

# Some questions answered about Mary

Dr. Robert Fastiggi April 29, 2015

**Q:** Why do Catholics give so much attention to Mary?

**A:** Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata is credited with a simple response to this question: “No Mary, no Jesus.” This reply gets to the heart of the matter.

St. Paul writes in Galatians that, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of woman, born under the law” (4:4). This means that a woman named Mary — the mother of the Incarnate Word of God — is at the very center of salvation history.

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that God, in his omnipotent power, could have restored human nature in many different ways, but he chose to redeem us by becoming incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary. If God freely chose to redeem us by “being born of a woman,” then it necessarily follows that this woman, Mary, is central to his salvific plan. Blessed Pope Paul VI, in his homily of April 24, 1970, at the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Bonaria in Cagliari, Sardinia, put it beautifully: “If we want to be Christian, we must also be Marian — that is, we must recognize the essential, vital, providential bond which unites Our Lady to Jesus and which opens to us the way that leads us to him.”

**Q:** Do Catholics worship Mary?

**A:** According to Catholic teaching, it is forbidden to worship any creature, and Mary is created by God — “For no creature could ever be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer” (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 62). The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 made a clear distinction between the worship due to God alone and the veneration or honor (often called *dulia*) that can be given to Mary, the angels, and the saints.

**Q:** Why do Catholics call Mary “the Mother of God”? How could God have a mother?

**A:** It's not just Catholics who recognize Mary as the Mother of God. Eastern Orthodox Christians also honor Mary as the *theotokos*, the God-bearer or birth-giver of God. Even Luther and Calvin acknowledged that Mary was the Mother of God (though Calvin did not wish people to use the title). Why, though, is Mary called "the Mother of God"? It is because she is the mother of the Word Incarnate who is divine. Numerous Scriptures identify Mary as the mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1; Mt 1:18, 2:11, 12:46). Since Jesus is God (cf. Jn 1:1), Mary must be recognized as the one who bore God in her womb. Mary, of course, is not the mother of the Trinity or the divine nature of Jesus. Nevertheless, the person of the Word of God was the child she conceived in her womb and the child to whom she gave birth.

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is applied to Jesus and Mary in Matthew 1:23. Mary is the virgin who gives birth to Emmanuel (God is with us). Probably the strongest Scriptural support for Mary as the Mother of God is found in Luke 1:43, where Elizabeth speaks of Mary as "mother of my Lord." The Greek word for Lord used here, "*kyrios*," was used as a translation of the Hebrew word for God's personal name, YHWH, spoken by Jews as "Adonai" or "Lord." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 446). The belief in Mary as the Mother of God is a solemn dogma of the Catholic Church proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

**Q:** How old was Mary when she gave birth to Jesus?

**A:** We really don't know for sure. The great Jesuit, Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), who is considered the father of systematic Mariology, provides a survey of the Church Fathers and theologians on this issue in his 1592 treatise, "On the Mysteries of the Life of Christ." Suárez reports the consensus to be that Mary was around 14 when she conceived Jesus. He mentions that the Dominican theologian Cajetan believed Mary to be 19 to 24 when she conceived Jesus, but Suárez describes this as mere conjecture.

**Q:** If the New Testament speaks of the brothers and sisters of Jesus, why do Catholics believe Mary remained ever-virgin?

**A:** Nowhere in the New Testament does it ever identify the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus as the sons or daughters of Mary, his mother. According to

Old Testament usage, close relatives could also be referred to as “brothers or sisters.” This is spelled out well in paragraph 500 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

When Matthew 1:25 tells us that Joseph had no relations with Mary “until she bore a son,” this does not mean that Mary and Joseph had marital relations after Jesus’ birth. In 2 Samuel 6:23 we read how “Saul’s daughter Michal was childless until her death.” This does not mean she had children after her death!

The Fathers of the Church also found evidence of Mary’s perpetual virginity in the New Testament. Mary’s reply to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Lk 1:34) suggests a resolve to remain a virgin. When our Lord entrusts the care of Mary to the beloved disciple (Jn 19:26-27), it implies that Mary had no other children to whom she could be entrusted.

## Q: Why do Catholics pray to Mary when we can appeal directly to God?

**A:** Catholics, of course, can pray directly to God, the Holy Trinity. Vatican II, though, recognized the “close and indissoluble tie” that unites Mary to her divine son (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 53). Mary is intimately united to her divine son, and she is “our mother in the order of grace” (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 61)··· Jesuit Father Francisco Suárez explained that we should pray to Mary “so that the dignity of the intercessor may make up for our deficiency.”

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