow in the faith, to have a firm hope and a deeper love. (*Christ is Passing By*, 170)

7. How can a woman be the Mother of God?

Mary is truly "Mother of God" because she is the mother of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself, as God's Revelation tells us through Sacred Scripture. Christians have lived this truth of faith from the earliest times.

The gaze of faith, united to the whole of Revelation, can discover the mysterious reasons why God, in his salvific design, wanted his Son to be born of a virgin. These reasons refer both to the person and redemptive mission of Christ and to Mary's acceptance of this mission for mankind. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 502-509)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- Our mother is a model of correspondence to grace. If we contemplate her life, our Lord will give us the light we need to divinize our everyday existence. Throughout the year when we celebrate feasts dedicated to Mary and frequently on other days, we Christians can think of the Virgin. If we take advantage of these moments, trying to imagine how she would conduct herself in our circumstances, we will make steady progress. And in the end we will resemble her, as children come to look like their mother. (*Christ is Passing By*, 173)
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8. Why is she also the mother of Christians and the mother of the Church?

Jesus is Mary's only Son. But Mary's spiritual motherhood extends to all those whom he came to save: "She gave birth to the Son, whom God appointed the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29), that is, of those who believe, to whose birth and upbringing she contributes with a mother's love.

St. John, in chapter 19 of his Gospel, records the words of Jesus to his mother: "Beside the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw the mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your Mother.'"

At the same time that she is recognized and venerated as the true Mother of God and of the Redeemer, it is said even more: she is truly the Mother of the members (of Christ) because she collaborated with her love so that believers, members of that head, could be born in the Church. Mary is Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 963-967)

Mary is both virgin and mother because she is the figure and the most perfect fulfillment of the Church: "The Church [...] becomes Mother by the word of God accepted in faith, since, by preaching and baptism, she begets children conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God to a new and immortal life. She too is a virgin who keeps intact and pure the fidelity promised to the Bridegroom" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 64).

(Catechism of the Catholic Church.
501-507)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- Our mother, you brought to earth Jesus, who reveals the love of our Father God. Help us to recognize him in the midst of the cares of each day. Stir up our mind and will so that we may listen to the voice of God, to the calls of grace. (*Christ is Passing By*, 174)
- Seeing how so many Christians express their affection for the Virgin Mary, surely you also feel more a part of the Church, closer to those brothers and sisters of yours. It is like a family reunion. Grown-up children, whom life has separated, come back to their mother for some family anniversary. And even if they have not always got on well

together, today things are different; they feel united, sharing the same affection.

- Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the mystical body and more united to its visible head, the pope. That's why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary! By seeing ourselves as part of the Church and united to our brothers in the faith, we understand more deeply that we are brothers of all mankind, for the Church has been sent to all the peoples of the earth.
(*Christ is Passing By*, 139)

- She is consolation, help, hope, Queen and, above all, Mother: Mother! Call her again and again. She is listening, she sees you in danger perhaps, and with her Son's grace she, your

holy Mother Mary, offers you the refuge of her arms, the tenderness of her embrace. Call her, and you will find yourself with added strength for the new struggle. (*The Way*, 516)

9. What is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary?

The Blessed Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was taken body and soul to the glory of heaven, where she already participates in the glory of the resurrection of her Son, anticipating the resurrection of all the members of her body. Therefore, we Christians affirm: "We believe that the Most Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal

office with regard to the members of Christ" (Creed of the People of God).

The Church looks to Mary to contemplate in her what the Church is in her mystery, in her pilgrimage of faith, and what she will be at the end of her journey, where she awaits, for the glory of the Most Holy and indivisible Trinity, in communion with all the saints the one whom the Church venerates as the Mother of her Lord and as her own Mother: "Meanwhile, the Mother of Jesus, already glorified in heaven in body and soul, is the image and beginning of the Church which will reach its fullness in the age to come. In this world too, until the day of the Lord comes, she shines before the People of God on the way as a sign of sure hope and consolation" (*Lumen Gentium*). (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 972-974)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- The feast of the assumption of our Lady prompts us to acknowledge the basis for this joyful hope. Yes, we are still pilgrims, but our mother has gone on ahead, where she points to the reward of our efforts. She tells us that we can make it. And, if we are faithful, we will reach home. The blessed Virgin is not only our model, she is the help of Christians. And as we besiege her with our petitions — "Show that you are our Mother" — she cannot help but watch over her children with motherly care. (*Christ is Passing By*, 177)
- The divine Motherhood of Mary is the source of all the perfections and privileges with which she is endowed. Because of it, she was conceived immaculate and is full of grace;

because of it, she is ever virgin,
she was taken up body and soul
to heaven and has been
crowned Queen of all creation,
above the angels and saints.
Greater than she, none but God.
'The Blessed Virgin from the
fact that she is the Mother of
God has a certain infinite
dignity which comes from the
infinite good, which is God.'
There is no danger of
exaggerating. We can never
hope to fathom this
inexpressible mystery; nor will
we ever be able to give
sufficient thanks to our Mother
for bringing us into such
intimacy with the Blessed
Trinity. (*Friends of God*, 276)

10. Why does Our Lady occupy a central place in the lives of Christians?

"All generations will call me blessed": The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship. The Church rightly honors the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs.... This very special devotion differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration. The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an "epitome of the whole Gospel," express this devotion to the Virgin Mary. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 971)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- How does a normal son or daughter treat his mother? In different ways, of course, but always affectionately and confidently, never coldly. In an intimate way, through small, commonplace customs. And a mother feels hurt if we omit them: a kiss or an embrace when leaving or coming home, a little extra attention, a few warm words.
- In our relationship with our mother in heaven, we should act in very much the same way. Many Christians have the custom of wearing the scapular; or they have acquired the habit of greeting those pictures — a glance is enough — which are found in every christian home and in many public places; or they recall the central events in Christ's life by saying the rosary,

never getting tired of repeating its words, just like people in love. (*Christ is Passing By*, 142)

- If you feel proud to be a son of Our Lady, ask yourself: How often do I express my devotion to the Virgin Mary during the day, from morning to night? (*The Forge*, 433)

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