

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Short reflections, eternal truths



THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

Understanding Her Role in
the Catholic Faith

FR LUKE GOYMOUR

There's Something About Mary: Understanding Her Role in the Catholic Faith

There's something about Mary that has captivated the hearts of Christians for centuries. And yet, she is often misunderstood, especially by those looking in from the outside. One of the most common misconceptions is that Catholics worship Mary. Let's be clear: we don't. The Church teaches very firmly that worship - what we call *latria* - is reserved for God alone: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What we offer to Mary is something different. We honour her. We venerate her. We celebrate her, for she is fully alive in Christ. And, importantly, that's not the same as worship.

Veneration vs. Worship

The distinction is very important:

- **Worship (*latria*)** is the highest form of adoration, offered only to God. It involves sacrifice, praise, and the recognition that God alone is the Creator and Sustainer of all.
- **Veneration (*dulia*)** is the honour we give to saints - those holy men and women who have gone before us in faith.
- **Mary's veneration (*hyperdulia*)** is unique, because her role is unique. She is the Mother of God. That's not just a title - it's a truth that points us directly to Jesus.

We honour Mary because of who she is and what she's done. She said "yes" to God, and through her, the Word became flesh. Her obedience made the Incarnation (God becoming human) possible. She is the first disciple, the one who carried Christ not only in her heart, but in her womb. Furthermore, as she is now in heaven and, in a spiritual sense, more fully alive, she continues to intercede on our behalf, much as a devoted mother would.

Think of it this way: if you were struggling and asked a friend to pray for you, you wouldn't be worshipping them - you'd be asking for help. Catholics relate to Mary in much the same way. We believe she is alive in Christ, in heaven, and that her prayers are powerful. We say, "You've walked this road. You know what it's like. Please, pray for us."

Mary's Unique Insight

Mary's perspective on Jesus is unlike anyone else's. She saw his first steps, heard his first words, and stood by him in his final agony. No one knows a child quite like the child's mother. Even Joseph couldn't match that closeness. Mary's insight into Jesus' life is singular - and that's why we turn to her not instead of Christ, but to draw closer to him.

In fact, Marian devotion always leads us to Jesus. She doesn't point to herself, she points to him. Her life is a model of faith, obedience, and discipleship. And when we honour her, we're not replacing Christ - we're following her example to love him more deeply.

Mary herself said, "*All generations will call me blessed*" (Luke 1:48). That's not a boast - it's a prophecy. And we're simply fulfilling it. We honour her not because she is divine, but because her humanity was so open to God that it became the gateway for our salvation.

Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation

What the Church teaches about Mary is deeply connected to what it believes about Jesus. In fact, everything we say about Mary ultimately points us back to Christ. One of the oldest and most important titles given to her is *Mother of God*. And that title tells us just as much about who Jesus is as it does about Mary herself.

To say that Mary is the Mother of God doesn't mean she existed before God or created him. It means that the child she carried in her womb is one person, fully God and fully man. Mary gave Jesus his human body, his DNA, his physical features. Through her, and not Joseph, Jesus was descended from King David. So when we say Mary is the Mother of God, we're affirming the central mystery of our faith: the Incarnation—God becoming flesh.

Some Christians today feel uneasy about this title. They prefer to say Mary is the Mother of Jesus, or the mother of Jesus' human nature. But that's not quite right. Mothers don't give birth to "natures" - they give birth to persons. If we say Mary only gave birth to part of Jesus, we risk splitting him into two separate people: one human, one divine. That's not Christianity, rather it's a fifth-century heresy called Nestorianism. Denying Mary's title as Mother of God is, in effect, denying that Jesus is truly God.

So when we say in the Creed, "*born of the Virgin Mary,*" we're not just affirming Mary's role - we're proclaiming the most profound truth of our faith: that the eternal, invisible God took flesh and became one of us. Christianity isn't about us reaching up to God - it's about God reaching down to us.

Jesus Is Fully Human

I remember going to see *The Passion of the Christ* with a friend. After the film, she said, "He wouldn't have been able to endure that if he wasn't God." I understood the sentiment, but I had to gently correct her. Jesus didn't survive the Cross because he had superpowers. He endured it because he was fully human - and fully obedient to the Father.

The Incarnation doesn't mean God wore a human disguise. Jesus is one person with two natures: human and divine. These natures are distinct but united.

This is what theologians call the *hypostatic union*. It means Jesus experienced everything we do - pain, hunger, fatigue, sorrow - except sin. And yet, at the same time, he remained fully God.

This isn't just theological jargon. It matters. Because if Jesus wasn't truly human, then his suffering and death wouldn't mean anything. And if he wasn't truly God, then he couldn't save us. The Incarnation reveals a God who is so in love with us that he makes himself small, so that we can know him, love him, and be loved by him.

God Touches the whole of Creation through Mary

When God united himself to our human nature, he did so in a very deliberate and precise way, he did so in the womb of the Virgin Mary. God entered our world in the womb of Mary; this is no small thing. Jesus is our salvation, and salvation quite literally entered the world through Mary. In becoming flesh he didn't just come close to us - he sanctified all of creation. Furthermore, the Incarnation (God becoming flesh) is the foundation of our sacramental life. This sacramental principle is writ large in our Catholic faith: God makes himself known through created things. In Jesus, the invisible God becomes visible. And in the sacraments, God continues to touch our lives through ordinary matter: water, bread, oil.

This is why the sacraments are so powerful. They're not just symbols - they're encounters with the living God. Just as Jesus communicated divine life through his humanity, so now he communicates grace through the physical signs of the Church.

Jesus Saves Us by Becoming One of Us

We often say Jesus died for our sins. But that only has meaning if he truly died—and was truly human. When Adam and Eve sinned, all of us inherited the effects of that sin because we share their human nature. Jesus saves us by taking on that same nature. He stands in our place and offers his perfect humanity back to the Father.

The early Church Fathers expressed it eloquently: *Humanity was wounded by Adam's disobedience, but healed through Christ's obedience as the second Adam.* They recognised that, according to God's perfect plan, just as salvation was lost through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, it would be restored through the obedience of the New Adam and New Eve - Jesus and Mary. While Adam and Eve said "No" in the Garden, many years later both Mary and Jesus offered a resolute "Yes" to God's will. Not only are we healed, but in Christ we are, lifted up and made sons and daughters of God. Through Christ, we join God's own family and in Christ, we share a spiritual mother: Mary.

So when we say in the Creed, "*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,*" we're proclaiming that God has truly become one of us. He hasn't left us on our own. He's united himself to the whole of creation - to love it, to heal it, and to save it.

As St Athanasius said: "*What is not assumed is not redeemed.*" Jesus assumed the fullness of our humanity so that every part of us could be redeemed.

Mary: First Disciple, Model of Faith

Mary is not only the Mother of God - she is also the first disciple of Christ. She didn't need to understand everything before she said yes. And neither do we. She pondered the mysteries of God in her heart, even when they were painful

or confusing. She heard Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul. She witnessed her Son's rejection, suffering, and death. And yet she remained faithful, journeying with him all the way to the foot of the Cross.

Mary had no special exemption from discipleship. Though highly favoured, she still had to hear the word of God and keep it. She sat at the feet of Jesus, just like the other disciples. Her greatness lies not only in her motherhood, but in her faith.

Following Mary's Example

Mary teaches us how to respond to God. Not with perfect understanding, but with trust. Not with pride, but with humility. She shows us how to ponder the mysteries of God in our hearts, how to sit at the feet of Jesus, how to say yes even when we don't have all the answers.

Let us pray that, as Mary's yes opened the door for the salvation of the world, a new door to deep faith and life will be opened in us. Let us recognise God in our ordinariness, in our poverty, in our nothingness. And may our yes - however small or hesitant - open us to the transforming grace of God.

Apart from Christ, Mary is the most significant person in salvation history. She is the Mother of God, the New Eve, the first disciple, and the model of faith. We do not worship her - but we rightly honour her, love her, and call her blessed, just as Scripture says. Dear friend there's something about Mary, and that something always leads us to Jesus.



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**Why is Mary referred to as the Mother of God?
Do Catholics worship Mary? What gives Mary
such a significant role within the Catholic Faith?**

**In this pamphlet, Fr Luke answers these
questions and discusses the importance of Mary
as a model of faith.**

***“The Shepherd’s Voice”, pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from
Fr Luke Goymour***

Fr Luke Goymour was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary’s College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor’s degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master’s degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark’s with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.