

# HOLY BIBLE STUDY QUEEN

THE MOTHER OF GOD  
*in the* WORD OF GOD

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Read each lesson as well as the Bible passages and other resources the instructor recommends. Taking notes will help you remember what you read. Then answer the study questions.

In between lessons, review your notes, reread the lessons and continue to study and pray over the Bible passages cited by the instructor. Using a daily Missal, you may want to see how these passages are used and interpreted in the Church's liturgy.

Be sure you begin and end each study session with prayer.

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The studies are designed for you to work at your own pace privately or with a group.

We suggest to use the individual Sacred Art pieces for *Visio Divina*. Similar to Lectio Divina, Visio Divina invites us to experience the divine mysteries of the Sacred Scriptures in a unique and powerful way through careful meditation and prayer while interacting with Sacred Art.

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# Introduction

## About the Study

The Mother of Jesus is mentioned only about a dozen times in the New Testament. So why is Mary so important to Catholic faith and devotion?

As we'll see in this in-depth study, Mary is a key gateway into salvation history. The Bible portrays Mary as the all-holy one who gave the Word flesh, the Mother of God, and the spiritual mother of all who live by faith in her Son.

We begin by learning how to read the Old Testament the way Jesus taught the Apostles to read it - as containing "types" that foreshadow and prepare His coming in the New Testament. Ranging widely through the Old Testament, we'll explore the essential biblical "types" of Mary. We'll see how she is depicted as the new Eve, the new Ark of the Covenant, and the new Queen Mother of the Kingdom of God. We'll see how at critical junctures in salvation history, the figure of Mary is foreshadowed and anticipated.

We also explore the biblical basis for key Catholic doctrines and dogmas regarding Mary - her Immaculate Conception, perpetual virginity and Assumption into heaven.

## Objectives

- I. To understand the biblical basis for Catholic faith and devotion to Mary.
- II. To understand Mary's pivotal role in God's plan of salvation as that plan is presented in the Bible and Church teaching.
- III. To gain new appreciation for Mary's importance in the family of God, and be able to express that more faithfully and intelligently in prayer, devotion, and personal witness.



## Materials

The primary text will be the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Old and New Testament. Each lesson will recommend certain passages for reading and study. In addition, the instructors recommend the following book, which covers much of the material to be studied in this course.

*Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* by Scott Hahn

Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Old and New Testament

# LESSON ONE

# A BIBLICAL INTRODUCTION TO MARY

## Lesson Outline

1. From Scripture to Creed
  - I. Mary of the New Testament
  - II. Mary of Doctrine and Devotion
2. Reading Mary in Matthew
  - I. Of Her Was Born
  - II. Through the Holy Spirit
3. Reading Mary in Luke
  - I. The Lord Is With You
  - II. Handmaid of the Lord
4. Reading Like Jesus
  - I. Literal, Historical, Divine
  - II. Typology and Mary
5. Study Questions

## Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the basic outlines of the New Testament's witness to Mary.
- II. To appreciate how the Old Testament forms the essential background for what the New Testament teaches about Mary.
- III. To understand "typology" and its importance for reading the New Testament texts concerning Mary.

# From Scripture to Creed

## Mary of the New Testament

What the New Testament has to say about Mary fills only a few verses.

She is the focus of several passages in the Gospels and is referred to once in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Scriptures do depict Mary at every stage in her Son's life - at His conception and birth; during His childhood; at the start of His ministry, at the foot of the Cross, and following His Resurrection and Ascension.

But in most of these cases, Mary's presence amounts to little more than a mention.

Basically, this is what we learn from the Scriptures:

An angel announced that Mary would bear Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26-38). While pregnant with Him, she paid a long visit to her relative, Elizabeth (see Luke 1:39-56).

She bore Jesus in Bethlehem (see Matthew 1:18-25) and was by His crib as magi (see Matthew 2:11) and shepherds (see Luke 2:15-20) paid Him homage. Under threat of danger, she fled with her newborn and Joseph, her husband, into Egypt (see Matthew 2:14).

Mary presented Jesus in the Temple (see Luke 2:23, 33-35), and later, when He was twelve, found Him there teaching (see Luke 2:48-51).

Mary was at the wedding in Cana where Jesus performed His first miracle (see John 2:1-11). She was there, too, at Nazareth when He was rejected by His own people (see Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6).

She watched Him die on the Cross (see John 19:25-28), and was among those gathered with the Apostles in Jerusalem awaiting Pentecost and the sending of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:14).

There are also a few indirect mentions of Mary in

the New Testament. An anonymous woman cries out to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that carried you" (see Luke 11:27-28). Paul mentions her but not by name (see Galatians 4:4). And she is apparently the woman depicted in a fantastic vision in the Bible's last book (see Revelation 11:19-12:18).

## Mary of Doctrine and Devotion

Even counting indirect mentions, Mary is referred to just fourteen times in the New Testament. That's far less than some of the Apostles - certainly less than Peter, who is mentioned about 155 times.

How then did she come to be one of only two people mentioned by name in the Apostles' Creed ("...born of the Virgin Mary")? How did she come to inspire some of the Church's earliest liturgies and prayers, as well as some of its most controversial and misunderstood dogmas?

These questions have long been sticking points for many Christians, who can find no basis in Scripture for what Catholics believe and pray about Mary.

At best, they look upon our Marian beliefs and devotions as products of a pious but misguided imagination. At worst, they call it "Mariolatry" - a false worship that undermines the perfect saving work of Christ and robs Him of His glory.

Unfortunately, many devout Catholics would be equally hard-pressed to explain the connection between the Mary of the Bible and the Mary of Catholic doctrine and devotion.

That's why this course is important.

We're going to discover that when it comes to Mary, there's far more to Scripture than what first meets the eye. We'll see why prayers such as the "Hail Mary" are composed largely of biblical words, and see how the Church's Marian dogmas and doctrines are definitive interpretations of Scriptures concerning Mary.

In fact, through close study of the Bible, we're going to find the seeds not only for Catholic devotions such as the Rosary, but for dogmas and doctrines such as Mary's Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, and her crowning as Queen of Heaven.

Catholic devotion to Mary, rooted in the biblical witness of Christ's first followers, is far from blasphemy or idolatry. At the end of this course, you may wonder whether it is blasphemy not to honor Mary - as God's most perfect work, the human person who most truly conforms to the image of God (see Genesis 1:27; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49).

To appreciate the connections between the Mary of Scripture and the Mary of doctrine and devotion, we need to learn how to read the Scriptures as they were written. When we do, we'll discover that, though the biblical data is scant, it is rich in divine meaning.



Section I. End

# Reading Mary in Matthew

## Of Her Was Born. . .

Consider this a "reading lesson." We're going to learn how to read from the New Testament writers themselves. We want to start by simply understanding the "literal" or literary sense of these texts - what the words on the page tell us about Mary.

Mary's first appearance in the New Testament comes in its very first chapter - at the end of the long genealogy that begins the New Testament.

She is introduced as: "Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah" (see Matthew 1:16).

We have to read these words in context. These are the final words of a list of descendants Matthew has drawn up to demonstrate that Jesus is "Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (see Matthew 1:1).

To understand the literal meaning of this text about Mary, then, we have to know some background about the Christ, and about David and Abraham.

Abraham was the founding father of God's chosen people, Israel. God made a covenant with him, promising that through his descendants "all the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (see Genesis 22:18).

God promised Abraham that kings would stem from his line (see Genesis 17:6) and later swore an oath to Israel's King David - that his kingdom would have no end, that David's son would be His son and would reign forever, not only over Israel but over all the nations (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 89:27-28; Psalm 132:4-5; 11-12).

But David's kingdom crumbled and the people were dispersed into exile (see Matthew 1:11; 2 Kings 24:14).

From that time forward, Israel's prophets taught them to hope for a "Christ" (or "Messiah" in Hebrew). He was expected to be the son of God promised to David, who would liberate Israel's scattered tribes and reunite them in a new and everlasting kingdom that would be a light to the nations (see Isaiah 9:5-6; 49:6;

55:3; Ezekiel 34:23-25,30; 37:25).

Read in context, then, the few words that Matthew gives us about Mary are no trifling matter.

In this short sentence, Matthew has effectively positioned Mary at the center of Israel's history - the history of God's chosen people. Of her was born the Christ through whom God would fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham and David.

As mother of the royal Messiah of Israel, Mary is also necessarily at the center of human history. For the fruit of her womb will be the source of the world's salvation. Through Christ, born of Mary, God will bestow His divine blessings upon all nations and peoples.

## Through the Holy Spirit

Matthew continues this theme in the verses that follow, as he describes how Mary was "found with child through the Holy Spirit" (see Matthew 1:18-25).

He tells us that Mary's conception by the Spirit fulfills a promise God made through the prophet Isaiah - that a virgin would bear a son who would be called Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us" (see Matthew 1:18,22-23; Isaiah 7:14).

This was an obscure prophecy. Nobody that we know of at the time of Jesus believed it had anything to do with the coming Messiah. Some rabbis said the prophecy had been fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime - when King Hezekiah was born.

Hezekiah was indeed a mighty reformer who "pleased the Lord, just as his forefather David had done." In addition, Scripture tells us, "the Lord was with him" (see 2 Kings 18:1-7; 2 Chronicles 29-32).

But Matthew seems to be telling us that Hezekiah was at best only a partial and imperfect fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Its perfect fulfillment awaited the

Spirit's conception of Jesus in Mary's womb.

Mary is "she who is to give birth," as Malachi foretold in a prophecy Matthew will later quote (see Micah 5:1-2; Matthew 2:6). Through Mary, mother of the long-awaited Messiah, "God is with us."

Again, to understand the literal meaning of this passage, we have to understand the deep Old Testament context that Matthew assumes.

Matthew expects that his readers will hear in these words the promise that echoes throughout salvation history - the promise of the divine presence, that God will one day come to dwell with His people (see Isaiah 43:5; Zechariah 8:23; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

This was one of the great messianic hopes stirred by the prophets. Ezekiel, for one, prophesied a new King David and an "everlasting covenant" by which God would promise: "My dwelling shall be with them; I

will be their God, and they shall be My people" (see Ezekiel 37:24-28; Revelation 21:3).

And we hear echoes of Isaiah's Emmanuel prophecy throughout Matthew's Gospel. Jesus repeatedly describes how He will be "with us" for all time, especially in the Eucharist (see Matthew 18:20, 25:40,45; 26:26-28). His last words resound with the promise: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (see Matthew 28:20).

Matthew's reference to Mary as the Virgin prophesied by Emmanuel once more places her at the center of God's saving plan - for Israel and for the world.

The literal meaning of this text is that Mary is the divine "sign" that long ago God promised to give - the sign of His faithfulness to His eternal covenant with David, the sign that He has come to fulfill His purposes for all creation.



Section II. End

# Reading Mary in Luke

## The Lord Is With You

We turn now to Luke's Gospel. We want to look closely at his account of the Annunciation (see Luke 1:26-38). Here again we simply want to read the literal text in its literary context. As it is written, we want to know what this passage tells us about Mary. Luke, like Matthew, introduces Mary as a virgin betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David. She is greeted by the angel Gabriel: "Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you." The angel uses a word - variously translated hail or rejoice - that the prophets used to foretell the joy of the people at the Messiah's coming (see Joel 2:23-24; Zechariah 9:9). In fact, the angel's announcement seems to be drawn almost word-for-word from a prophecy of Zephaniah (see Zephaniah 3:14-18)

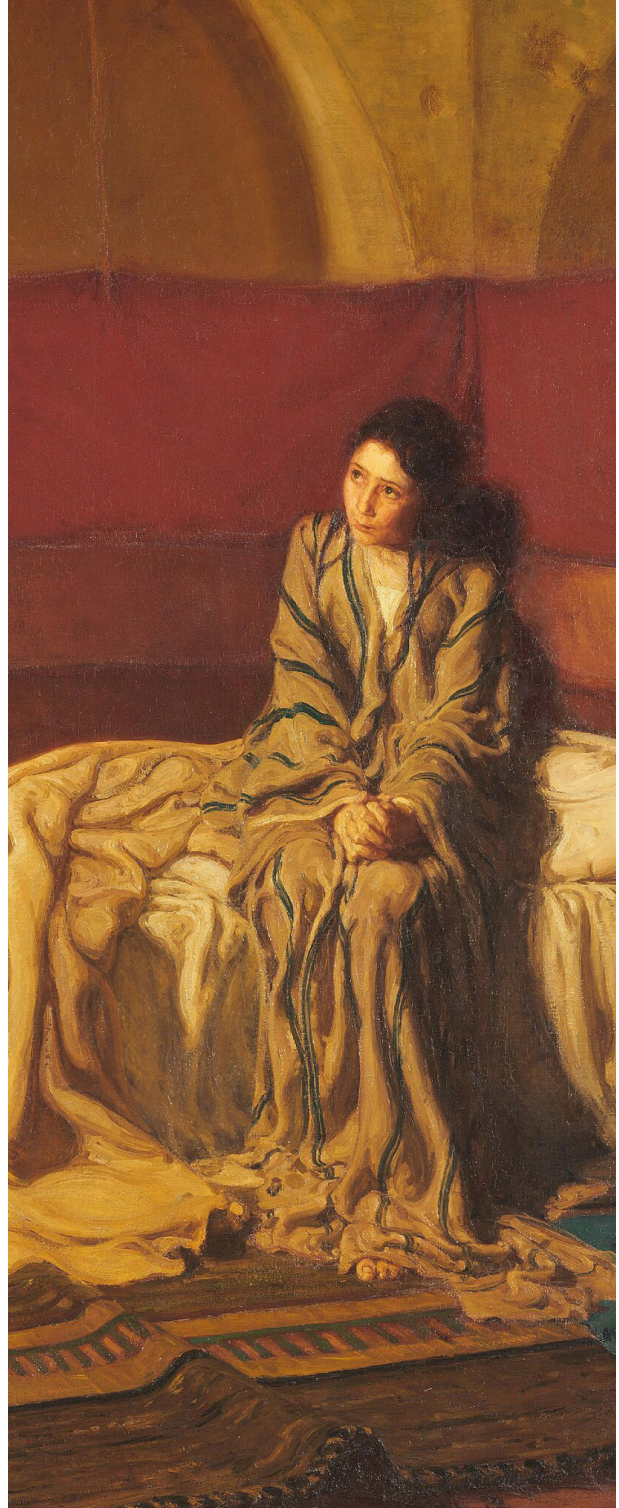
<i>Luke 1</i>	<i>Zephaniah 3</i>
Hail,	Shout for joy,
favored one!	O daughter Zion!
The Lord	The King of Israel, the Lord
is with you. . .	is in your midst . . .
Do not be afraid, Mary	Fear not, O Zion . . .
You will conceive in your womb	Your God is in your midst,
...[the] Son of the Most High	a mighty savior

Luke seems to be depicting Mary as Daughter Zion - the representative of her people - called to rejoice that God, as her Savior and King, has come into her midst. As in Matthew, then, we see the historic hopes of Israel focused in the person of Mary. The words the prophets taught Israel to long to hear - "Say to daughter Zion, your Savior comes!" (see Isaiah 62:11) - are heard now by Mary. The angel also tells Mary that her Son will be "Son of the Most High" and will be given "the throne of David His father." For the literal meaning of this passage, we have to return to the Old Testament background of God's covenant with David. In fact, in the angel's words we hear echoes of God's covenant with David (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:4-5; 27-30). God swore that David's son would be "a son to Me." And the angel promises that Mary's child will be "Son of the Most High" - another way of saying "Son of God" (see Mark 5:7; Luke 1:35; 8:28). God swore that David's son would rule on his throne forever. The angel promises that Mary's Son will be seated on "the throne of David his father...forever." Mary is shown here to be the "sign" that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah from David's dynastic line.

## Handmaid of the Lord

We'll focus on other elements of Luke's Annunciation story in future lessons. For now, let's jump ahead to the conclusion of Luke's account. Mary has asked how she, as a virgin, will conceive the child promised by the angel. The angel replies: "For nothing will be impossible for God" (see Luke 1:37). These words, too, are freighted with Old Testament meaning. An angel spoke almost these same words to Abraham's wife, Sarah, when she laughed at the notion that in her old age she would bear the son that God had promised to Abraham (see Genesis 18:14). Luke appears to be showing us that Mary, too, is being called to bear the son of God's covenant promise. In fact, through a close reading of Luke's Annunciation story, we can hear echoes of a number of miraculous births in the salvation history. In addition to the birth of Isaac to Sarah, we can hear echoes of Rebekah's conception of Jacob and Esau (see Genesis 25:21-22); Rachel's conception of Joseph (see Genesis 29:31; 30:22-24); and Manoah's

wife's conception of Samson (see Judges 13:2-7). Mary's response to the angel takes up the story of still another barren woman who found favor with God - Hannah the mother of Samuel (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 19-20). In presenting herself as "the handmaid of the Lord," she recalls the oath of Hannah - who pleaded with God for a son, vowing to consecrate him to the Lord. Three times Hannah described herself as the Lord's "handmaid" (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 16, 18). Made a gift to the Lord by his grateful mother (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 22; 2:20), Samuel became a holy and righteous priest and prophet, chosen by God to anoint David as King. In describing herself as the Lord's handmaid, Mary too is vowing to dedicate her child to God. Her child, too, will be a holy prophet and priest, anointed to be a Davidic king.



Section III. End

# Reading Like Jesus

## Literal, Historical, Divine

What do we learn from our literary reading of these Marian texts from Matthew and Luke?

First, the literary reading gives us knowledge of an historical truth - the birth of Jesus through the Holy Spirit to a virgin named Mary.

This historical truth at the same time conveys to us a divine meaning.

That is to say: the historical events, and the manner in which these events are written about, communicate far more than factual information. They reveal the existence of a plan of salvation that God is working out in human history.

Matthew and Luke's accounts assume the existence of a divine economy, in which the covenant oaths God swore to Abraham and David centuries earlier are meant to find their ultimate fulfillment in the future coming of Christ.

Indeed, Matthew and Luke seem to envision a sort of golden thread connecting the events, figures and institutions of the Old Testament with those of their New Testament.

The reason for the evangelists' careful use of quotes and allusions to Israel's past is to reveal that unity between the Old and New Testaments - to show how what happens to Mary is a continuation and culmination of what has gone before.

## Typology and Mary

This way of reading and writing is broadly known as typology. And typology is critical to understanding what the Bible has to say about Mary.

Typology is the way Jesus taught the Apostles to read the Old Testament.

He referred to Jonah (see Matthew 12:39-41), Solomon (see Matthew 12:42), the Temple (see John 2:19) and the brazen serpent (see John 3:14) as "types" or "signs" that prefigured Him.

On the first Easter night He said that, "Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled" (see Luke 24:44-45).

What He showed them was that the persons, places, things and events of the Old Testament were written to prepare us for Him.

Jesus and the Apostles were already familiar with this way of reading from the Old Testament and the liturgical readings they heard in the synagogue. In the writings of the prophets and psalmists, often we find typological readings of earlier events, deployed to prepare Israel for its coming savior.

Isaiah spoke of a new creation (see Isaiah 65:17) and a new exodus (see Isaiah 11:10-11,15-16; 43:16-22; 51:9-11).

He and others, notably Ezekiel and Jeremiah, spoke of the coming of a new Davidic shepherd-king and the restoration of the kingdom (see Isaiah 9:1-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 16:59-63; 34:24-30; 37:23-28).

The New Testament writers saw each these great "types" - creation, the exodus and the covenant-kingdom of David - gloriously reprised in the New Covenant of Jesus.

Jesus was the New Adam, the first born of a new creation (see Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; 45-49). His Cross and Resurrection mark a new exodus (see Luke 9:31; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). His Church is the new Jerusalem and the new Kingdom of David (see Galatians 4:26; Acts 1:6-9; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6).

As we will see in the lessons ahead, the New Testament writers also developed a typological understanding of Mary's role in salvation history - as the new Eve, the new Ark of the Covenant, and the new Queen Mother of the Kingdom of God.

What we will find is that Mary is depicted as mysteriously inseparable from the saving mission of her Son. We see this already in Matthew's repetition of the phrase "the Child and His mother" (see Matthew 1:18; 2:11; 13,14,20,21).

This is how Mary is portrayed in one of the earliest biblical confessions of the faith: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to ransom those under the Law, so that we might receive adoption" (see Galatians 4:4-5).

What the New Testament has to say about Mary fills only a few verses. But it tells us all we need to know: Mary was made holy, destined from all eternity to give the Word flesh, to bear God's only begotten Son, and to be crowned mother over all who enter into His kingdom.



Section IV. End



# LESSON ONE

# WEDDING AT CANA, GARDEN IN EDEN

## Lesson Outline

1. Mary in the Gospel of John
  - I. First Reading
  - II. Sign of a New Creation
2. The Mother of Jesus
  - I. Scolding Mary?
  - II. Woman of Revelation
3. The New Eve
  - I. Mother of All Living
  - II. The Messiah's Wedding
  - III. New Covenant Bride
4. Study Questions

## Lesson Objectives

- I. To appreciate the Old Testament symbolism that forms the deep background to the Gospel account of the wedding feast at Cana.
- II. To understand how Mary is depicted as a “New Eve” in this account.
- III. To appreciate the importance of the Old Testament marriage symbolism for John’s recounting of the “sign” at Cana.

# Mary in the Gospel of John

## A First Reading

In our first lesson we acknowledged the relative scarcity of direct references to Mary in the New Testament.

In this lesson and the next we will look at two of the three Gospel scenes in which Mary can be said to play a prominent role.

Many if not most of the stories in the Gospel have "parallels" - accounts of the same story or episode in another or in all of the other Gospels. For example, Matthew, Luke and John each report the story of Jesus' Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. All four Gospels tell the story of Jesus' Baptism.

The few stories involving Mary are much different. Each is unique to the Gospel that records it - with no parallels. Only Luke, for instance, tells the story we studied closely last week - the Annunciation. Matthew alludes to it, but gives no details. Mark and John pass over the scene entirely.

Likewise, the scene we study in this lesson - the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee - is only found in John's Gospel (see John 2:1-12).

At first glance, it is a straightforward account of a miracle that Jesus performs - changing water into wine. Mary's role in the story is apparently limited to calling Jesus' attention to the fact that the wine has run short.

But again, as we saw in our last lesson, we will see that when it comes to Mary, there is more to Scripture than what first meets the eye.

## Sign of a New Creation

The first clue that we should look for a deeper meaning is found in the story's opening words - "on the third day." This points us to what has gone before in the Gospel.

The Cana story marks the conclusion of a series of events that begin in John's first chapter. John begins his Gospel with a kind of recapping of the creation story found in the Bible's first book. His first words are even the same as the first words of Genesis - "In the beginning..." (compare John 1:1; Genesis 1:1).

John's opening verses are likely adapted from an early Christian hymn (see John 1:1-5,9-18).

There are striking similarities between John's hymn and other "Christological" hymns or hymn excerpts identified in the New Testament. Like these, John's hymn identifies Jesus as God, the One through whom all things were created, who manifests himself in the flesh in order to be exalted or to reveal His glory (compare John 1:1-5,9-18; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:2-5).

As the first verses of Genesis describe God creating light and separating it from darkness, so in John's first verses Jesus is described as a light shining in the darkness.

Genesis shows us, in the beginning, "the Spirit of God...moving over the face of the waters" (see Genesis 1:2. Note: the New American Bible translates this as "a mighty wind" but "Spirit of God" is a better, more literal translation). John, in turn, shows us the Spirit hovering above the waters of baptism (see John 1:32-33).

There are more parallels. Notice John's Genesis-like repetitions of "the next day" (see 1:29;1:35; 1:43). On the first day, John the Baptist is introduced, on the second day Jesus is baptized. Days three and four describe Jesus' calling of disciples. The point to observe is that John's is describing a seven-day "inaugural week."

John wants us to see the coming of Jesus into the world as a new creation. In this new creation, a new people of God is to be born by faith in Jesus and the power of water and the Spirit in Baptism (see John 1:12; 29-34; 3:5).

Mary makes her appearance on the seventh day of John's new creation - that is, on the third day after the calling of Nathaniel on the fourth day.

In Genesis, the seventh day is the pinnacle of creation - when creation is completed, sanctified and perfected. The Sabbath is instituted on the seventh day as an "everlasting token" of God's "perpetual covenant" with creation (see Exodus 31:16-17).

The same Greek word translated "token" to describe the Sabbath is also used in John's Cana story. What Jesus does at Cana is described as the beginning of His "signs" (see John 2:11).



Section I. End

# The Mother of Jesus

## Scolding Mary?

Read in context, then, we see that Mary is present on the new Sabbath of God's new creation. As the Sabbath was the sign of God's first covenant, Mary is a part of the "sign" of God's new and everlasting covenant with His creation.

In the creation story only the name of God is spoken. The first man and woman are identified not by name but as "the man" and "the woman."

The same is true in the Cana story. Notice that only Jesus is referred to by name. Mary is never named. John refers to her as "the mother of Jesus" and Jesus calls her "woman."

This is another indicator that John intends us to find a deeper, symbolic connection between what happens at Cana and the Genesis story.

And we should keep this deeper meaning in view as we try to understand the tricky or difficult passages in the account.

The most infamous of these is Jesus' response to Mary: "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."

Quite often this text is used by non-Catholics to "prove" that Catholic devotion to Mary is "unscriptural." Jesus, they argue, is obviously distancing himself from Mary in this passage - He even seems to be scolding her.

This interpretation doesn't hold up to careful study. It's true that to our ears Jesus sounds like He is telling Mary to mind her own business and that He doesn't care whether the wine has run out.

But we have to remember that the Gospel wasn't written in English. It was written in Greek and recounts a dialogue that originally took place in a Hebrew dialect.

Actually, the words Jesus uses (literally, "what to me and you") were a figure of speech common in the Greek and Hebrew of His day.

The phrase has several shades of meaning in the Old and New Testaments.

However, in each biblical instance where it is found, the phrase expresses a situation similar to what's going on at Cana: Someone is reluctant or refuses to do something and doesn't agree that he has any business involving himself in the situation.

Sometimes the phrase implies a hostility between the two parties (see Judges 11:12; 2 Chronicles 35:21; 1 Kings 17:18; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 8:28). Other times it expresses a simple disagreement or difference of opinion (see 2 Kings 3:13; Hosea 14:8).

With that background, how should we understand Jesus' use of this idiom? First, there is no evidence anywhere in John or the rest of the New Testament to suggest that Jesus harbored hostility toward His mother.

Jesus was without sin (see Hebrews 4:15). Among other things that means He was faithful to the fourth commandment and honored and obeyed His parents (see Luke 2:51).

Nor do we find any evidence in the Cana episode that implies separation or tension between Mary and Jesus. In fact, four times in these twelve verses she is referred to as "the mother of Jesus."

Perhaps the best evidence for what Jesus meant is found in Mary's reaction to His words. She turns to the servants and says: "Do whatever He tells you."

Certainly, she doesn't take His words to be dismissive. And if Jesus had intended to reproach her, surely He wouldn't have complied with her implied request.

## Woman of Revelation

The real drama - and deeper significance - of the passage is found in Jesus' addressing of Mary as "Woman."

In anti-Catholic polemics this too is often cited as evidence of Jesus' lack of affection for His mother. Again there is no basis anywhere in John's Gospel or elsewhere for drawing such a conclusion.

Jesus often addresses women this way (see Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10;20:13). In every case this form of address is polite and respectful.

It is, however, most unusual that He would address His own mother this way. In fact, nowhere else in the Bible or in other literature of the time do we have an example of a son referring to his mother as "woman."

This strongly suggests the word has symbolic value for Jesus and John. In fact, this is the only way that Jesus refers to Mary in John's Gospel. Note that on the cross, when the dying Jesus entrusts His mother to His beloved Apostle John, He also calls her "woman" (see John 19:26).

To understand what's happening at Cana, we need to keep in mind John's larger framework - the new creation.

In the first creation, "woman" was the name Adam gave to Eve (see Genesis 2:23). And as we will see, John wants us to see the "woman" at Cana as a New Eve and to see Jesus as a New Adam.

This reading is reinforced when we look at another work attributed to John, the Book of Revelation. There, a mysterious "woman" is at the center of a great cosmic battle, described as a "sign" that John sees in heaven (see Revelation 12:1).

As in John's Gospel, the Book of Genesis lies behind the scene in Revelation 12. The drama there plays out a promise made by God in the Garden of Eden.

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit (see Genesis 3), God promised that throughout human history there would be an "enmity" between the serpent and the woman and between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. He promised further there would be a decisive struggle and that the woman's male child would crush the serpent's head (see Genesis 3:15).

In Revelation, the "woman" plays out the role assigned to Eve. She travails to give birth to a male child while a huge serpent, explicitly identified as the serpent of Genesis (see Revelation 12:9), waits to devour him.

The woman's offspring is described as the long awaited Messiah - a "male child" who would "rule all the nations" (compare Revelation 12:5 and Psalm 2:9). That could only be Jesus, so the woman could only be His mother, Mary.

When the child is born and is whisked up to heaven, the serpent makes war against the "the rest of her offspring." This can only be the Church, the people of God - "those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (see Revelation 12:17).

That's why the woman from Revelation has from the earliest days of the Church been interpreted as both a symbol of Mary and of the Church.

How does this help us understand the story of Cana?

First, the creation story of Genesis is in the background at Cana as it was in Revelation. Mary is here, too, called "woman."

Also, Mary is presented at Cana as the mother of the Messiah, Jesus, as she is in Revelation.

She is also associated with Jesus' disciples - as the woman in Revelation is the mother of those who "bear witness to Jesus." Indeed, at Cana, Mary is the catalyst for the miracle that manifests Christ's glory and causes His disciples to begin to believe in Him (see John 2:2,11).

It is interesting to note that in Mary's only other appearance in John - at the foot of the Cross - she is also portrayed as mother of the Church. Jesus designates her the "mother" of His beloved Apostle John and, by extension, mother of all his disciples (see John 19:26-27).



Section II. End

# The New Eve

## Mother of All Living

In his "new creation" story, then, John wants us to see Mary as the New Eve.

At Cana, the New Eve radically reverses the decision of the first Eve. The first woman led the first Adam to commit his first evil act in the garden. At Cana, the new woman leads the New Adam to perform His first glorious work.

The first Eve counseled Adam to defy God and eat the fruit. The New Eve brings the people's needs to her Son and teaches the people to obey Him in faith - "Do whatever He tells you" (see John 2:5).

The first Eve was "the mother of all the living" (see Genesis 3:20). By teaching the disciples and servants to believe in Jesus, the new Eve becomes the mother of the Church - "the children of God" (see John 1:12; 19:26-27).

## Priest of the Most High God

As the Sabbath was the sign of God's first covenant with creation, the wedding feast of Cana - with its faithful servants and its miraculous abundance of wine - is the sign of God's new covenant.

In the first covenant, we witness the marriage union of a man and a woman, Adam and Eve (see Genesis 2:23-24). And in the new covenant, we have a new man and a new woman present at a wedding feast.

True, Mary is Jesus' mother, not His bride. But in order to understand the supernatural depths of biblical symbolism that John intends here, we need to set aside our "natural" ways of reading.

As the "woman," Mary becomes the locus of a host of biblical symbols and expectations - she is simultaneously: a daughter of Israel, the mother of the new people of God, and bride of God.

Notice who is not mentioned in John's account. The couple being married. Isn't it odd that a wedding feast would be described but not the bride and groom?

When the headwaiter tastes the wine, his remarks to the "bridegroom" seem to be addressed to Jesus - "You have kept the good wine until now" (see John 2:10). John stresses this reading by following the headwaiters' word immediately with this: "Jesus did this as the beginning of His signs."

John is evoking a deep Old Testament tradition. The "sign" that he wants us to see here is that of God fulfilling His promise to come as a divine bridegroom to Israel and to be "wed" to His people in a new and everlasting covenant.

We see this promise of "messianic nuptials" with increasing intensity in the writings of the prophets (see Hosea 2:16-25; Jeremiah 2:1-2; 3:1, 6-12; Ezekiel 16; Isaiah 50:1; 54:4-8; 62:4-5), in certain Psalms (see for example Psalm 45) and other Old Testament writings (See Song of Songs).

In Hosea, we have the clearest description of God's intentions. There, in language reminiscent of Genesis, God promises a new covenant with creation that will be capped by His marriage to Israel forever (see Hosea 2:20-21; Genesis 1:20-21, 24-25).

In Hosea and elsewhere, the messianic blessings of the new covenant are accompanied or symbolized by "new wine" (see Hosea 2:23; Amos 9:13-14; Joel 2:19, 24; 4:18; Zechariah 9:16-17; 10:7; Isaiah 25:6).

In the Song of Songs, which symbolically depicts the wedding of God to His people, wine is also the sign of their joyful union (see Song of Songs 1:2,4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:3,9; 8:2).

## ‘Covenant in Your Flesh’

At Cana, then, John is presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the divine bridegroom and provider of the new wine at the wedding feast of the new covenant.

Again our interpretation is helped by looking at John’s Revelation, which concludes with a cosmic wedding feast. It is the "wedding feast of the Lamb" - of Christ to His bride, the Church (see Revelation 19:9; 21:9; 22:17); there too, this wedding feast marks the pinnacle of a new creation - a new heaven and a new earth (see Revelation 21:1).

Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, Jesus is explicitly identified as both the "Lamb of God" (see John 1:29, 36) and the Bridegroom (see John 3:29).

Jesus is also shown at Cana to be a new Adam, the firstborn of a new creation.

What John implies is made clear elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul calls Jesus a "type" of Adam (see Romans 5:14) and the new or last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49).

At Cana, Mary is the "bride" of the New Adam, the mother of the new creation.

It is significant that the only "vow" spoken at this wedding are the words Mary speaks to the servants - "Do whatever He tells you."

In Mary’s words we hear a distinct echo of Israel’s covenant traditions.

We find essentially the same phrase used to describe Israel’s ratification of the covenant at Mount Sinai: "Everything the Lord has said, we will do" (see Exodus 19:8; 34:3-7; Deuteronomy 5:27). It is also used in the accounts of Israel’s renewal of the covenant (see

Joshua 24:24; Exodus 10:12; Nehemiah 5:12).

So the words Mary speaks at Cana are a sort of covenant vow that she speaks on behalf of the servants and the disciples - expressing their acceptance of Jesus and their willingness to live by faith in His words.

That the servants share her faith is reflected in their decision is reflected in John’s detail - told by Jesus to fill the jars, they filled them "to the brim" (see John 2:7).





## LESSON THREE

# THE ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT

### Lesson Outline

1. The Annunciation
  - I. How can this be?
  - II. The power of the Most High will overshadow you
2. A History of the Ark
  - I. God's Presence among His People
  - II. David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem
  - III. Lost Forever?
3. The Visitation
  - I. Elizabeth and Mary
  - II. David's Journey and Mary's Visit
4. The Ark in Heaven
  - I. The Ark Reappears in Heaven
  - II. The Woman Clothed With the Sun
  - III. What Makes Mary the Ark of the New Covenant?
5. Study Questions

### Lesson Objectives

- I. To see how Mary's visit to Elizabeth parallels David's bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.
- II. To understand how the book of Revelation uses the startling image of the rediscovered Ark of the Covenant to introduce a vision of the Mother of Christ.
- III. To understand why the New Testament writers see Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant.

# The Annunciation

## How can this be?

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke gives us by far the most information about Mary. Most of that information is simple and literal: the stories of the Annunciation, the Nativity, and so on. But some of what Luke has to tell us is conveyed in a less obvious way, by means of parallels in words and images.

In the first lesson, we looked at the story of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel came to Mary to tell her that she would conceive a child who would inherit the throne of David.

Naturally, Mary was surprised. She asked the obvious question: “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (see Luke 1:34).

Gabriel replied that it would happen by the power of God: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (see Luke 1:35).

## The power of the Most High will overshadow you

The word translated “overshadow” is used nowhere else in the New Testament. In fact, it occurs only one other place in Scripture, if we refer to the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Luke was familiar with.

The book of Exodus tells us how Moses had the Ark of the Covenant placed in the Dwelling, the holy place in great tent that was to serve as the dwelling-place of God among His people. (The word translated “Dwelling” is often translated “Tabernacle.”)

“Then the cloud covered the meeting tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the Dwelling. Moses could not enter the meeting tent, because the cloud settled down upon it and the glory of the LORD filled the Dwelling” (see Exodus 40:34-35).

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word translated “settled down upon” (“the cloud settled down upon it”) is the same as Luke’s word “overshadow” (“the power of the Most High will overshadow you”).

Luke is telling us that the power of God will overshadow Mary just as the power of God overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant in the tent.



# A History of the Ark

## God's Presence among His People

On Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses instructions for building the Ark of the Covenant. The construction is minutely described (see Exodus 25:1-22). The Ark's most important contents are the tablets of the Law (see Exodus 25:16), God's covenant with His people. It also contained a sample of the manna that fed the Israelites in the desert (see Exodus 16:14-16) and the rod of Aaron the priest.

The Ark, with its carved cherubim on top (see Exodus 25:18-20), was the visible throne of the invisible God. Once it was built, it went before the Israelites wherever they wandered, signifying God's presence with them (see, for example, Numbers 10:33).

When the Israelites marched to conquer the Promised Land, the Ark of the Covenant still marched before them (see Joshua 3:3-4). It was the sign that God was with His people.

In the siege of Jericho, for example, Israel's only military action was to parade the Ark of the Covenant around the city on seven successive days: the walls miraculously fell flat by themselves (see Joshua 6).

## David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem

Long after most of the Promised Land belonged to Israel, the town of Jerusalem was still an independent enclave of Jebusites (see Joshua 15:63).

When David finally conquered Jerusalem, he made the strategically placed fortress town his capital (see 2 Samuel 5:9). Once the newly expanded city was established as the capital of Israel, David decided to give the Ark of the Covenant a permanent home there.

“And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6:2, Revised Standard Version; compare the New American Bible translation).

The Ark of the Covenant was placed on a new cart (contrary to the instructions for carrying it given in Exodus 25:13-15, and compare 1 Chronicles 15:15). But the cart was unstable, and one of the attendants reached out to steady the Ark (another clear violation of the Law - see Numbers 4:15). He was struck dead immediately.

David was dismayed, and in awe of the power of God. “How can the ark of the LORD come to me?” he asked (see 2 Samuel 6:9).

The procession turned aside, and the Ark “remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months” (see 2 Samuel 6:11), bringing great blessing to Obed-Edom's whole household.

Finally, David did bring the Ark into Jerusalem the proper way, amid great festivity and rejoicing. David himself went “leaping and dancing” for joy before the Ark, making such a spectacle of himself that his snobbish wife turned up her nose at him (see 2 Samuel 6:14-16).

## Lost Forever?

The small empire built up by David and expanded by his son Solomon broke up after Solomon died (see 1 Kings 12). The two small kingdoms of Israel and Judah could not stand up against the great world powers. First Israel fell to Assyria (see 2 Kings 17:1-6); then Judah fell to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25).

The prophet Jeremiah had warned the people of Judah that God's judgment was coming upon them. But he had also predicted a time when God would build up His people again and make a "new covenant" with them (see Jeremiah 31:27-34).

A story in 2 Maccabees 2:4-8 tells us that Jeremiah prepared for that time by hiding the Ark of the Covenant on Mount Nebo.

"The same document also tells how the prophet [Jeremiah], following a divine revelation, ordered that the tent and the ark should accompany him and how he went off to the mountain which Moses climbed to see God's inheritance. When Jeremiah arrived there, he found a room in a cave in which he put the tent, the ark, and the altar of incense; then he blocked up the entrance."

Since that time, the Ark has never been seen on earth again.

"Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the path, but they could not find it. When Jeremiah heard of this, he reproved them: 'The place is to remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord will be seen in the cloud, just as it appeared in the time of Moses and when Solomon prayed that the Place [that is, the Temple] might be gloriously sanctified.'"

The Ark would not be seen again until the time when God showed His mercy and gathered His people together again. But when would that be?



# The Visitation

## Elizabeth and Mary

The news that she would have a child was astonishing enough for Mary. But the angel Gabriel had more good news for her:

“And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God” (see Luke 1:36-37).

Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were both very old (see Luke 1:7); her pregnancy was nothing short of a miracle, though not a miracle on the same order as the one Mary was about to be a part of.

After this news, the very next thing we read is that Mary decided to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

We’re going to take a close look at this visit, because Luke will use it to show us a very important truth about Mary.

## David’s Journey and Mary’s Visit

“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Luke 1:39-40, Revised Standard Version; compare the New American Bible translation).

We remember how “David arose and went” to a city of Judah to bring out the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:2, Revised Standard Version; compare the New American Bible translation).

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb” (see Luke 1:41).

In the same way, David “leaped and danced” before the Ark of the Covenant (see 2 Samuel 6:14-16).

When she felt her child leap in her womb, Luke tells us, Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (see Luke 1:41). “And how does this happen to me,” she asked, “that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (see Luke 1:43).

Her words almost repeat what David said about the Ark of the Covenant: “How can the ark of the LORD come to me?” (see 2 Samuel 6:9).

Finally, after her glorious hymn of praise to God (which we know, from its first word in Latin, as the Magnificat; see Luke 1:46-55), “Mary remained with her [Elizabeth] about three months and then returned to her home” (see Luke 1:56).

The Ark of the Covenant “remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months” on its way to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 6:11).

Luke piles these parallels one on top of another, so that we can’t help noticing the similarity between the Ark of the Covenant’s trip to Jerusalem and Mary’s trip to Zechariah’s house.

To drive the point home even more, Luke makes an interesting word choice in Luke 1:42: he tells us that Elizabeth “cried out in a loud voice” when she expressed her joy at Mary’s arrival.

The word translated “cried out” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. But it does occur five times

in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and every time it shows up in passages having to do with the Ark of the Covenant, describing the joyful noise God's people made in celebration of His presence among them.

Elizabeth lifts up her voice in praise of God in the presence of Mary, just as her ancestors (Elizabeth was a Levite and a descendant of Aaron the priest; see Luke 1:5) did in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant.

All these parallels point to one startling truth: Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant.

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant bore the tablets of God's covenant, God's word in stone. In the New Testament, Mary carries God's Word in flesh, Jesus Christ, who will bring the New Covenant that Jeremiah foresaw so long ago (see Jeremiah 31:27-34)



Section III. End

# The Ark in Heaven

## The Ark Reappears in Heaven

The news that she would have a child was astonishing enough for Mary. But the angel Gabriel had more good news for her:

“And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God” (see Luke 1:36-37).

Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were both very old (see Luke 1:7); her pregnancy was nothing short of a miracle, though not a miracle on the same order as the one Mary was about to be a part of.

After this news, the very next thing we read is that Mary decided to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

We’re going to take a close look at this visit, because Luke will use it to show us a very important truth about Mary.

## The Woman Clothed With the Sun

And who is this woman?

“She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth” (see Revelation 12:2).

“She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne” (see Revelation 12:5).

The one destined to rule the nations with an iron rod (a shepherd’s rod) is the Lord’s Anointed, the Messiah or Christ (see Psalm 2). The “woman clothed with the sun,” whom John sees when he looks at the Ark of the Covenant, is the Mother of the Christ.

## What Makes Mary the Ark of the New Covenant?

The Ark of the Covenant was the sign of God’s real presence among His people. In Jesus Christ, born of Mary, God was really present among his people in an even more direct way.

The Ark held the Word of God written in stone. Mary bore the Word of God in flesh

The Ark held the bread from heaven, a foreshadowing of the Eucharist (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Mary bore the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ (see John 6:48-50).

The Ark contained the rod of Aaron, symbol of his priesthood. Mary bore Jesus Christ, our High Priest (see Hebrews 3:1).

If the Ark of the Covenant was holy, then by the same standards Mary is even holier. As Mother of God, she is the Ark of the New Covenant, bearing Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the Bread of Life, our great High Priest. That is not a re-interpretation of the Gospel: it is a truth made clear by the New Testament writers themselves.

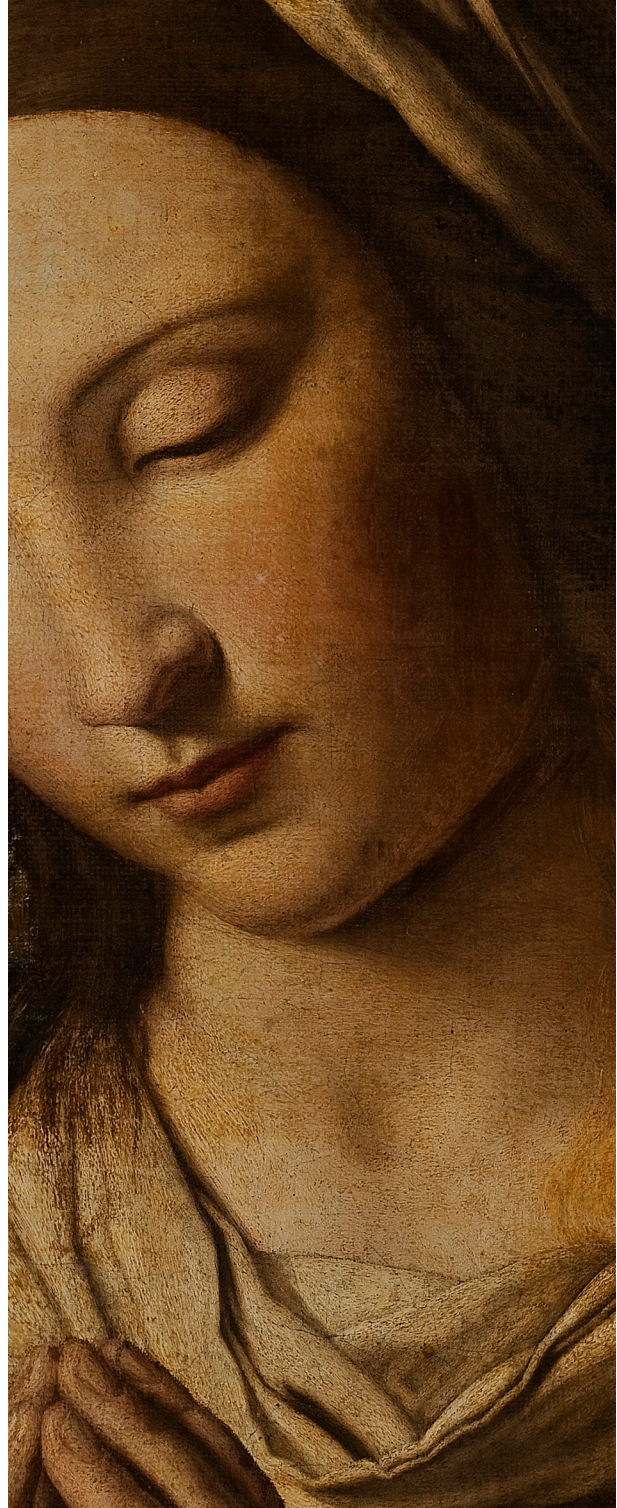
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Section III. End

# Study Questions

- I. What important objects did the Ark of the Covenant contain?
- II. Who brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem?
- III. According to 2 Maccabees, on what mountain did Jeremiah hide the Ark?
- IV. According to Jeremiah, when would the Ark of the Covenant be seen again?
- V. Of what famous priest was Elizabeth a descendant?
- VI. What sights and sounds accompanied the reappearance of the Ark of the Covenant in John's vision?
- VII. What Old Testament event was accompanied by similar signs?
- VIII. Name at least three parallels between the Ark of the Covenant and Mary, the Mother of Christ.

## NOTES

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## For prayer and reflection:

Wherever the ancient Israelites went, they followed the Ark of the Covenant. If Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant, how should we as Christians be following her?

## LESSON FOUR

# MOTHER CROWNED IN GLORY

### Lesson Outline

1. Mothers and Sons
  - I. A Mother's Advice
  - II. The Mother as Teacher
2. The Mother of the King
  - I. Solomon Bows to his Mother
  - II. The Place of the Gebirah
  - III. She Who Is to Give Birth
3. Kingdom of the Son of David
  - I. David's Kingdom and Christ's
  - II. Mother of the King of Kings
  - III. The Infant Jesus Holds Court
  - IV. Queen of Heaven
4. Study Questions

### Lesson Objectives

- I. To see the importance of the Queen Mother in the Davidic kingdom of the Old Testament.
- II. To understand the duties and privileges that came with the position of Queen Mother.
- III. To see how Mary fills the position of Queen Mother in the kingdom of Christ.

# Mothers and Sons

## A Mother's Advice

“A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars...She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne” (see Revelation 12:1, 12:5).

This strange and beautiful vision from Revelation is the image millions of Christians across the world see when they think of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

But what exactly does it mean? It seems literally to depict Christ as a newborn King, destined to rule on a throne. Why, however, is the woman depicted as a heavenly Queen, crowned with stars and arrayed in glory.

The answer is in a long tradition that runs right through the Old Testament into the New.

The image of Mary in glory “clothed with the sun” is yet another way the New Testament writers tell us the truth about who Jesus Christ is. But to understand what Revelation reveals, we need to go hundreds of years back into the Old Testament.

In fact, a good place to start is right at the end of the book of Proverbs.

The Bible tells us only one thing about a certain King Lemuel: that he got some very good advice.

*“Open your mouth in behalf of the dumb,  
and for the rights of the destitute;  
Open your mouth, decree what is just,  
defend the needy and poor!”* (see Proverbs 31:9).

Now, a king always has people trying to tell him what he should do. Usually the advice is aimed at creating some benefit for the adviser. Often what sounds like advice is just flattery.

But here is someone advising the king to take care of the poor and the meek - the people who have no other defense. Who could speak freely enough to the king to give him that kind of advice?

The first verse of King Lemuel's chapter in Proverbs gives us the answer: “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa. The advice which his mother gave him” (see Proverbs 31:1).

Only the king's own mother could speak to him that way. As a king, he might be her ruler, but by the law of nature he was still her son.

This chapter is full of the kind of advice any good mother would give to her son: don't fall in with loose women, don't drink too much, and above all find a good wife.

But because the son happens to be a king, his mother also has to remind him of his duties as a ruler. He must be the voice of the defenseless, a power for the powerless. His kingdom must be for the poor and the meek.

A flattering courtier could never say things like that to a king. It's not surprising, then, that the queen mother in Near Eastern kingdoms was traditionally looked on as the friend of the poor, the intercessor between the people and the king.

And when we see that the book of Proverbs ends with a queen mother's advice, we know how important the inspired writers considered the wisdom of the

queen mother. A ruler who had Proverbs read to him would be left with the queen mother's words ringing in his ears.

God, the Bread of Life, our great High Priest. That is not a re-interpretation of the Gospel: it is a truth made clear by the New Testament writers themselves.

## The Mother as Teacher

The mother's authority over her children - even if they happen to be kings - is part of nature. Lemuel is never mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. One ancient Jewish tradition, however, said that Lemuel was a pseudonym for the great Solomon himself, the king whose name is still synonymous with wisdom.

Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba. Their first son had died shortly after birth - a judgment on David for his adultery with Bathsheba, who had been the wife of one of David's most trusted officers until David sent him off on a suicide mission (see 2 Samuel 11).

As David's heir, Solomon was the prototypical Son of David, inheriting all those promises of a glorious kingdom that God had made for David's line (see 2 Samuel 7:8-16).

He had one other famous gift: the gift of wisdom. But he still listened to his mother's advice.



Section I. End

# The Mother of the King

## Solomon Bows to his Mother

In fact, one of the first things we hear about Solomon's reign is the important part his mother played in it.

When Bathsheba enters the newly crowned King Solomon's court, Solomon bows before her. Then he has her seated on a throne at his right hand (see 1 Kings 2:19). No other subject ever earned that honor - not during the reign of Solomon, and not under any other king in the Old Testament.

Then she asks him a favor, a request that Adonijah had given her. She acts in her traditional role as intercessor for the people - which is a bit surprising, considering who Adonijah was.

Adonijah, an older son of David, had been Solomon's rival for the succession. David had promised Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be king, but Adonijah took advantage of his old father's weakness to make a grab for the kingdom himself (see 1 Kings 1:5). It was only Bathsheba's quick action that saved the kingdom for her son (see 1 Kings 1:16-21).

Now Adonijah asks for something extraordinary: he wants his father's concubine Abishag as his wife. In Middle Eastern cultures, taking the king's wife or concubine was a way of publicly declaring yourself king.

This time, Solomon doesn't take his mother's advice. He had very magnanimously spared Adonijah after the failed coup, but this was just too much (see the whole story in 1 Kings 2:13-25).

But even Solomon acknowledges, by placing her in such an exalted position, that she has a right to give

him advice and to present Adonijah's cause to him. The Queen Mother can intercede, but the king is the final judge.

The influence of the queen mother was one of the distinctive features of the government of Judah, the kingdom that David's descendants ruled after the northern tribes broke away. (Solomon's son Rehoboam was not as wise as Solomon: in his pride, he alienated more than half his kingdom. See the story in 1 Kings 12:1-20.)

We don't hear about the queen mother very often, but every time we do, it is clear that she has great influence in the kingdom.

Even when the kingdom was near its end, the Queen Mother's influence was still powerful.

"Say to the king and the queen mother," God's instructions to Jeremiah begin in Jeremiah 13:18. The prophecy of doom that follows would not have been addressed to the Queen Mother as well as to the king unless they both were powerful leaders in the kingdom.

Jeremiah's prophecy came true. Judah was finally destroyed by the Babylonians, and Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor, took away all the important people of Jerusalem.

"He deported Jehoiachin [the king] to Babylon, and also led captive from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother and wives, his functionaries, and the chief men of the land" (see 2 Kings 24:15).

The king's mother is next in importance after the king, and more important than his wives.

All through the history of the kingdom, the Queen Mother occupied that place, second only to the king in the kingdom. There was a special word for the Queen Mother in Hebrew: she was called Gebirah, or “Great Lady.”

## The Place of the Gebirah

The story about Solomon and his mother points out one of the chief duties of the Queen Mother in the government of David’s kingdom.

In the story, she comes to Solomon with a request from Adonijah, one of his subjects. In other words, she acts as intercessor for the people before the king.

Bathsheba was hardly the first Queen Mother to act that way. As far back as the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the most ancient literary works we know of, the Queen Mother in near-eastern courts had filled the role of intercessor for the people.

The reason for her special position is found as much in nature as in tradition. The king had absolute authority, and in the government of the state, his mother was subject to him.

But in the primary relationship of the family, she was still his mother, and had a mother’s authority over him. She was the only subject who could in any way expect the king’s obedience.

In times when polygamy was common, the Queen Mother’s position was usually more important than the position of any of the king’s wives. There were many wives, but only one mother.

From a practical point of view, the Queen Mother’s position in itself was a kind of proof of her political wisdom. A king like Solomon, who had seven hundred wives, must have had too many sons to count. But only one of them could be king - and that one probably by the influence of his mother.

Bathsheba’s case shows us that the wife whose son was chosen as heir must already have navigated some very tricky political waters. She would make a fine political strategist when her son was king.

So we see that the Queen Mother had several important functions in the government of the Davidic kingdom - functions that made her position not just a family relationship, but also a political office.

- She was a visible sign of the king’s legitimate rule.
- She gave the king practical advice.
- She interceded for the people with the king.

These are the things that made the Queen Mother uniquely important among all the subjects in the kingdom, and that gave her an essential place in the government of the Davidic kingdom.



## She Who Is to Give Birth

In spite of the promises that it would last forever (see 2 Samuel 7:16), David's kingdom collapsed, and Nebuchadnezzar took all the leading families to exile in Babylon (see 2 Kings 24:10-16).

Had God gone back on His promise? Clearly that was impossible. The promise was unconditional, and God is faithful to His promises.

So the faithful people of God looked forward to a time when the kingdom of David would be restored. They clung to the words of the prophets, who promised that a king of David's line would one day bring back all the lost sheep of Israel.

The prophets even made the king's mother a key to their prophecies.

Isaiah, for instance, in a time of great distress told Israel's King Ahaz to look for "this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (see Isaiah 7:14).

The sign was meant to reassure Ahaz of God's continued commitment to the "house of David" (see Isaiah 7:2,13), in the face of foreign threats and intrigue.

Micah even more explicitly prophesied a coming ruler from the house of David.

He would be born in the city of David, Bethlehem and, like David, would be a shepherd. Micah, too, mentions the future ruler's mother, referring to "she who is to give birth" (see Micah 5:1-3).

Once again, the sign of salvation is a future king to be born of a woman.

Notice that Isaiah and Micah say nothing about the fathers of these children. Usually, in the Bible it is the father of a prominent person who is mentioned, often to the exclusion of the mother.



Section II. End

# Mothers and Sons

## David's Kingdom and Christ's

Now, the reason we have looked so hard at the kingdom of David is this: the kingdom of David is the key to understanding the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

All the New Testament authors show us clearly that Jesus - born of a virgin in Bethlehem, as the prophets foretold - is the Son of David, and his Kingdom is the promised restoration of the kingdom of David.

From the beginning, the Christians' most persuasive argument was how perfectly Jesus fulfilled the prophets' promises of the Son of David (see, for example, Acts 2:25-36).

It was the kingdom of David - with its capital at Jerusalem, the Holy City - that the prophets had foretold would be restored when God brought the scattered Israelites back together, united again as they had been when David ruled.

## Mother of the King of Kings

But if Jesus is the promised King from David's line, and if His Kingdom is David's kingdom restored, then Mary must be the Queen Mother. That is exactly what the very beginning of the New Testament shows us.

The Gospel according to Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ. It's a fascinating passage to study: what seems at first glance to be merely a list turns out to be a masterpiece of literary craft.

For example, Matthew divides the whole genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations (see Matthew 1:17). Three is a number that symbolizes

perfection. In Hebrew numerals, which (like Greek and Roman numerals) use letters for numbers, the name David adds up to 14. Just by the numbers, Matthew shows that Jesus is the perfect Son of David.

The genealogy ends with "Joseph, the husband of Mary." Then Matthew tells us, "Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah," which recalls the language of both Micah and Isaiah (see Matthew 1:16).

There's another interesting feature of Matthew's genealogy. Four of the ancestors listed are women - which is unheard-of in respectable Jewish genealogies. The last of the women mentioned is Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. She was the prototype of the Queen Mother, as Solomon was the prototypical Son of David.

## The Infant Jesus Holds Court

When Jesus is still a tiny child, born to all appearances into an ordinary working family, three distinguished visitors from the East come to pay their respects (see Matthew 2:1-12).

They have traveled all this way to see "the newborn king of the Jews" (see Matthew 2:2).

When they finally arrive at Bethlehem, the Magi see "the child with Mary his mother" (see Matthew 2:11). The King of the Jews, as we saw with Solomon, properly appears in state with his mother by his side.

The Magi present gifts fit for a king: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold and spices were tributes regularly paid to Solomon by royal visitors (see 1 Kings 10:10, 10:25).

The only other times in Scripture when myrrh and frankincense are mentioned together are in the Song of Songs, when they are part of the pageantry of Solomon's wedding day (see Song of Songs 3:6-7) - a day when Solomon's own mother places the crown on his head (see Song of Songs 3:11).

Matthew paints a picture of the child Jesus, the perfect Son of David, holding court in the same way as Solomon, the original Son of David.

## Queen of Heaven

Our final glimpse of the Queen Mother in the Bible comes in that famous symbolic vision in the Book of Revelation (see Revelation 12:1, 12:5).

The symbols of Revelation are sometimes hard to interpret. And there have been various interpretations of who this great "woman clothed with the sun" is.

In the Catholic understanding the woman is a sign of both Mary and of the Church. For our purposes here, we will explore the connection with Mary.

The "great sign" is a woman giving birth, just as in Isaiah's prophecy the sign that the kingdom would be

restored would be a woman giving birth.

The child to be born is described as one who will "rule all the nations with an iron rod" - which is how the Messiah is described (see Psalm 2:7-9).

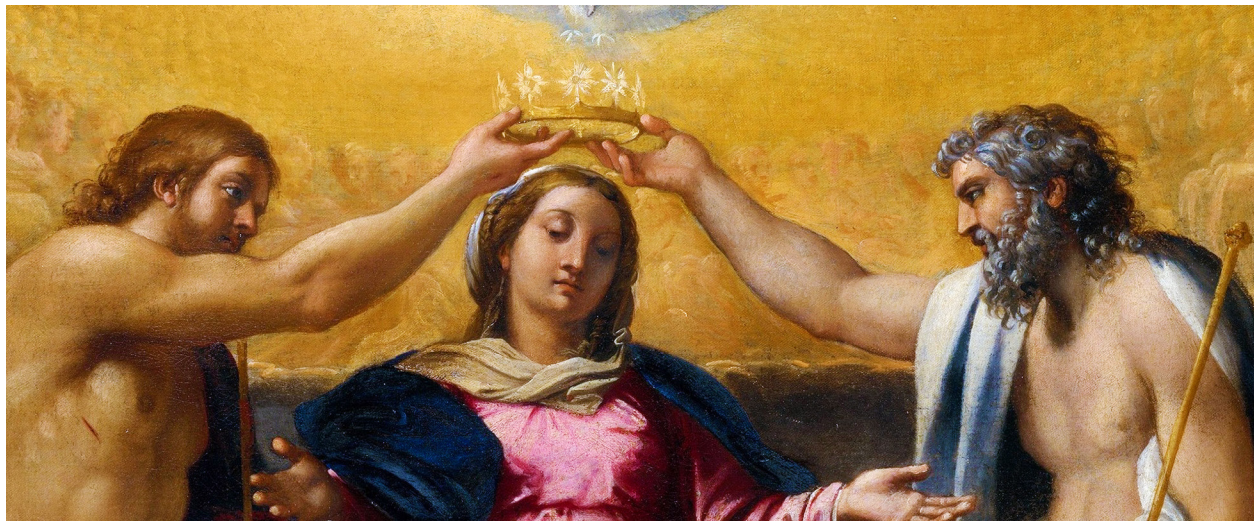
The Queen Mother of the Old Testament wore a crown, and the "woman clothed with the sun" wears a crown of twelve stars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Here we see Mary crowned and enthroned as Queen Mother, just as Solomon's mother had been crowned and enthroned, and just as every mother of every son of David had been crowned and enthroned.

Revelation shows us the Queen Mother enthroned in heaven, enthroned with her Son, in perfect fulfillment of the promise of the Davidic kingdom.

The Queen Mother's place in the heavenly kingdom does not detract from the glory of the King.

On the contrary, it is because the King is glorious that His Mother is also glorious. Just like the queen mothers all through the long history of the Davidic kingdom, she points the way to the King, speaking for the people - for us - before Him.



Section III. End



## LESSON FIVE

# THE ALL-HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

### Lesson Outline

1. Mary in the Gospel of John
  - I. First Reading
  - II. Sign of a New Creation
2. The Mother of Jesus
  - I. Scolding Mary?
  - II. Woman of Revelation
3. The New Eve
  - I. Mother of All Living
  - II. The Messiah's Wedding
  - III. New Covenant Bride
4. Study Questions

### Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the relationship between Catholic teaching about Mary and the Scriptural portrayal of Mary.
- II. To understand the biblical foundations of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.
- III. To appreciate how Catholic belief in the Immaculate Conception flows from the New Testament portrait of Mary as the “New Eve”

# The Truth About Mary



(553) - we see the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, interpreting the same Scriptures we have been studying in this course.

The Church's interpretation of the Scriptures concerning Mary has continued down through the centuries.

The result has been a series of dogmas and doctrines about Mary, all based on the truths revealed in the Scripture texts we've been looking at in this course.

In this lesson and in the next, we will take a closer look at these dogmas and doctrines, examining how they are based upon and deepen our appreciation of the biblical portrait of Mary.

## Councils and the Bible

Throughout this course, we've been looking at the truths about Mary revealed in Sacred Scripture. We've been looking closely at what Scripture has to say about Mary, and - just as important - how Scripture says it.

Since the very beginnings of the Church, the biblical portrait of Mary has been studied and prayed over by popes, bishops, theologians, and saints.

And Mary - who she was, and what role she played in God's plan for the salvation of the world - was an important topic of discussion and debate in the early Church councils, which were official meetings of bishops under the authority of the pope.

In these councils - such as the Council of Ephesus (in the year 431), the Second Council of Constantinople

## Dogmas and the Bible

Before we do that, however, we should say a word about the meaning and purpose of dogma and doctrine in Catholic teaching.

Doctrine and dogma are the revealed teachings of Jesus as defined by the Church, which has been entrusted with the Holy Spirit of Jesus to protect it from error and to guide it into all the truth (see John 14:26; 16:12-15; 20:21-22; Acts 2:1-4).

For our purposes here it's important to keep in mind that doctrine and dogma represent the Church's definitive interpretation of Scripture, under the guidance of the Spirit.

In the New Testament, the Greek word dogma is used to refer to the "legal claims" of the divine law revealed in the Old Testament scriptures (see Ephesians 2:15).

It is also used to refer to the "decisions" reached by the first Church council, held in Jerusalem (see Acts 16:4).

The Council of Jerusalem met to make a definitive interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures regarding the treatment of non-Jews who convert to Christianity (see Acts 15), a decision in which the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 15:28).

In the same way, the Church's doctrines about Mary - about her Immaculate Conception, her status as the "ever-Virgin Mother of God," and her "Assumption"

into heaven as "Queen of all things" - represent a definitive interpretation of the whole of Scripture as it relates to Mary's role in God's plan for our salvation.

And, as we'll see, each of these doctrines is based on the biblical portraits we've already studied:

- Mary as the new "Eve"
- Mary as the new "Ark of the Covenant"
- Mary as the new "Queen Mother"



Section I. End

# Mary and the First Gospel

The dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception states that Jesus' mother, alone among the billions born since the beginning of the world, was conceived without inheriting the curse of Adam and Eve's original sin. In God's plan, and by His grace, she was kept free from sin in order to become the all-holy Mother of God, as she was declared by the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Pope Pius IX declared the dogma on December 8, 1854, in a document entitled *Ineffabilis Deus* ("The Ineffable God")

He noted the long history of the Church's belief that Mary was unstained by original sin - expressed especially in the writings of popes and in the Church's prayers and worship.

And he noted that this belief was ultimately founded on centuries of preaching and teaching on three passages that we have looked at in great detail in earlier lessons - the "first Gospel" in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:15), the annunciation (see Luke 1:26-38), and the vision of the "woman" in the Bible's last book (see Revelation 12).

As we've seen in earlier lessons, these passages give us the biblical portrait of Mary as a "new Eve."

In the dogma of the Immaculate Conception we see the Church peering deeper into the mystery of God's plan.

Recall that in Lesson 2 we saw how the biblical account of God's punishment of Adam and Eve contained a proto-evangelium ("first gospel") - an inaugural announcement of the salvation that would come from a "woman" and her "offspring."

In this first gospel, God himself promised that there would be perpetual enmity between this woman and the serpent, and this enmity would culminate in the crushing of the serpent's head by the woman's "offspring" (see Genesis 3:15).

## Original Sin, Original Enmity

What does this have to do with Mary's Immaculate Conception? To answer means taking a closer look at the "first gospel."

First, the scene in Genesis depicts punishment for "original sin." That sin was caused by the temptation of the serpent, who is revealed elsewhere in Scripture to be the devil (see Revelation 12:2,9).

This sin is inherited by every human being as Eve became "the mother of all the living" (see Genesis 3:20). And as a result of this sin, humans are under the power of death (see Wisdom 2:24; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). This is one of the reasons that Jesus said of the Devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (see John 8:44; Hebrews 2:14).

In punishment, God promised there would be "enmity" between the "woman" and the serpent, and between their offspring.

"Enmity" means mutual hatred.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated "enmity" implies a mortal rivalry, a hatred which causes each party to desire the death of the other (see Numbers 35:21; Ezekiel 25:15; 35:5).

The word is used only to describe rivalries between

persons or nations. It isn't ever used to describe a hatred between a person and an animal.

This suggests that this passage of Genesis is meant to be read symbolically. In other words: although the text depicts God literally promising to put enmity between a snake and a woman, symbolically the text speaks of enmity between whom or what the snake "stands for" and whom or what the woman "stands for."

Indeed, this is how the Church's earliest saints and theologians interpreted the passage, beginning in the pages of the New Testament (see Romans 16:20; Revelation 12).

Note that it is God who establishes the enmity ("I will put enmity"). This is no natural aversion. This is a divinely created opposition, one that God has established for all time.

## Offspring and Death

Note also that this enmity is "two-fold" - between the serpent and the woman, and between the serpent's offspring and the offspring of the woman.

The Hebrew word translated "offspring" is literally, "seed."

It refers to the seeds of plants (see Genesis 1:11; 12:20; Leviticus 26:16). It also refers to the children of individuals (see Genesis 4:25; 15:3; 2 Samuel 7:12) and to a person's descendants or to the race of a people (see Genesis 12:7; 13:15; Isaiah 14:20; 57:3).

Occasionally, the word is used in a "moral" sense, as when the psalmist speaks of "the posterity of the wicked" (see Psalm 37:28) and the prophet Isaiah speaks of an "evil race, corrupt children" (see Isaiah 1:4).

Finally, God promises that the woman's seed will "strike" or crush the head of the serpent.

To crush the head of a serpent is to kill it. So what we have here is the promise of the serpent's death under the foot of the seed of a woman, that is under the foot of the woman's child.

## From Scripture to Dogma

From a close reading, we can see how the Church - beginning in the New Testament - has long seen this text as supporting a belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception.

First, it foresees a new "woman," a new Eve, and her "seed," Jesus. As we've seen in earlier lessons, this passage is the source of the description of Mary as "woman" in John's Gospel (see John 2:4; 19:26).

This woman and her child were the focus of Christian expectations for a messiah, as Paul says: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman . . ." (see Galatians 4:4)

Also as we've noted in earlier lessons, the dramatic conflict between "the woman" and the "serpent" in the Bible's last book are heavily influenced by the proto-evangelium (Revelation 12). This, also as we've noted, is where we get the interpretation of the serpent in Eden as Satan (see Revelation 12:9).

In Revelation, we're shown that the woman's offspring is both Jesus (see Revelation 12:5) and "those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (see Revelation 12:17).

Finally, the proto-evangelium envisions the defeat of Satan by the woman's seed. Paul alludes to this when he writes: "the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet" (see Romans 16:20).

How does this interpretation foresee "the woman" (Mary) being born without original sin?

It is true Scripture teaches that all men and women have been conceived "in sin" (see Psalm 51:7). Paul wrote that sin entered the world through Adam and

Eve and, as a result, "all sinned" and "condemnation came upon all" (see Romans 5:12,18).

But the proto-evangelium seems to envision at least two people - the woman and her offspring - who will not be conceived under the rule of the serpent and the consequences of the serpent's deceit.

Recall what the text says - the enmity is "put" by God, and that enmity is a mortal rivalry - an absolute hostility, a struggle to the death.

If Mary was conceived with original sin, there couldn't be the perpetual enmity promised by God himself between the seed of the woman and the serpent. To the contrary, if Mary was conceived with original sin, the serpent would be victorious, subjecting the woman to his power. If this were the case, God's promise would prove to be untrue.

But this clearly is not what God intended in putting enmity between the woman's seed and the serpent's. Rather, it appears that Mary, the woman promised in the beginning, must be born outside of Satan's power in order to fulfill God's promise of absolute enmity.

That's how Pope Pius XII interpreted this Scripture in Fulgens Corona ("The Radiant Crown"), written to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the dogma's declaration (see no. 7). This interpretation was also affirmed by Pope John Paul II (see "Mary's Enmity Towards Satan Was Absolute").

Also, as Paul noted, for the sake of our salvation, God caused grace to overflow, and caused Jesus "who did not know sin" to reign over the power of sin and death (see Romans 5:20; 2 Cor 5:21). If the woman's seed, Jesus, was not to know sin, how could His mother?



Section II. End

# Hailing Mary

## Full of Grace

The annunciation scene in Luke's Gospel, in which the angel Gabriel greets Mary by the title "full of grace," is also cited as a biblical foundation for the Immaculate Conception.

We discussed the annunciation scene in detail in our first lesson.

Here we want to focus on the angel's greeting: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" (see Luke 1:28).

This is a greeting found nowhere else in Scripture. *Kecharitomene*, the word translated "favored one," or "full of grace" is extremely rare, used only in the annunciation text and in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.

In each case, the verb is used to indicate an action that causes some effect in the object of the verb.

Paul speaks of how God "granted" or bestowed His grace upon us in Jesus (see Ephesians 1:6-7). In this instance, Paul uses the word to describe how God's grace causes a transformation in us - forgiving our sins, making us His adopted sons and daughters.

In the same way, the use of *kecharitomene* in the angel's address implies that Mary has been favored by the bestowal of God's grace.

Some Church fathers and scholars believe that the sense of the term would best be translated as "made full of grace" or "transformed by grace." The sense is that Mary has already been "graced" and is now and will be in the future, filled with grace.

Another thing to note about the angel's greeting - she is not hailed as Mary, but as "full of grace." No other

person is addressed this way by an angel in Scripture. It's almost as if "Full of Grace" is Mary's name.

Throughout Scripture, when God gives a person a new name it indicates that person's true place in God's plan of salvation.

Abram's name is changed to "Abraham," signaling his role as designating him to be the "father of a host of nations" (see Genesis 17:5). Simon is called "Peter," because he will be the rock upon which Christ founds His Church (see Matthew 16:18).

And, by the command of God, Mary is called "full of grace." In this name, her destiny is revealed. From before the foundation of the world, she was chosen to be sinless mother of His only-begotten Son.

This is how Pope John Paul II interpreted this Scripture in the homily he preached on the 150th anniversary of the dogma. Full of grace, he said, "is the name that God, through His messenger, chose to use to describe the Virgin. This is how He had always seen and thought of her, *ab aeterno* (from all eternity)."

## From Bible to Liturgy

All these scriptural images of Mary are brought together in the liturgy for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The Entrance Antiphon for the Mass, puts the words of the prophet Isaiah in the mouth of Mary: "My soul rejoices in my God, for He has clothed me in the garment of salvation . . . like a bride adorned with her jewels" (see Isaiah 61:10).

The Opening Prayer explains the great mystery of the

Immaculate Conception in God's plan for the world's salvation - "Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy mother of Your Son. You let her share beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring by His death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception."

The First Reading for the feast is the story of Adam and Eve's sin and the proto-evangelium (see Genesis 3:9-15,20). The Second Reading is drawn from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, including the same verse we discussed earlier - the only other place in the New Testament where the Greek word *kecharitomenē* is used (see Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12).

Paul's words were originally addressed to every believer in Christ. Read in the Liturgy, they apply first and foremost to Mary - who is to be the forerunner of every Christian. "Before the foundation of the world," she was chosen "to be holy and without blemish" by the "grace that God granted" her in the Beloved, Jesus. The grace given to Mary in her mother's womb, is to be the destiny of all who believe in her Son and are baptized.

The reading reminds us, too, that Mary was "destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of His will." In other words, God's will, expressed in the First Reading, is accomplished in Mary's Immaculate Conception and her bearing of Christ.

This is reinforced by the Gospel reading for the feast - the annunciation (see Luke 1:26-38).

Finally, the special Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer for the feast is another summary of the biblical testimony to Mary's Immaculate Conception, revealing Mary to be a sign of the Church and "a promise of its perfection."



# Study Questions

- I. What is dogma? What is the relationship between dogma and Scripture?
- II. What are the three “biblical portraits” that form the foundations of Catholic dogmas and doctrines concerning Mary.
- III. Why is Genesis 3:15 known as the “first gospel”? What does God promise concerning the serpent and the woman?
- IV. How does the “first gospel” form part of the biblical foundation of the Immaculate Conception dogma?
- V. What does the Greek word kecharitomene mean? How does the biblical story of the annunciation form part of the biblical foundation of the Immaculate Conception dogma?

## NOTES

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## LESSON SIX

# THE QUEEN ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN

### Lesson Outline

1. Seeing Mary with Catholic Eyes
  - Course Review
  - Modern Marian Dogmas
2. The 'Woman' of Revelation 12
  - The Ark Returns
  - The Queen-Bride
  - The First Gospel
3. From Scripture to Liturgy
  - Summary of Revelation
  - The Feast of the Assumption
4. Study Questions

### Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the biblical foundations of the Dogma of the Assumption.
- II. To understand the deep Old Testament symbolism and imagery in Revelation 12, and its relation to Catholic beliefs about Mary.
- III. To appreciate how the biblical portrait of Mary is reflected and interpreted in the Church's liturgy.

# Seeing Mary with Catholic Eyes

## Reading the Last Book

In this course, we've undertaken a close study of the place of Mary in the Bible.

We've seen that although there are few direct references to Mary in the New Testament, she is depicted at each critical juncture in the life and work of Christ - His birth, the beginning of His public ministry, His death and resurrection, and the sending of His Spirit at Pentecost.

We've seen also that the New Testament accounts describe Mary in terms of Old Testament scenes and promises - as a new Eve, as Daughter Zion, as the ark of the new covenant, and as Queen Mother of the kingdom of God's people.

In our last lesson, we discussed how the Church has continued to reflect on the biblical testimony to Mary's place in salvation history. We considered how this on-going reflection has led to the formulation of doctrines and dogmas concerning Mary's Immaculate Conception, her status as the "ever-virgin Mother of God," and her "Assumption" into heaven as "Queen of all things."

And, as we noted, these doctrines represent the Church's definitive interpretations of the Scriptures concerning Mary.

## Modern Marian Dogmas

We focused in that last lesson on the Immaculate Conception, the first Marian doctrine to be proclaimed in the modern era. In this final lesson we will take a close look at the most recent of the Marian dogmas - the Assumption, pronounced by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

That dogma states that, at the end of her time on earth. Mary was taken up - body and soul - to heaven.

Like the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption is not an event recorded in Scripture. Indeed, the last mention of Mary in the biblical narrative is in relation to the life of the early Church in the days between the Ascension and Pentecost (see Acts 1:14).

But in *Munificentissimus Deus* ("The Most-Bountiful God"), Pius pointed to a long heritage of belief in the Assumption - an ancient tradition expressed in homilies, prayers, the dedication of churches, and the celebration of liturgies.

Underlying this tradition was a rich vein of Scriptural meditation and interpretation.

At the center of this tradition is the mysterious, apocalyptic vision of Revelation 12. As we noted in Lesson 4, the heavenly queen mother depicted in this vision is both a symbol of Mary and at the same time a symbol of the Church.

In this final lesson, we want to look more closely at this vision.

We will examine how it undergirds the Assumption dogma. And, through a close study of the text, we'll also see how this vision ties together many of the Old Testament images used to describe Mary and her pivotal place in God's saving plan.

# The 'Woman' of Revelation 12

## The Ark Returns

The image of the woman in Revelation 12 actually begins in the last verses of Revelation 11- with the fantastic scene of the temple revealed in heaven along with the ark of the covenant.

Keep in mind that the chapter divisions in Revelation, as in all the books of the Bible, are artificial - imposed by scribes in the Middle Ages. There were no chapters in John's original.

As it was written, John's vision was this: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of the covenant could be seen in the temple . . . A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars . . ." (see Revelation 11:19-12:1).

We have already explored the New Testament's depiction of Mary as the ark of the new covenant (see Lesson Three).

To understand this scene, we have to understand the "back-story" concerning the ark.

The ark had been missing since around 587 B.C., when the prophet Jeremiah hid it in a cave before the Babylonians invaded and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Maccabees 2:4-8).

Jeremiah foretold that the ark would remain hidden until "God gathers His people together again and shows them mercy."

The ark's reappearance, then, was tied to the long hoped for restoration of the kingdom to Israel (see Acts 1:6).

The prophets envisioned this restoration as a great in-gathering of Israel's exiles in a new exodus that would culminate in all nations worshipping in the temple at Jerusalem (see 2 Maccabees 2:18; Isaiah

11:12,15-16; Jeremiah 31:8,10; Ezekiel 36:25; 37:21; 38:8,12).

Jeremiah hearkens to both the first exodus and the kingdom and temple. He promises that the "glory of the Lord" will be seen in a cloud - as it came to the tabernacle in the time of Moses, and as it came to the temple ("the place") in the time of Solomon (see Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:11).

Indeed, the return of the ark was to be a sign of the return of God's own presence to Israel. It would be a sign of His dwelling among His people - which the ark symbolized from the beginning (see Jeremiah 3:16-17; Ezekiel 37:37; Exodus 29:43-46).

We see all these images and expectations in John's revelation.

John's vision of the ark deliberately evokes the great "theophany" or appearance of God to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:16-17).

In the Greek, the words translated in Revelation 11:19 as "flashes of lightning, rumblings" are the same as those translated "peals of thunder and lightning" in Exodus.

The "violent hailstorm" John beholds recalls the "fierce hail" that God rained down upon Pharaoh, which was also accompanied by peals of thunder (see Exodus 9:18,23).

And as Moses heard a "very loud trumpet blast," John, too, hears trumpeting and loud voices in heaven - using language again similar to that used to describe Moses' theophany (see Revelation 11:15).

The scene also has echoes the Old Testament story of the fall of Jericho - which marked Israel's entrance into the promised land, and the end of its exodus in the wilderness.

Bearing the ark, the Israelites marched around Jericho for seven days, circling the city seven times on the seventh day, blowing a trumpet that finally brought the city's walls down (see Joshua 6:1-20).

In Revelation, the seventh trumpet likewise sounds with an "earthquake," signaling the beginning of a new world - the everlasting kingdom of Jesus (see Revelation 11:15,19).

John is showing us the fulfillment of Jeremiah's promise - and the promise of Israel's exodus. The kingdom has been restored. The ark has been revealed.

And the ark is revealed to be a woman - as we see in the very next verse.

We will examine how it undergirds the Assumption dogma. And, through a close study of the text, we'll also see how this vision ties together many of the Old Testament images used to describe Mary and her pivotal place in God's saving plan.

## The Queen-Bride

Revelation 12 uses Old Testament imagery to describe the "woman" as both the mother of Jesus and as the mother of the Church - which is the new people of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the bride of Christ (see Revelation 21:1-3; 9-13; 22-24).

But to understand what it means to say that Mary is the virgin queen mother assumed into heaven, we need to look closely at John's use of Old Testament ideas and images.

As we noted in Lesson Two, Israel was often portrayed in the Old Testament as a woman, a virgin daughter espoused to God in a covenant relationship compared to a marriage bond.

In Revelation, John presumes this Old Testament idea, and develops the Old Testament's image of

daughter Zion giving birth to the Messiah.

In foretelling Israel's salvation, the prophet Isaiah said that Israel would be arrayed like a queen-bride - gloriously crowned, radiant with the brightness of the sun and the moon (see Isaiah 60:19-20; 62:3-5). In the same way, Solomon's bride is described as a queen radiant as the moon and the sun (see Song of Songs 6:4,10).

John, in using this Old Testament imagery, is showing us the queen-bride, Israel.

The twelve stars of her crown are an obvious symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel. But throughout Revelation, the twelve tribes are also reckoned as signs of the twelve apostles, the representatives of the new Israel, the people of God, the Church (see Revelation 7:4-8; 21:12-14).

So the woman in Revelation is Daughter Zion and Mary. But as Daughter Zion was a symbol of whole people of God - Israel - the woman in John is also a symbol of the Church.

Paul, in language similar to that of Revelation, called the Church "the Jerusalem above . . . our mother" (see Galatians 4:26-27; Isaiah 54:1), and spoke of the Church as the bride of Christ (see Ephesians 5:31-32). John referred to the Church as a "Lady" (see 2 John 5).

So it is natural to see that Mary, as presented in Revelation, is the mother of the Church, and is a symbol for the whole Church, which gives birth to a new people of God. Indeed, Mary, as the Mother of the Church, is said to have "offspring" in addition to the one male child she gives birth to. Those children are described as those who believe in Jesus (see Revelation 12:17).

John's woman is depicted in a painful childbirth, again evoking Old Testament images of Daughter Zion in travail - suffering in exile, awaiting the birth of her salvation (see Micah 4:10; Isaiah 26:17-19).

Isaiah said that Daughter Zion, amid roaring sounds

from the temple, would give birth to a male child and more children (see Isaiah 66:6-10). The scene is very similar in John.

We should note, too, that John's choice of words in Revelation 12:1-2 seems to deliberately evoke Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah's birth (see Isaiah 7:10,14). In both, we read of a sign high in the sky, and of a woman with child giving birth to a son.

John is showing us Daughter Zion giving birth to the Messiah.

The son born to the woman is said to be "destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod." This is a reference to Psalm 2, which depicts God giving His son the nations as an inheritance, and instructing the son to "rule them with an iron rod" (see Revelation 12:5; Psalm 2:7-9).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, this Psalm is interpreted as a prophecy of Jesus (see Acts 13:32; Hebrews 1:5). So in showing us the Messiah's birth to Daughter Zion, John is, at the same time, showing us that Jesus is that Messiah and Mary is that Daughter Zion.

In John's vision, the Christ child is taken to heaven and enthroned, as a battle breaks out in between a huge dragon and the heavenly host.

## The First Gospel

Here we see a dramatic portrayal of the promise made by God in the Garden of Eden - the so-called protoevangelium or "first gospel" (see Genesis 3:15).

Recall that God promised to place "enmity" between the serpent and "the woman," and between their respective "offspring." That the woman's offspring would strike at the serpent's head with his heel.

Now, examine the scene in Revelation.

We have a "woman," and an dragon that John clearly identifies as "the ancient serpent," the Devil who deceived the whole world (see Revelation 12:9). The woman, then, must be the "new Eve" foretold in Genesis.

The serpent is waiting beneath the woman to devour her offspring. And the birth of this son and "the rest of her offspring" is the occasion of moral combat in which the serpent is ultimately defeated.

The final image of the woman in Revelation 12 is that of the woman fleeing into the desert - to a place specially prepared for her by God.

Later in his vision, John sees the woman given eagle's wings to fly to a place in the desert where she would be nourished by God (see Revelation 12:6,14).

John's language here recalls Jesus' words to the apostles - that He was going to the heaven to "prepare a place" for them "so that where I am you also may be" (see John 14:1-3).

The language of preparing a place is often used in the New Testament to describe the destiny that God has planned for His children - He prepares a place for believers at Christ's right hand (see Matthew 20:23), and prepares the kingdom for those He has blessed (see Matthew 25:34; see also 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

John also evokes God's care for Israel in the wilderness, where He bore the people on eagles' wings in their time of trial (see Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31-33; 32:10-12). And God's care in the desert included nourishing His people with bread from heaven (see Deuteronomy 8:2-3,6; Wisdom 16:20-21,26).

# From Scripture to Liturgy

## Summary of Revelation

What do we learn from about Mary in Revelation 12 - and how is this passage related to Catholic belief in her Assumption?

First, we find in Revelation all of the biblical images of Mary that we have discussed in this course. She is portrayed as the new ark of God's covenant, the new Eve, the Daughter Zion, and the Queen Mother of God's kingdom.

She is depicted as a virgin mother, giving birth to the Messiah, and as spiritual mother of all those who keep the commandments and bear witness to Jesus.

She is shown to embody or represent all of God's people. She experiences God's protection and nourishment in the wilderness of the world and is flown to a place prepared for her by God.

We see, then, the outlines of the biblical foundation for this great Marian doctrine:

Because Mary is the New Eve, envisioned by God since before the garden of Eden to be the ark of His new covenant, to bear God's only begotten Son, the Author of Life (see Acts 3:15), Mary was protected from the serpent and taken on eagle's wings to a place prepared for her by God.

## The Feast of the Assumption

The Church's interpretation of these biblical texts can be found in the Mass readings for the Feast of the Assumption and for the Vigil of the Assumption, August 14-15.

The vigil for the feast begins with a reading from the first book of Chronicles (see 1 Chronicles 15:3-4,

15-16; 16:1-2) - about David bringing "the ark of the Lord to the place which he had prepared for it."

The psalm for the vigil likewise celebrates this event: "Advance, O Lord, to your resting place, you and the ark of your majesty" (see Psalm 132:8).

The epistle gives thanks for the victory over death won for us by Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). The gospel celebrates Mary as not only the mother of Christ, but as one who heard God's word and believed (see Luke 11:27-28).

The Mass for the feast begins with a reading from Revelation - beginning with the vision of the ark in the heavenly temple (see Revelation 11:19-12:1-6, 10). The psalm depicts a queen standing at the king's right hand (see Psalm 45), while the epistle envisions Christ as the king putting His enemies under His feet - the last enemy being death (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-27).

Finally, the gospel for the feast is Mary's visitation of Elizabeth (see Luke 1:39-56) which, as we have explored in earlier lessons, depicts Mary as the ark of the covenant.

In the Assumption liturgies, then, we see the Church identifying as the fulfillment of numerous Old Testament figures. Mary is shown to be the ark of the covenant, bearing the Lord's presence. And we see her described as Daughter Zion, the new Eve, and the Queen of Heaven.

We also see her as a symbol of the whole people of God. As Revelation describes her offspring as keeping God's commandments and bearing witness to Jesus (see Revelation 12:17), she is hailed by Jesus herself in the liturgy as "blessed" because she heard the work of God and observed it (see Luke 11:27-28).

Portrayed in the Scriptures as the model of believers and the new Eve, it is fitting that the dogma and the worship of the Church associates Mary with Christ's

victory over death, which came into the world through the first Adam and the first Eve (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-27)..

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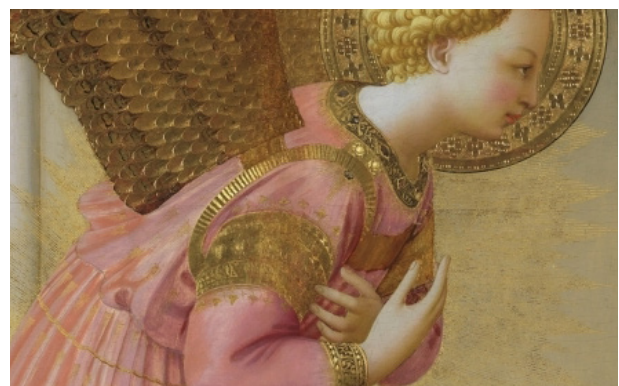
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