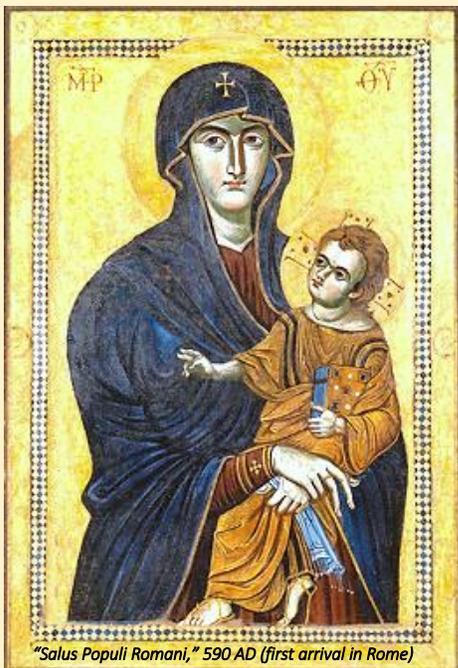


Into the deep

ADULT FAITH FORMATION:
DEEPENING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH & IDENTITY



"Salus Populi Romani," 590 AD (first arrival in Rome)

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Mother

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers; They will strike
at your head, while you strike at their heel."
(Genesis 3:15)

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the woman out of all human history who was chosen by God the Father to give human flesh and blood to His divine Son. God knew He would choose Mary long before He even formed Adam and Eve. Because she plays an important role in our redemption, God created Mary in a unique and special way which the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception explains. Many people hold to the incorrect understanding that this doctrine is about Jesus or believe that this teaching was not proclaimed until fairly recently. While Marian dogma dates back to 4th century writings of the early Church fathers, it was the document, *Ineffabilis Deus*, issued by Pope Pius IX on 8 December 1854 that formally defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pius IX did this in the hope that such would help the Catholic faithful grow spiritually toward Christ.

Ineffabilis Deus taught that the Blessed Virgin Mary "in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin." In other words, at the moment of the creation of her soul and its infusion into her body, the person of Mary was preserved from original sin.

The term *conception* does not mean the active or generative conception by her parents. While

Mary's body was formed in her mother's womb and her father shared in her formation, the Church teaches that the person is truly conceived when the soul is created and infused into the body. Mary was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin at the first moment of her animation, and thus sanctifying grace was given to her before sin could have taken effect in her soul. Thus, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception means that at the moment of her own conception in her mother's womb, God intervened and preserved Mary from original sin. Mary was therefore born with a perfect, sinless human nature; the same that she would be giving to her Son, Jesus.¹

In addition to this doctrine, the Church also proclaims four other Marian doctrines: Mary, Mother of God; Perpetual Virginity; The Assumption; and Mary, Mother in the Order of Grace.

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."
(Luke 1:31-32)

Mary, Mother of God: One of the primary truths about Jesus is that He is both divine (fully God) and human (fully man). The term "Mother of God" is also often misunderstood and yet it has a specific meaning. When the Son of God, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, "stepped into" human history (i.e., became Incarnate), He did so through Mary. The person that Mary gave birth to was Lord of Heaven and earth Incarnate. Because Mary

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Salus Populi Romani Protectress and Health of the Roman People

Deep within the papal basilica Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and resting within the Borghese Chapel therein is the Marian icon shown at upper left, *Salus Populi Romani*. It is said to have arrived from Crete in the year 590 AD during the pontificate of Pope Gregory the Great and is further believed to have been painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist. Around 1240 AD, it began to be called *Regina Caeli* (*Queen of Heaven*). It also happens to be Pope Francis' favorite icon of the Madonna.¹

On the morning after his election as Pope, Francis slipped out of the Vatican to pray before this ancient icon. It features Mary dressed in a blue robe holding the infant Jesus who in turn is holding a jeweled golden book in his left hand while blessing the people with his right.

While serving as bishop and cardinal in Argentina, Bergoglio (Francis) would come to Santa Maria Maggiore to pray before this icon each time he was in Rome. Today, before and after every foreign trip, Francis continues his tradition to pray before this Marian image and leaves a bouquet of white roses. The other Marian icon for which he is known to have deep affection is the painting "Mary, Undoer of Knots" that he discovered in a Bavarian church while studying in Germany in the 1980s.¹

¹ "Pope Francis' favorite Marian icon gets makeover," Associated Press. 25 January, 2018. Web. 2 December 2019.



Did you know? On December 1st, Pope Francis issued *Admirabile Signum* (“a wonderful sign”); a letter on the importance of Nativity scenes to “encourage the ... tradition of preparing the Nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares.” Many thanks to all who participated in our library’s crèche exhibit!

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is the mother of Jesus and Jesus is God, Mary is therefore the Mother of God Incarnate – or *Theotokos* - which the Council of Ephesus formally declared in 431 AD. Thus, her role as Mother of God places Mary in a unique position in God’s plan for our salvation.² The Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God is celebrated each January 1st.

“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.”
(Isaiah 7:14)

Perpetual Virginity: Belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity before, during and after Jesus’ birth is likewise a centuries-old teaching. Ancient Christian writers looked to the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel as the foundation for this belief (EZ 44:2) and the Gospels of Luke and Matthew further attest to this (LK 1:26-27, 35; MT 1:23). And if Jesus’ conception was miraculous, so too was His birth. The Church teaches that Mary retained her virginity, even in the act of giving birth to Jesus, as a sign of her everlasting purity and holiness and of her singular devotion and total gift of herself to God.² Because she is both virgin and mother, Mary’s life is a supreme example of holiness to those who are married as well as those who live the chaste single life. Some of the earliest Church fathers who defended the teaching on Mary’s perpetual virginity include Origen, Athanasius, Ambrose and Augustine. The Fifth Ecumenical Council held at Constantinople in 553 AD declared Mary *aeiparthenos* (*ever-virgin*) and The Lateran Council of 649 AD later affirmed it.

“As they walked on still conversing, a fiery chariot and fiery horses came between the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind...”
(2 Kings 2:11)

Assumption of Mary: One consequence of original sin is that it brought death into the world. If Mary was born without original sin, then she could not have died due to corruption by sin. The Church teaches that at the end of her life when her mission on earth was complete, God *assumed* Mary body and soul into Heaven. Scriptural precedent for this belief is found in the Old Testament story of Elijah who was “*taken into Heaven in a whirlwind*” (2 Kg 2:11).²

Evidence of belief in The Assumption is also found in the prayers and writings of the ancient Church; one of which comes to us from St. Gregory of Tours:

“The Apostles took up her body on a bier and placed it in a tomb; and they guarded it, expecting the Lord to come. And behold, again the Lord stood by them; and the holy body having been received, He commanded that it be taken in a cloud into paradise: where now, rejoined to the soul, she rejoices with the Lord’s chosen ones” (Book of Miracles 1:4, 6th century).

The encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* of Pope Pius XII issued 1 November 1950 formally defined The Assumption of Mary.

Mary, Mother in the Order of Grace: Because of her cooperation with the redemptive work of Christ, Mary becomes mother in a spiritual sense. The Church teaches that this motherhood in the order of grace continues uninterrupted from the time of her consent given to the Archangel Gabriel at The Annunciation. But what exactly does this mean?

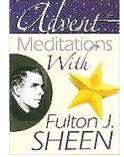
First, Mary watches over and protects the human race through her intercessions (e.g., Jn 2:1-11) and she points us to Christ: “*Do whatever he tells you.*” Mary is also our mother in the order of grace because she is the mother of the Church. If Christ is head of the Church and the baptized are His Body, and if Mary is mother of Christ’s body, then she is also Mother of the Church and our mother. Finally, she is mother in the order of grace because she is the “handmaid of the Lord” upon whom the Holy Spirit came to rest. The world which received Christ through Mary over two thousand years ago continues to receive Christ through Mary today. It is through her help that God’s grace reaches us and “transforms us more and more into the image of her Son, Jesus Christ.”² One of the documents resulting from the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), lends additional insight into this particular Marian dogma (LG No. 52-69).

In this new Advent season, as we joyfully anticipate our Savior’s birth, let us also joyfully remember that His Mother – the Blessed Virgin Mary - is likewise our own spiritual Mother who gently guides us home to her Son, Jesus.

“O come, O come Emmanuel...”
Wishing you a blessed Advent and Christmas season!

Faith Formation Opportunities for Adults of All Ages

“Advent Meditations with Fulton Sheen”
Tuesdays, 12:00-1:00pm
Dec 3, 10 and 17, in the Manning Adult Center



Join us for reflection and faith sharing with one of the 20th century’s greatest preachers. Snacks provided. Bring a sack lunch if you prefer. **Cost of book only \$2.00.**

Starting January 2020: “The Eucharist.”

A DVD study by Bishop Robert Barron.
Watch the bulletin for details.



A Winter Symposium celebrating the 25th anniversary of St. Pope John Paul II’s groundbreaking encyclical, *Evangelium vitae*
Coming in 2020

Sacred Arts Forum Tuesdays, February 2020

The next *Art inFormation* speaker series will focus on stained glass, iconography, sacred space and sacred song. Watch the bulletin.

New for Season of Lent 2020

Lenten Lunch Speaker Series Wednesdays in March

With guest speakers from various local men’s and women’s religious communities who will reflect on prayer, spirituality and their order’s charism. A portion of the luncheon proceeds will benefit Catholic Relief Services.

1 Pope Blessed Pius IX. “Ineffabilis Deus” - Apostolic Letter.” Vatican: the Holy See. Rome, 8 December, 1854. Web. 4 December 2019.
2 “The Five Doctrines on Mary.” On the Journey Series for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Clinton, MD, The Association for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM), 2005, pp 1-7.