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Mary is the Model of Christian Discipleship

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PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

MARY IS THE MODEL OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

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Introduction

What does Mary mean to us today? The Blessed Virgin Mary has an important place in the life of every Christian. She accompanied Jesus from His conception in her womb until His death on the cross. In doing so she followed Jesus in a perfect manner. Since we as Christians are the followers of Jesus, Mary is able to show us how to follow Jesus. Therefore, I will endeavor to explain how the Blessed Virgin Mary's life is a model of Christian discipleship.

The first chapter of this thesis will recount how Mary is described in the New Testament. The New Testament begins its account of Mary's life with the Annunciation. The Archangel appears to her and announces her selection to be the mother of Jesus. "Embracing God's saving will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son."¹ The New Testament records Mary's role in the important events of the life of Jesus from His conception to His ascension.

The second chapter is entitled 'Mary in Dogma'. Here I will consider four dogmas of the Catholic Church about the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are: the Mother of God, the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Assumption of Mary. Marian dogmas help us to look more closely at Mary. Since Mary is the model for Christian discipleship, she is the model of the Religious life also. As a Religious sister, I have chosen Mary as my mother and teacher. The third chapter explains Mary's place in the SABS Congregation to which I belong. As a member of

¹ *Lumen Gentium* 88.

Congregation of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, I will present how the Blessed Mother is a model and inspiration for our consecrated life. Here I will mention the devotion that we practice to honor Mary and to grow in our filial relationship with her. Moreover, this chapter will discuss the role of the Virgin Mary in the life of Religious as a whole.

In this endeavor to explain how the Blessed Virgin Mary's life is a model of Christian discipleship, I will use the following sources: Scripture, the Councils of the Catholic Church, and the writings of various Popes and theologians.

Chapter One

Mary in the New Testament

When we look in the New Testament to explore what is said about Mary, it is remarkable that only four books mention Mary by name. These four books are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Besides these four books, one more book, the Gospel of John speaks of Mary as the Mother of Jesus or His Mother but never refers to her by name. Out of the 27 books in the New Testament, these five books give us information about Mary. However, St. Paul, in his Letter to Galatians, mentions her once indirectly (Gal 4:4 NAB). In addition, the book of Revelation describes a mysterious woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, who gives birth to a child (Rev 12:1-17). There are different opinions about who this woman is. While some scholars are of the opinion that the woman is Mary, others say that the woman represents the Church. In this chapter, we will look at Mary's place in the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians and the Book of Revelation in a chronological order. Since St. Paul's letters are the earliest written documents, we start with the Letter to the Galatians.

Mary in Galatians 4:4

The letters of the St. Paul are the oldest documents in the New Testament. There is only one mention of Mary in all the letters of St. Paul and she is not even named.² We see

²John Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 31.

this reference to Mary in Galatians 4:4. “But 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”(Gal 4:4-5).

It is clear that the “woman” mentioned in this passage is Mary, the mother of Jesus. St.Paul does not give any further details about “Who is that woman? What is her name? Is she a simple material instrument or an instrument of choice?”³ Perhaps Paul did not know Mary’s name. Moreover, he might have been ignorant of her virginal conception.

The phrase “born of a woman” is a frequently used Jewish expression to indicate a person’s human condition. When Paul says that Jesus was born of a woman, he seems to point out that Jesus shared our human condition. There is no indication of Paul’s awareness of the virginal conception in Gal 4:4. By using the word “woman”, Paul might be indirectly referring to Mary. He simply says that she is a woman who is the mother of Jesus and brought him into the world.⁴

There is another important point in Gal 4:4. Paul uses the words “when the fullness of time had come”. Like other fellow Christians, Paul also believed that there is a providential ordering in history. “The fullness of time” implies a climax in the history of Israel. From the calling of Abraham onwards, God was preparing many people to become instruments of his purposes. God’s salvific plan reached its climax with the virgin birth of Jesus. God chose the people of Israel as part of his plan. Mary was the last link in that plan before the appearance of Jesus. Paul does not give any historical

³ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* (Washington: AMI Press, 1991), 10.

⁴ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 42-43.

information about Mary. However, through his short reference to Mary, Paul reinforces Mary's place in salvation history⁵.

Mary in the Gospel of Mark

Unlike the other synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of Mark does not give an account of the conception and birth of Jesus. Likewise, it does not have any mention of Jesus' pre-existence as the Word of God as in the prologue of St. John. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus is presented as Messiah since his conception. There is no account of a birth narrative in the Gospel of Mark. Why? Some scholars are of the opinion that Mark was the first Evangelist and the story of the virginal conception was not discovered when he wrote the Gospel.⁶ Mark begins his Gospel presenting the figure of John the Baptist. Jesus who has already grown to manhood first appears in Mark at the time of his Baptism. At the Jordan River, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice from heaven designates him as the Father's beloved Son (Mk 1: 9-11).

Mark presents Jesus in such a way that until Jesus' suffering and death only he knows the fact that he is the Messiah. At the time of his trial before the Sanhedrin, he admits to the high priest that he is the Son of God (Mk 14:61-62). Again, at the foot of the cross, the centurion acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God. "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15: 39). According to Mark, the crowds and even Jesus' disciples do not understand who Jesus really is. Obviously, Mark does not say anything about the birth of Jesus. Some scholars are of the opinion that Mary also may be included in this

⁵ John Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians*, 32-33.

⁶ Philip J. Donnelly, "The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God," in *Mariology* Vol.2, ed. Juniper B. Carol, 254.

group who do not understand the messianic secret of Jesus. ⁷Mark uses her name only once (Mk 6:3) and he knows that Jesus' mother was called Mary.⁸

There are only two chapters which present Mary as the mother of Jesus in Mark's Gospel (Mk 3:31-35; 6:1-6). Mary appears on the scene only in one chapter (3:31-35). In 6:1-6, Mary is only mentioned. The name Mary appears in three other verses (Mk 15:40, 47; 16:1). Some scholars think that this is not Mary, the mother of Jesus.⁹

1. Jesus and His Family (Mk 3:31-35)

Mark 3: 20-21 states that Jesus came home and a crowd gathered around him. It was even difficult for him to eat. When his relatives heard of this, his relatives went to seize him because they said, "He is out of his mind." Mary's name is not mentioned here. But we assume that Mary also is included in his family. It is certain that there is a misunderstanding between Jesus and his family.¹⁰ They do not realize that it is the Spirit of God that prompts him to act as he does (Mk 1:10-12).¹¹ Later, Mk 3: 31-35 speaks about his family again. Here Mark includes in the family the "mother" and "brothers" of Jesus. They are standing outside and sent word to call him. When Jesus is informed of their presence, he distances himself from his physical family. He looks at the crowd around him and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3:35). For Mark, 'insiders' in the

⁷ Joseph A. Grassy, *Mary, Mother and Disciple: From the Scriptures to the Council of Ephesus* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc; 1988), 19-20.

⁸ John Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 33.

⁹ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), 40.

¹⁰ John Macquarrie, *Mary for all Christians*, 34.

¹¹ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Between the Creche and the Cross: Another Look at the Mother of Jesus in the New Testament," *New Theological Review* 3, no.23 (2010): 9.

circle are important.¹² The people who are seated around Jesus and listen to him are considered as his true family.

The Matthean and Lucan parallels to Mark 3:20-35 (Mt 12:24-50; Lk 8:19-21) present a different picture. While Matthew's Jesus points to the disciples and says that "whoever does the will of my heavenly father" belongs to his eschatological family, Luke's Jesus, without pointing to the disciples and without excluding his relatives, states that one can belong to his family only if he or she hears the word of God and acts on it. In the light of infancy narrative in Luke's text (Lk 1:38), one can say that Mary is not excluded from Jesus' eschatological family.¹³ In Luke's Gospel, Mary is the hearer and doer of the word of God.

2. The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Mk 6: 1-6)

This is the only text where Mark mentions Mary's name. Jesus visits his native place with his disciples. On the Sabbath, he teaches in the synagogue and people are surprised about his wisdom. "They said, "Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him" (Mk 6:3). The people know Jesus' family very well and they could not accept him as their teacher.

There are discussions about the phrase *son of Mary*. "Why not "son of Joseph"? Maybe it means that Joseph is dead and not in the scene. There is another assumption that Mark implies virginal conception of Jesus.¹⁴ But this idea is questionable when we read the previous two texts carefully. If Mark knew about the virginal conception of Jesus, he

¹² Celine Mangan, "Mary in Scripture," *Milltown Studies* 22 (January 1988):42.

¹³ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 286-287.

¹⁴ Doris Donnelly, *Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 94.

would describe Jesus' family in a more favorable way. In Mark 6:4, Jesus himself says, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house". Both Matthew and Luke who describe the virginal conception of Jesus in the earlier chapters of their Gospels omit the phrase "among his own kin" (Mt 15:37; Lk 4:24). Hence, there is the possibility that Mark did not know the tradition about the virginal conception of Jesus.¹⁵

The names of Jesus' brothers mentioned in this text and other texts (Mk 3:31-35; 6:3, Mt 12:46-50; 13:55-56; 28:10, Lk 8:19-21, Jn 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; 20:17, Gal 1:19, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 9:5) have raised questions about Mary's virginity. All of these texts use the Greek word *adelphos* meaning brother. Literally, the meaning of the word is blood brother. In the New Testament, the word *adelphos* sometimes denotes a different relationship. Hebrew and Aramaic use the word brother in the sense of a kinsman or relative, a cousin, a member of the same clan. Paul uses the word brother in his writings to refer spiritual or Christian bond of fellowship. Catholic tradition preserves the fact that all of the references to the brothers and sisters of Jesus mean cousins and Mary is a perpetual virgin. We will discuss in detail about Mary's virginity in another chapter.¹⁶

We saw that Mary's appearance in Mark's Gospel is not very complimentary to her. Mark does not give us a picture of Mary who encourages her son in her mission. Mary appears as a Jewish mother who is concerned about her son. However, some scholars disagree about Mary's comprehension concerning the Messianic secret of Jesus.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is clear in the Gospel that Mary is the Mother of Jesus.

¹⁵ Joseph A. Grassy, *Mary, Mother and Disciple: From the Scriptures to the Council of Ephesus*, 22-23.

¹⁶ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 45-47.

¹⁷ *ibid*; 43.

Mary in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew gives us little information on the person and character of Mary. In Matthew's Gospel, Mary appears generally in five texts.

1. Mt 1:1-17 The genealogy of Jesus
2. Mt 1:18-25 The birth of Jesus
3. Mt 2:11, 13-14, 20-21 The child and his mother
4. Mt 12:46-50 The family of Jesus
5. Mt 13:54-58 The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

First, let us look at the genealogy of Jesus. In the genealogy, Matthew's intention is to present Jesus as the Son of David and as Emmanuel. He also wants to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises. The promise God had made through the prophet Isaiah to the King Ahaz was fulfilled through the virgin birth of Jesus. "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" (Is 7:14). The people of Israel carried God's promise of hope and waited for the coming of the Messiah. For Matthew, this veil has been removed with the birth of Jesus.¹⁸

Mary has a significant role in the genealogy.¹⁹ Mary is mentioned at the end of the line of the ancestors. "Mary, of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah" (Mt 1:16). Before Mary, four women also are mentioned in the genealogy. They are Tamar (Gen 38:24), Rahab (Jos 2:1), Ruth (Ru 3:1-18), and the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba (2 Sam 11). All these women are distinguishable in the Old Testament for their irregular marital union. At the same time, they were instruments of God's messianic plan. Likewise, God

¹⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 85.

¹⁹ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 53.

chooses Mary as His instrument and her extraordinary marriage with Joseph results in the birth of Messiah.²⁰

Mary in the Birth Narrative

In the birth narrative of Jesus (Mt 1: 18-25), the Evangelist presents Mary as virgin and mother. Jewish marriage customs of the first century were especially strict. During the first stage, couples exchanged their consent before witnesses, but the girl continued to live with her relatives. At this period, man and woman were to maintain their virginity. The second stage includes transferal of the bride into her husband's home.²¹ Mary was found pregnant between these two stages. Therefore, Mary's pregnancy has the appearance of adulterous behavior. "She was found with child through the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18). Although Mary's virginal conception is through the work of Holy Spirit, Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, was not able to understand her. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and solves his concern about Mary's unexpected pregnancy. The angel reveals that the child begotten in Mary is through the Holy Spirit. Besides, the angel reminds Joseph of his duty to take Mary into his home (cf. Mt 1:20).

Matthew focuses on Joseph as the central person in the Annunciation scene of 1:18-25. It is Matthew's intention to present Jesus as son of David. Joseph is the Davidic and "legal" father of Jesus.²² In order to depict Jesus as Son of David, the family tree is presented as a Davidic genealogy leading up to Joseph. The angel of the Lord

²⁰ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 54.

²¹ Doris Donnelly, ed; *Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 97.

²² Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 53.

addresses Joseph as “son of David” (Mt 1:20). Besides, it is Joseph who gives Jesus his name.²³ However, Joseph is not mentioned in the story of the visit of the wise men (Mt 2:1-12). When the wise men came to pay homage to the “new born king of the Jews”, they found the child with Mary his mother (Mt 2:11). Mary is also mentioned in the narrative of the flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth. Matthew speaks of Mary and the infant Jesus four times in the second chapter (Mt 2:11; 13; 14; 20).

Mary and the Public Ministry of Jesus

After the infancy narrative of Jesus, two Matthean passages talk about Mary.

1. The true family of Jesus (Mt 12:46-50)

In this text, Matthew mentions that Jesus’ mother and brothers are standing outside while he is speaking to the crowd. For Matthew the disciples constitute the true family of Jesus. When Jesus declares, “whoever does the will of my heavenly father is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt 12:50), his physical family does not seem to react in Matthew’s Gospel. In Matthew’s Gospel, Mary seems to know that Jesus is the Messiah. Through the work of Holy Spirit, she virginally conceived her son. After Jesus’ birth, she witnessed the visit of Magi to the child. Furthermore, she had seen how God protected the child Jesus from the hands of King Herod.²⁴ Afterwards, to fulfill the promises of the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazorean”, God brought him back to Nazareth (cf. chapters one and two). Mary is the eyewitness to all these events in the life of Jesus.

²³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 85.

²⁴ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 99.

2. The rejection of Jesus in his own country (Mt 13:54-58)
“Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers....Where did this man get all this? And they took offense at him....And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith” (Mt 13: 55-58). This is the second text in Matthew’s Gospel in which Mary’s name is mentioned during the public ministry of Jesus. The people in his own native place do not accept Jesus. They cannot see him as their savior. People know Jesus’ family background and some are surprised and others took offence at Jesus and say that they know Jesus’ parents Joseph and Mary. The Gospel passage does not say that Mary also is present in the crowd but Mary’s name is simply mentioned.

As we have seen, Mary plays a small, but significant role in the Gospel of Matthew, especially in the infancy narrative. She, along with Joseph, is obedient to the will of God revealed through Joseph’s dreams.²⁵ Matthew presents Mary as virgin and mother of Jesus. It was important for Matthew to show that God had fulfilled his promises through the prophets for the salvation of Israel (cf. Mt 1:23; 2:6). The image of mother and child teaches us who God is. We have a loving God, who is faithful to his promises²⁶ and is able to save his people from the hands of the wicked. In salvation history, God chooses simple people as his instruments to accomplish his purposes. Mary is God’s powerful instrument, through her God brought the Messiah, who is the savior of mankind, into the world.

²⁵ Doris Donnelly, ed; *Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, 96.

²⁶ Joseph A. Grassy, *Mary, Mother and Disciple: From the Scriptures to the Council of Ephesus* , 39.

Mary in the Gospel of Luke

The Evangelist Luke's work consists of two books: his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In the New Testament, it is in the Gospel of Luke that we read the most about Mary. Mary has a significant role in the first two chapters of his Gospel. It includes the stories of the annunciation, the visitation, the birth at Bethlehem, the visit of the shepherds to the infant Jesus, the Presentation in the Temple, and the finding of Jesus in the Temple. Later in the narrative of Jesus' public ministry, there are a few references to Mary.

Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38)

The story of the Annunciation is one of the best known and loved the most in Christian tradition. The angel of the Lord appears to Mary and greets her, "Hail, full of Grace, The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). The first word of the angel's greeting is "hail" which is expressed in Aramaic. It does not correspond to the ordinary greetings of peace (shalom), in Greek or "hello". Rather, it has an echo of the greetings of Messianic joy. Mary is not greeted in an indifferent way. As God greets Mary through the angel, he greets not only her, but greets all of humanity. It carries a message that the Lord is coming to dwell in Israel and their salvation is near. Therefore, the angel's greeting is an invitation to mankind to rejoice from its innermost being. This greeting has an allusion to one of the Old Testament texts. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord" (Zec 2:14). God promises to daughter Zion that he will

come to dwell in her. The Annunciation fulfills this promise. Mary is identified with daughter Zion and Jesus whom Mary is going to bear is identified with Yahweh.²⁷

The angel does not address her by her earthly name “Mary”. Instead, the angel calls her by her divine name “full of grace” as she has always been seen by God. Grace is none other than the love of God.²⁸ Mary had already been filled with grace in preparation for her virginal way of life. Her whole life was development of the grace of God in her.²⁹ Mary is an open human being who has surrendered herself completely into the hands of God. She does not fear about her fate. She is a lover of God.³⁰ She is “full of grace”. She has found favor with God.

In verse 35, Luke says, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”. In Exodus of Old Testament accounts, the pillar of cloud was positioned at the entrance of the tent of Meeting to indicate the indwelling of God (Ex 33:9). Now Mary is the new holy Tent where God dwells in Mary.³¹ In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant symbolizes God’s presence among Israel. God’s presence in the Ark of the Covenant becomes real in Mary. She bears the Son of God in her flesh. Mary is the living Ark of the Covenant.³²

Mary said to the angel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary said “yes” to God’s great will. Through her consent to God’s choice, Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God.

²⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 64-65.

²⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Maria: On the Mother of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 51-52.

²⁹ Ignace de La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992), 4-5.

³⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 68.

³¹ *Ibid*; 87.

³² *Ibid*; 65.

“This *consent to motherhood* is above all a result of her total self-giving to God in virginity.”³³ She gave herself to God to the service of the saving plans of Almighty.³⁴

Mary’s obedience and humility is evident in her response to the angel’s words. She entrusted herself to God completely. With her free consent, God became man. God gave free will to man. He needs the freedom of his creature and asks man’s “yes” for the realization of his kingdom.³⁵ Adam and Eve said “no” to God’s will and closed the door to God’s grace. Mary opened that door through her great “yes”.

Mary’s faith reaches its climax in her “yes” to God. She believed what God had spoken to her through the angel. Mary is the model of faith. Her faith is similar to that of Abraham. When Abraham was told he would become “the father of many nations”, he did not doubt. “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body as (already) dead (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the dead womb of Sarah” (Rom 5: 18-19). At the Annunciation, Mary believed that by the power of the Holy Spirit, being as a virgin, she would become the Mother of the Son of God. Just as “Abraham’s faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant, Mary’s faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant”.³⁶ She became the mother of believers.

Mary’s Visitation to Elizabeth

After the Annunciation, “Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah” (Lk 1:39). Mary was going to visit her relative Elizabeth who is six

³³ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), no.39.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 89.

³⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man*, no.14.

months pregnant according to the promise of the Angel Gabriel to Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband (cf. Lk 1:5-25). Luke says that Mary traveled in "haste" to visit Elizabeth. Mary's genuine charity is evident here. She forgets herself and, motivated by faith in God's word, places herself at the service of others.³⁷ She is the humble handmaid of the Lord. Mary carries Jesus in her womb and brings him as the greatest gift to Zechariah, to Elizabeth his wife and also to the infant in her womb.³⁸ Mary is not afraid because she knows that God is with her and within her. We can say that her journey was the first "Eucharistic procession" in history. Mary is the living tabernacle of God made flesh. She is the Ark of the Covenant in whom the Lord visited and redeemed his people.³⁹ When Mary entered Elizabeth's house, she brought salvation to the whole city because she brought the savior with her.

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth heard the word of salvation from the one who had conceived the Incarnate Word.⁴⁰ She rejoiced and her offspring John leaped in her womb. Elizabeth praises Mary for the gift she has received from God. She recognizes already that Mary has been chosen to become the mother of Messiah (cf. Lk 1:42-43). Mary is also being praised for her faith in the promise of Almighty. "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45). Here Luke portrays Mary as a woman of faith whose faith stands in contrast to the disbelief of Zechariah (cf. Lk 1:20). As a response to Elizabeth's praise, Mary gives all the glory to God. This is the theme of the Magnificat.

³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Maria: On the Mother of God*, 53.

³⁸ *Ibid*; 7.

³⁹ *Ibid*; 19.

⁴⁰ George H. Tavard, *The Forthbringer of God: St. Bonaventure on the Virgin Mary* (Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 66.

The Song of Mary, Her Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55)

The word “Magnificat” is a Latin word which means “magnifies”.⁴¹ Different theories exist about the origin of the Magnificat. The first one is that it is a canticle composed by Mary during her visit to Elizabeth. The second one is that it is a canticle written by St. Luke and attributed to Mary to show forth her gratitude and humility. There is one more theory which says that Magnificat was a hymn composed in the early Jewish-Christian Church with the possible insertion of verse 48 and Luke found it appropriate to insert in his Gospel.⁴² Whatever the theories behind the origin of the Magnificat, there is no doubt that Magnificat is an expression of Mary’s joy and thanksgiving for God’s selection of her to become the mother of Messiah. As a Jewish woman, Mary praises God “for his mercy and love toward her and for his strong fidelity to the covenants made with her ancestors- Abraham and the Patriarchs”.⁴³

We can divide the Canticle of Mary into three different parts. In the first part (vv. 46b-7, 49-50), Mary praises God for his mercy in sending salvation to Israel. Mary’s praises are parallel to Hannah’s thanksgiving for her child in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Like Hannah, Mary also praises God in the name of all the poor and lowly in Israel. The second part (vv. 51-53) emphasizes that God has shown mercy to the lowly and the weak. The last part (vv. 54-55) stresses that God has thus fulfilled his promises to Abraham and his descendants.⁴⁴ It is clear that Mary was an extraordinary reader of the Bible. She

⁴¹ Jon M. Sweeney, *Strange Heaven: The Virgin Mary as Woman, Mother, Disciple, and Advocate* (Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2006) 47.

⁴² John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 73.

⁴³ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 74.

⁴⁴ John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, 74.

combined scripture into a new song, which is frequently sung in church liturgies.⁴⁵ She praises God for the magnificent grace granted to her. Her song reveals how grateful and humble Mary is. Mary speaks for Israel and the Magnificat “gives Mary a prophetic role and places her in the line of the prophets who have told of God’s plan of salvation”.⁴⁶

Mary in the Birth Narrative (Lk 2:1-20)

After the visitation Luke tells us that Mary returned to her home (Lk 1:56) and he does not give any further explanation about her life until the birth of Jesus. But in the second chapter of his Gospel, Luke gives Mary a significant role. Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, also has a special place with Mary in the second chapter. Here Luke narrates the birth of Jesus. According to the decree of Augustus Caesar, everybody had to be enrolled in his or her own town. Joseph belonged to David’s family and he was going from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be enrolled in the census together with Mary. Moreover, Mary was far advanced in pregnancy (Lk 2:1-7) which must have made it a difficult trip but she surrendered to God’s will.

Some authors divide the Lucan Nativity Story into two parts. The first part (vv.1-7) describes Jesus’ birth as the fulfillment of the prophecy (cf. Mic 5:1). The second part (vv. 8-20) explains the significance of this birth by the vision of angels to the shepherds. Mary, by giving birth to Jesus, gave to Israel its savior who is Messiah and the Lord (Lk 2:11).⁴⁷ Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecy of the prophet

⁴⁵ Jason Byrassée, “What About Mary?” *Christian Century* 121, no.25 (2004): 30.

⁴⁶ Frederick Houk Borsch, “Mary and Scripture: a response to Mary; grace and hope in Christ: An agreed statement of the Anglican- Roman Catholic International Commission,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no.3 (2007): 385.

⁴⁷ John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, 80.

Micah that we read in the Old Testament. According to the prophet Micah, the Messianic King would come from Bethlehem. When Jesus was born, Mary “wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7). The Evangelist Luke does not provide further details about the humble surroundings of Jesus’ birth. But he pictures Mary as a mother who is immediately ready to take care of her child.⁴⁸

Luke tells the rest of the birth narrative by means of the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds by the angel of the Lord (Lk 2:8-14). The shepherds found the infant Jesus in the manger with Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:16). Luke describes the visit of shepherds and their joyful reaction in a very skillful way. God chooses first lowly and poor people to receive the joyful news of the birth of Messiah. In the Magnificat, Mary described herself as a lowly handmaid of the Lord and praised him for the great things he has done for her. Likewise, shepherds also glorify and praise God for the great event they had heard and seen.

Luke concludes the birth narrative saying, “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Mary “preserved in her heart the mysterious words and events that surrounded Jesus’ birth”.⁴⁹ Mary heard the word of God and reflected upon its deeper meaning. Here Luke may be strengthening his picture of Mary as a disciple.⁵⁰ Mary does not understand the full significance of the happening. But she is growing as a believer and trying to understand God’s ways. This is clearer when we discuss Mary finding Jesus in the temple.

⁴⁸ Salvatore Garofalo, *Mary in the Bible* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1961), 150.

⁴⁹ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 150.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*; 151.

Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

Forty days after Jesus' birth, in accordance with the precepts of the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Lk 2:22). There was a righteous and God-fearing man in Jerusalem, called Simeon who was waiting for the consolation of Israel. When the child Jesus was brought into the temple, Simeon filled with the Holy Spirit, took the child into his arms and blessed God saying, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and Glory for your people Israel"(Lk 2:30-32). Then he blessed Mary and Joseph and said to Mary, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35).

Simeon's canticle is a revelation both to Israel and to all peoples. Jesus the newborn child is the salvation present to Israel and Gentiles. Simeon's words to Mary seems like a *second annunciation* to her.⁵¹ Mary is in puzzlement reflecting on the sword which will pierce her heart. Still, she is in a process of understanding God's ways. Through the Annunciation of the angel, Mary knows that the child to whom she gave birth is the Messiah. Now Simeon's words tell her of the challenges her Son has to face in his ministry. She has to be involved in the future mission of her child.⁵² She has to stand at the side of her suffering son. Her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful. On the one hand, Simeon's words confirms Mary's "faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to

⁵¹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God's Yes to Man*, no.16.

⁵² Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 78.

live her obedience of faith in suffering”.⁵³ The presentation of Jesus in the temple shows that Mary is a faithful observer of the Law of the Lord. Thus, Luke portrays Mary as a representative of the pious among Israel.

Mary and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple

Towards the end of the second chapter, once again Luke brings the Holy Family into the Jerusalem temple. They came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Now Jesus is twelve years old. After they had completed the feast days, they were returning to Nazareth. But Jesus remained in Jerusalem and his parents did not know about it. When they realized that Jesus was not with them, they searched for him and could not find him. They returned to Jerusalem and on the third day they found Jesus in the temple sitting in the midst of teachers. Mary asked Jesus, “Son, why have you done this to us?” Jesus replied, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:48-49) Luke adds that Mary and Joseph did not understand what their twelve-year-old son told to them.

Even though Jesus stayed with his mother Mary for twelve years, she does not understand her son completely. New events unfold to her the mystery of her son. She is growing in her journey as a disciple. She has to advance in her faith. Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce through her soul. The finding of Jesus in the Temple shows us the beginning of fulfillment of his prophecy. Mary’s concern about her son pierced her heart. Furthermore, Jesus’ answer to his parents (cf. Lk 2:49) leaves more uncertainty

⁵³ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man*, no.16.

about the future.⁵⁴ Mary starts to grasp the distress and trial she has to endure as the Mother of the Son of God.

As we have seen in Lk 2:19, once again Mary “kept all these things in her heart”. She ponders over the events had happened once more and she realizes of the necessity to grow in understanding of her son’s relationship to God his Father.⁵⁵

Mary and the Public Ministry of Jesus

Luke gives a significant place to Mary in his first two chapters of his gospel. Her name is mentioned about thirteen times. However, Mary’s name is not used in the account of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. At the same time, Mary appears as Jesus’ mother on two occasions (Lk 8:19-21; 11:27-28). We may wonder why Luke does not bring Mary into the scene often after Jesus’ childhood. The traditions show that Mary was still on the scene during Jesus’ ministry and was present in the beginning of the Church. Luke’s interest was to illustrate Mary as a symbol of discipleship. During the infancy narrative, Mary was the most appropriate figure to illustrate discipleship. But in the account of Jesus’ ministry, the twelve disciples appear and thus Luke has different figures to illustrate discipleship. At the same time, the two scenes, in which the mother of Jesus are mentioned emphasizes her continuity of discipleship.⁵⁶

Mary and the Family of Jesus (Lk 8:19-21)

“Then his mother and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him

⁵⁴ Jean Cantinat, *Mary in the Bible*, (Maryland: Newman Press, 1965), 162.

⁵⁵ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 81.

⁵⁶ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 163.

because of the crowd. He was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.” He said to them in reply, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it”.

In comparison with other Synoptic Gospels (Mk 3:20-35; Mt 12:46-50), Luke gives a different picture for this story of the family of Jesus. In these three Gospels, Jesus talks about his eschatological family. Mark presents a negative context for the physical family of Jesus. Luke says that his mother and brothers could not join him because of the crowd. At the same time, Mark and Matthew report that the mother and brothers stood outside and did not give any reason why they did not join with Jesus.

In Mark 3:21, we read that Jesus’ relatives set out to seize him because they think he is beside himself. After this in Mk 3: 31-35, Jesus’ mother and brother have come asking for him. This background gives us a glimpse of a negative approach on the part of family of Jesus. Luke has removed any element of unfriendliness between Jesus and his family. Luke extends the family of Jesus. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus points towards those sitting around him and says, “Here are my mother and sisters. Whoever does the will of God (my heavenly Father) is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mk 4:34-35; Mt 12:50). Luke does not give any gestures like that. Furthermore, as soon as Jesus heard about the presence of his mother and brothers outside, he says, “My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it”. It seems that Jesus praises his mother and brothers and confirms that they listen to the word of God and do it. This is in harmony with Luke’s picture of Mary’s first response to the word of God. “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 168-170.

A Beatitude on Jesus' Mother

Luke presents Mary as the one who hears the word of God. It is evident in the first two chapters of his Gospel. Luke pictures Mary as a model of discipleship in his Gospel. In Lk 11:27-28, he emphasizes this idea one more time.

“While he was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” (Lk 11:27-28).

The woman praises Mary for being the mother of Jesus. But Jesus points out that genuine blessing comes from the hearing the word and keeping it. Here Jesus does not deny Mary's status as his mother. On the other hand, Jesus also praises his mother for hearing the word of God and doing it. Mary is blessed not only because she gave birth to Jesus and nursed him in his infancy but also because she is hearer and doer of the word. God delights in her and accomplished great things because of her faith.

Like the woman in the crowd, we see a similar blessing in Luke 1:42. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith and her conception of Jesus.⁵⁸ “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb”. Mary is blessed because she is the mother of Jesus. She became mother of Jesus since she was obedient to the word of God. Therefore, according to the criteria of Jesus, Mary is also included in the group of those who are blessed.

Of all the Evangelists, Luke gives the fullest and most sympathetic picture of Mary. He does not hesitate to point out Mary's intimate thoughts. He expresses Mary's dilemma at the angel's greeting, her joy at the visitation to the Elizabeth, and her anxiety

⁵⁸ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 172.

during her searching for Jesus when he was twelve years old.⁵⁹ Luke pictures Mary as a simple woman who is a model of obedience, humility and faith.

Mary in the Acts of the Apostles

Outside the Synoptic Gospels, Mary is named only once in the New Testament. Luke, author of the Acts of the Apostles, pictures Mary at the heart of the resurrection community in Jerusalem. After the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles were afraid and uncertain about their future. They did not know what to do. Jesus appeared to them several times and spoke about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Jesus had asked them not to leave Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. “While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles returned from Mount Olivet to the “upper room” in Jerusalem where they were staying. After listing the names of the eleven disciples, Luke writes; “All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). According to tradition, they were in prayer for nine days.⁶⁰ Nine days after the ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon them which marked the beginning of the Church. The Church celebrates this day as Pentecost.

Luke depicted Mary as a faithful disciple from the time of the conception of Jesus. In Luke 8: 19-21, we have seen that she met the criteria to become a member of the eschatological family of Jesus. John, in his Gospel, presents Mary as a believing disciple

⁵⁹ Lucien Deiss, *Mary: Daughter of Sion*, (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1972), 129.

⁶⁰ Jon M. Sweeney, *Strange Heaven: The Virgin Mary as Woman, Mother, Disciple, and Advocate*, 51.

at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus (Jn 19: 25-27).⁶¹ The death of Jesus does not change her mind. At the time of the Annunciation, Mary responded to the angel of the Lord, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). From that time onwards, she gave herself to the work and person of her son. Her maternal self-giving does not stop after the departure of her son.⁶² She continued to be obedient to the will of God. She remained with the disciples in Jerusalem and joined in the community’s prayer for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit and thus she prepared for the beginning of the Church.

When Luke depicts Mary in the upper room, preparing for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, it has a very special significance. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke talks about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary at the Annunciation (Lk 1:35). At the beginning of the Acts, he speaks about the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the “Jerusalem community” at Pentecost.⁶³ In the first event, through the work of Holy Spirit, Jesus was brought into the world. In the second, empowered by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the apostles become capable to continue the ministry of Jesus. Mary’s active presence in both events indicates her significant role in the life of the Church.

⁶¹ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament* , 174-75.

⁶² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man* , no.40.

⁶³ Jean Cantinat, *Mary in the Bible*, 187.

Mary in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is different from the other three Gospels in so many things. It has no account of the birth of Jesus, of his baptism, of his temptations. It does not say anything about the Last Supper, the agony in Gethsemane, and the Ascension. John differs from the other Gospels, not because of ignorance and lack of information but as Barclay states: “by the fact that he had more knowledge or better sources or a vivid memory than the others”.⁶⁴ In fact, he tells us many things that other Gospels do not mention. For example, the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee (2:1-11); the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus (3:1-15); the raising of Lazarus (11); and the washing of the disciples’ feet are some of the accounts that only John mentions.⁶⁵

It is noticeable that John does not mention the name of Mary in his Gospel. Instead, he calls her ‘the mother of Jesus’ (Jn 2:1, 3, 5; 19:25, 26). John is the only one of the four Evangelists who never calls Jesus’ mother by her name. Mark uses her name Mary once (Mk 6:3). While Matthew uses the name Mary five times (Mt 1:16, 18, 20; 2:11; 14:55). Luke calls the mother of Jesus by her name thirteen times, twelve times in his Gospel (Lk 1:27, 30, 34, 38, 39, 41, 46, 56; 2:5, 16, 19, 34) and once in the Acts. (Acts 1:14).⁶⁶ The Gospel of John does not share any of the other stories of Mary that occur in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. And the mother of Jesus is mentioned only on two occasions in the fourth Gospel, once at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-11) and then at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27).

⁶⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 5.

⁶⁵ *ibid*; 6.

⁶⁶ Horacio Bojorge, *Image of Mary According to the Evangelists* (New York: The Society of St. Paul, 1978), 43.

Wedding Feast of Cana

Mary is presented at the wedding feast of Cana as the Mother of Jesus. “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding” (Jn 2: 1-2). The Son seems to have been invited because of his Mother. “When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn 2:3-4).

Jesus’ reply to his mother sounds like a refusal to her request. His sharp response indicates clearly that Mary has placed some burden on him.⁶⁷ However, Mary is not disappointed at the answer of her Son. She turns to the servants and says to them: “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2:5). Through these words, Mary encourages us to unite our will to the will of her Son. Her persistence is remarkable. Like the royal official who requested Jesus for the healing of his son (Jn 4: 46-54), Mary does not give up at the rejection of her request.⁶⁸ She believes in her Son’s salvific power and her faith helps to rouse the faith of the disciples.

At the Cana event, we see a new meaning of Mary’s Motherhood. Mary’s concern for human beings is explicit here. Mary comes to the help of human needs and brings those needs to the attention of Jesus. In other words, Mary stands “between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. She *puts herself “in the middle”*, that is to say *she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position*

⁶⁷ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament* , 188.

⁶⁸Frederick Houk Borsch, “Mary and Scripture: a response to Mary; grace and hope in Christ: An agreed statement of the Anglican- Roman Catholic International Commission,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no.3 (2007): 392.

as mother.”⁶⁹ Mary intercedes for mankind and her mediation is maternal. At Cana, Mary does not tell Jesus what to do. As a mother, she points out to her Son the things which must be done and leaves everything to Jesus’ decision.⁷⁰

Pope Benedict XVI describes the Cana event as an image of the divine wedding feast. God the Father invites us to this divine wedding feast through the Son. He gives us every good thing which is represented by the abundance of wine. On the cross, “he gives himself really to us in flesh and blood, puts his Body into our hands and our hearts, this is the hour of the wedding feast”.⁷¹

At the Foot of the Cross

The Gospel of John gives the final portrait of Mary in the Gospel. After the miracle at Cana, the mother of Jesus appears again in the passion narrative. “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother....he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour, the disciple took her into his home. (Jn 19: 25-27) Jesus speaks to Mary and his beloved disciple from the cross. Here also Jesus addresses Mary by the same term as at Cana-“woman”.

Some scholars say that the words “woman, behold, your son,” expresses Jesus’ concern about care for his mother after his death. We cannot ignore this idea completely. However, we cannot accept this view as a primary reason behind Jesus’ words. On every occasion, when Jesus speaks during his passion, his words are concerned with his mission.

⁶⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man*, no.21.

⁷⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Maria: On the Mother of God*, 9.

⁷¹ *ibid*;13.

Hence, Jesus' words may carry the message of entrusting his beloved disciple to the Blessed Mother.⁷²

At the foot of the cross, the mother of Jesus is given as mother to every single human being. She is the mother of all mankind. But who is the beloved disciple standing near the cross? John at the foot of the cross represents us.⁷³ To understand the meaning we have to look carefully at the words "the disciple whom Jesus loved". St. John, in his Gospel often presents an individual as representative of a group. The disciple at the foot of the cross is the figure of all who love Jesus. Jesus promised that everyone who loved him and kept his commands would in turn be loved by his father and himself (Jn 14:23). They would be his friends and would follow Jesus to Calvary. Many exegetes are of the opinion that the disciple who was at the foot of the cross represents all who love Jesus.⁷⁴

Mary's presence at the foot of the cross has another perspective in the light of Old Testament. In the book of Genesis, Eve is called the woman. The Lord said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers" (Gn 3:15). Lord continues that woman's seed will strike head of the serpent. In the Gospel of John, the passion and death of Jesus is considered as the victory of Jesus over the power of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30). At the very moment of his victory, Jesus addresses Mary as woman and assigns her to be the mother of his beloved disciple.⁷⁵ If we compare Mary with Eve in Gn 3:15, this is the moment, when woman would become a mother with seed (offspring). Here John is the symbol of Christian disciple. Christ

⁷² John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, 377.

⁷³ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God's Yes to Man*, no.23.

⁷⁴ John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, 376-77.

⁷⁵ Raymond Brown E; ed; *Mary in the New Testament*, 189.

assigns a place to Mary similar to Eve in the OT. Gn 3: 20 also elicits this symbolism. “The man called his wife Eve, because she became the mother of all the living” (Gn 3:20). If ‘Eve’ is the “mother of all the living” (Gn 3:20) in the OT, Mary is the ‘New Eve’ in the NT. Mary is the mother of all in the new creation. When Jesus appointed Mary as the mother of the beloved disciple, she became the mother of all the disciples of the Savior.⁷⁶

At the wedding feast in Cana and at the foot of the cross Jesus addresses Mary as ‘woman’. In Cana, Mary appears to be concerned about others’ affairs and she intercedes to Jesus on their behalf. But, Jesus replies his hour has not yet come. At the cross, Jesus’ hour has come and he appoints Mary as mother to all.

The Woman in Revelation 12

The book of Revelation is different from other books in the New Testament. Its symbolic language makes it difficult to understand its real message. It was written during a time of severe Christian persecution towards the end of the first century A.D. Christians were in need of strengthening in the light of faith for what they were experiencing at the hands of Roman persecution. The book of Revelation gave them a message of hope and consolation. The book is written by a certain John who, because of his Christian faith has been exiled by Roman authority to the island of Patmos.⁷⁷

There is no specific mention of Mary in the book of Revelation. However, in Revelation 12:1-17, there is a highly symbolic portrait of a woman clothed with the sun,

⁷⁶ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 40.

⁷⁷ Joseph A. Grassi, *Mary, Mother and Disciple*, 90.

with the moon under her feet, who gives birth to a child. Over the centuries, there are many interpretations on this biblical passage. While some scholars are of the opinion that the woman is the symbol of Mary, some say that the woman represents the Church. We will look at Revelation 12 in the light of these different interpretations.

The theology of the early Church considers Church and Mary as one. Hippolytus, the earliest exegetical writer of the Church of Rome at the end of second century writes about the woman in Revelation 12 in this manner: “The woman stands for the Church, and the sun stands for the Christ”. The Church is the woman in heaven. Methodius, the great theologian of the fourth century is of the opinion that the great woman in the heaven is the Church who gives birth to her children through baptism in all parts of the world. He also continues that these children die on the earth, but rise again to join their mother.⁷⁸ The theologians of the early Church saw the Church in Mary, and Mary in the Church. However, at the beginning of the early Middle Ages, the ideas of Mary and of the Church began to be separated.

Hugo Rahner says that the woman clothed with sun represents Mary, Christ’s mother and is “at the same time a symbol of the Church and the Church’s fate that is both earthly and heavenly”.⁷⁹ She has already entered heaven and is still on the painful journey on this earth. Although she is in the heavenly glory, she bears the pains of childbirth. At the same time, she is the queen of the heaven and the sorrowful mother.⁸⁰

Ignace de La Potterie in his work, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, says that the woman in the Revelation 12 is a symbol of the people of God, who has given birth to

⁷⁸ Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church* (Michigan: Zaccheus Press, 2004), 113-14.

⁷⁹ *ibid*; 112.

⁸⁰ *ibid*

the Messiah. She represents the Church and she must pass through many trials.⁸¹ The twelve stars around the head of the woman is the reference to twelve tribes of Israel or twelve apostles. Her pain of childbirth is the symbol of her eschatological sufferings in her condition as a mother.⁸² At last, she will win victory over the powers of evil.

Some scholars see that woman is the symbol of both Old and New Israel. Bertrand Buby, in his work *Mary, the Faithful Disciple* writes: “From the religious imagery embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures, the woman is a symbol of both the Old and New Israel. The former has brought forth the Messiah who has been taken up to heaven, while the latter, the Church, experiences both persecution and the sustaining providence of God”.⁸³ The woman represents the people of God which begins with Israel and continues with the persecuted church. Buby says we can read Revelation 12 in terms of Mary as the woman. She is the full flowering of Israel and is the archetype of the Church.⁸⁴

Who is the child born to the woman? “She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule the nations with an iron rod” (Rev 12:5). This is taken from Psalm 2:9. It gives an indication that the child is the Messiah. Some commentators say that this messianic birth is not the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem which is described in the Infancy narrative in the Gospels. Instead, the messianic birth in Revelation 12 refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, several times resurrection is described as a new birth (cf. Acts 13:32). Resurrection is the moment of the birth of the

⁸¹ Ignace de La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 246.

⁸² *Ibid*; 251.

⁸³ Bertrand Buby, *Mary: The Faithful Disciple*, 112.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 113.

glorified Christ.⁸⁵ Most of the scholars agree with the idea that the child who is born to the woman is the Messiah. The text is written in the first century for a Christian audience and they were familiar with Mary as the mother of Messiah.

After looking at various opinions of scholars, we can say that the woman in Revelation 12 plays two different roles, Mary and Church. We cannot say woman is the Church because she is presented with some of the features of Mary. Likewise, we cannot say the woman is Mary; for she is presented as the type of the Church.⁸⁶ However, with its image of mother and child this text gives a picture of God's plan in all history. God took care of Israel giving her a Messianic hope. He gave Israel Jesus, son of Mary as Messiah. God will continue taking care of his people (present church). Thus, Revelation 12 transcends Jesus' birth and takes care of it in all history. In the end, God will win over the power of evil which is represented by the dragon.⁸⁷

In this chapter, we have reflected on Mary our beloved mother, through the different books of the New Testament. All the four Gospels speak of Mary as the mother of Jesus. At the same time, there is a great diversity within the Gospels regarding Jesus' mother. Matthew traces Mary as a virgin and mother who is obedient to the will of God revealed through Joseph's dreams. Mark gives us very little information about Mary as the mother of Jesus. Mary appears in Luke as a model of humility, faith and obedience. John pictures Mary as a compassionate woman who is concerned about other persons' needs and intercedes to Jesus on their behalf. Along with Gospels of Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles presents Mary as a faithful disciple of Jesus. Mary is with Jesus since his conception (in Gospel of Luke) and remained with him at the time of his

⁸⁵ Ignace de La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 252-253.

⁸⁶ Lucien Deiss, *Mary: Daughter of Sion*, 138-139.

⁸⁷ Joseph A. Grassi, *Mary, Mother and Disciple*, 94.

crucifixion (in Gospel of John). The death of Jesus does not change her mind. She continues to be obedient to the will of God and stays with the disciples in the Upper Room preparing for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Scripture helps us to understand the deeper meaning of Mary's life as a faithful disciple of Jesus. What does the Catholic Church teach us about Mary? In the next chapter, we will focus on the Catholic understanding of Mary by considering four Marian dogmas.

Chapter Two

Marian Dogmas

In the first chapter, we endeavored to understand Mary through the Scripture texts about her. Now we are going to explore the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Catholic Church has defined four Marian Dogmas, which state the important aspects of Mary's role in salvation and her personal relationship with God. They are:

1. The Divine Motherhood
2. Perpetual Virginity
3. The Immaculate Conception
4. The Assumption

These dogmas put an end to controversies that existed about Mary's place in salvation history. In this chapter, we will look at each dogma separately exploring their origin, scriptural references and their place in the present church.

The Divine Motherhood

In 431, the Council of Ephesus declared the Dogma of Divine Motherhood to protect it from the heresy of "Nestorianism". According to Nestorius, Jesus contained two persons, God the Son and the human Jesus. It also said that Mary was only the mother of the human "element" of Jesus.⁸⁸ But the Church teaches that Christ is a single person with two natures- divine and human. Nestorianism denies the Incarnation. If Christ

⁸⁸ James R. White, *Mary: Another Redeemer* (Minnesota: Bethany Press, 1998), 47.

contained two persons, “God the Son was not really born as a man and did not die as a man; he only accompanied a man, and watched him die”. The Council of Ephesus denied this error and states that Jesus is true man and true God.⁸⁹

Mary’s Divine Motherhood sets her above all other created beings.⁹⁰ There is no evidence that Mary was called “theotokos”, “Mother of God”, before the fourth century. St.Cyril of Alexandria says: “To confess our faith in orthodox fashion...it is enough to ...confess that the holy Virgin is Theotokos”.⁹¹ St.John Damascene says: “This name contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation”.⁹² The Council of Ephesus (431) solemnly confirmed the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary as a truth of the Church’s faith. It stated that the holy virgin is the Mother of God. After twenty years later in 451, the Council of Chalcedon reaffirmed the Dogma:

“...the son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is one and the same, the same perfect in divinity, the same perfect in humanity, true God and true man, consisting of a rational soul and a body, consubstantial with the Father in divinity and consubstantial with us in humanity, ‘in all things like as we are, without sin’ (Heb. 4:15), born of the Father before all time as to his divinity, born in recent times for us and for our salvation from the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as to his humanity.”⁹³

Two things are essential to understand Mary as the Mother of God. First, Mary is truly the mother of Jesus. Second, Jesus to whom Mary gave birth is truly God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived Jesus. After his birth, like any other mother Mary nursed, nurtured and loved her child. Mary is the mother of Jesus. Jesus to whom

⁸⁹ Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic- Evangelical Debate* (Michigan : Brazos Press, 2003), 38.

⁹⁰ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 209.

⁹¹ Walter J. Burghardt, “Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought,” in *Mariology* Vol.2, ed. Juniper B. Carol, 125.

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1967), no.252.

Mary gave birth is God. Therefore, Mary is the Mother of God. The Greek term *theotokos* is used to refer to Mary as Mother of God. *Theotokos* is translated as “God-bearer”. Certainly, Mary bore God, so we affirm that Mary was the “God-bearer”.⁹⁴

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

“The One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father’s eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly “Mother of God” (*Theotokos*).⁹⁵

In the Incarnation, the Son of God became man for our salvation. The Eternal Father had chosen a mother for Him from among human beings. The Second Vatican Council teaches about Mary’s title as “Mother of God”. “At the message of the angel, the Virgin Mary received the Word of God in her heart and in her body, and gave Life to the world. Hence she is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer”.⁹⁶

Scripture speaks of Mary as a genuine mother. A shoot that would spring from the root of Jesse (Is 11:1), the fruit of a virginal womb (Is 7:14), by the power of the Most High and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18-25, Lk 1:35), Mary would conceive Jesus as her own Son (Lk 1:31), and bring Him forth (Lk 2:7; Mt 1:16). From her He was made (Gal 4:4), the fruit of her womb (Lk 1:42). She gave Him His name and brought Him up as her Son (Lk 2), a man in all things like the rest of men, except sin (Heb 4:15). Scripture does not call Mary Mother of God. But in the Annunciation scene, the angel Gabriel speaks of the child Mary is to conceive as the “Son of Most High” and “the Son of God” (Lk 1:32, 35). Elizabeth greets Mary as the “the mother of my Lord”

⁹⁴ Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic- Evangelical Debate*, 37.

⁹⁵ Council of Ephesus (431): DS 251 as found in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed.495.

⁹⁶ *LG* 53.

(Lk 1:43). Although Mary is not called the Mother of God in Scripture, she is called the Mother of the Lord and the Mother of Jesus.⁹⁷

In 1931, when the Church celebrated the fifteenth centenary of Ephesus, Pope Pius XI wrote an encyclical *Lux veritatis* which states:

“If the son of the Blessed Virgin Mary is true God, then it is meet and just that the woman who gave birth to Him should be called the “Mother of God.” And further, if Jesus is a single person, then Mary should most certainly be called the Mother, not only of Christ the Man, but of God- the *Theotokos*”.⁹⁸

From the time of the Council of Ephesus, with great veneration and faith, the Church proclaims that Mary is “Theotokos”, “Mother of God”. This faith is pronounced in the Liturgy as well as in the prayers of many diverse nations and peoples.⁹⁹ For example, in the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed, Christians profess their belief that Mary is the Mother of God. “...in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...” The Church encouraged the faithful to venerate Mary as Mother of God. The divine motherhood is Mary’s greatest privilege. Recognition of Mary as Mother of God has been the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy. If Mary is not truly the Mother of God, Christ is not true God and true man.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Gerald Van Ackeren, “Mary’s Divine Motherhood,” in *Mariology* Vol.2, ed. Juniper B. Carol, 182-183.

⁹⁸ Pope Pius XI, *Lux Veritatis* as found in Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church* (Bethesda: Zaccheus Press, 2004), 38.

⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *A Year with Mary* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1986), 45.

¹⁰⁰ Gerald Van Ackeren, “Mary’s Divine Motherhood,” in *Mariology* Vol.2, ed. Juniper B. Carol, 177-178.

Perpetual Virginity

The dogma that Mary is perpetually a virgin was defined at the Second Council of Constantinople in the sixth century. This idea is found in the third canon of the first Lateran Council under Pope Martin I in 649. The essential words of the dogma are “The holy, ever virginal and Immaculate Mary is *Mother of God*, since in recent days she really and truly conceived, without seed, by the Holy Ghost, the same divine Word who was born before all time and gave birth to him in chastity, her virginity remaining unimpaired after the birth”.¹⁰¹ Paul IV, in the Bull *Cum quorundam* asserted that Mary was a virgin “before birth, in birth and perpetually after the birth” of Jesus.¹⁰²

The Church declared that Mary conceived Jesus only by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³ The virginal conception of Jesus is clearly evident in the Scriptures. The Evangelist Matthew records the virginal conception in the first chapter of his Gospel (cf. Mt1:18, 25). Luke also point out Mary’s virginity in the moment of the conception. In Lk 1:27, Mary is twice called a virgin. At the Annunciation scene, Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Lk 1: 34). Mary’s astonishment at the message of the angel indicates her state as a virgin. Mary is called Joseph’s betrothed although she was with child (Lk 2:4). Joseph is not called Jesus’ father until the child Jesus was born. Joseph’s physical parenthood is not mentioned in the ceremony of circumcision and naming of Jesus (Lk 2:21).¹⁰⁴ The virginal conception

¹⁰¹ *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, no. 269.

¹⁰² Michael O’ Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 361.

¹⁰³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 496.

¹⁰⁴ Michael O’ Carroll, *Theotokos*, 358.

of Jesus is the fulfillment of promise of God through the prophet Isaiah. “The Lord Himself shall give you a sign: behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Is 7:14).

Some argue that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus. The reason behind this argument is Scripture references about the siblings of Jesus (Mk 3:20-21; 31-35, 6:3, Mt 12:46, Lk 8:19, Jn 2:12, 7:3-5). The Greek word *adelphos* is used in Scripture to refer to Jesus’ brothers. But this word has a broader meaning. It is occasionally equivalent to a relative with whom there was no blood relationship (cf. Rom 9:3).¹⁰⁵ Origen suggested that Jesus’ brothers were children of Joseph and another woman.¹⁰⁶ St. Ambrose argued that the Johannine account of Jesus entrusting Mary to John at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:27) indicates that Mary had no other children.¹⁰⁷ The brothers of Jesus in the Scripture could have been Jesus’ close relatives, foster siblings or members of the same tribe. Anyone of Jesus’ brothers is said to be the sons of Mary of Nazareth.¹⁰⁸

The Church teaches firmly that Mary is “ever-virgin”. Although Mary gave birth to her son, it did not affect her virginity. The Second Vatican Council states: “The birth of our Lord did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it”.¹⁰⁹ In the liturgy, the Church celebrates Mary as a perpetual virgin. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Mary remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin” (St. Augustine, *Serm.* 186, 1:PL 38, 999)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ John R. Meyer, “Mary of Nazareth and Jesus’ Brothers and Sisters,” *Annales theologici rivista di teologia del Centro Academico Romano della Santa Croce* 14, no.2 (2000), 448.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid; 462.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid; 465.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid; 465-466.

¹⁰⁹ *LG* 57.

¹¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 510.

The mystery of the perpetual virginity of Mary continues in the Church. Mary's virginity is praised in the Church's prayers. On the feast of her holy name, the Church praises her in the Breviary with the words: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary: for thou alone hast destroyed all heresies in all the world!" St. Augustine teaches that the Church is a virgin in her faith. All Christians are called to be virgins according to the faith. By the power of grace in Baptism, Christians have the responsibility to keep their true faith without any stain or error. At the same time, a smaller number of people in the Church are chosen to keep physical virginity in their body. The same Holy Spirit, who overshadowed the Blessed Virgin Mary, gives grace to these people to live a life of consecrated virginity.¹¹¹ They follow Mary in her perpetual virginity and accept her as a model to give witness to God in this world.

The Immaculate Conception

The doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception started to develop in the fourth century. St. Ephraem (d.372) proclaimed the sinlessness of the Virgin Mary in one of his hymns. Although this hymn had been addressed to Christ, it also point out Mary was free from all stain. "Thou and Thy Mother are the only ones who are immune from all stain; for there is no spot in Thee, O Lord, nor any taint in Thy Mother."¹¹² A feast of the *Conception of Mary* began to be celebrated in the eighth century. In 1708, Pope

¹¹¹ Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, 32-33.

¹¹² Felix Nwatu, "The Immaculate Conception: A Model of the Development of Dogma," *Asia Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (2009): 8.

Clement XI in his Constitution *Commissi Nobis* declared the feast of Mary Immaculate Conception as a holy day of obligation.¹¹³

In the nineteenth century, popular devotion to the Blessed Mother increased throughout the Catholic world. The Marian apparitions to St. Catherine Laboure in Paris (November 1830) stirred up this devotion. These apparitions carried the message that Mary was conceived without sin.¹¹⁴ The Holy See received numerous petitions from the hierarchy and from the common faithful for the solemn definition of the dogma. At last, in 1854, Pope Pius IX declared it as an official teaching of the Church.

“We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful”¹¹⁵

In an apparition to St. Bernadette in 1858, Blessed Virgin Mary said: “I am the Immaculate Conception”. Thus, Mary revealed to the world that she was conceived without sin.¹¹⁶ While dogma teaches that Mary was free from all stain of original sin, it does not say that she was not to be redeemed by Christ. Through the merits of Christ, God preserved her from the stain of original sin. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* comments about this point. “By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was *preserved from the inheritance of original sin.*”¹¹⁷ God

¹¹³ Felix Nwatu, “The Immaculate Conception: A Model of the Development of Dogma,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (2009): 12.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (Boston, MA: St.Paul Books, 1854), no.21.

¹¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *A Year with Mary*, 31.

¹¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater, Mary: God’s Yes to Man*, no.10.

enriched Mary with the fullness of grace because she was to be the Mother of Christ. The “Immaculate Conception was the beginning of a prodigious and undiminished expansion of her supernatural life”.¹¹⁸ It was totally God’s gift to her.

Lumen Gentium in its chapter eight on the *Mother of God* asserts that the Blessed Mother was free from all stain of sin. “Mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, fashioned by the Holy Spirit into a kind of new substance and new creature”.¹¹⁹ It also states that Mary, from the first moment of her conception was adorned with a unique holiness.¹²⁰

The Fathers of the Church taught about the Blessed Mother’s, exalted dignity, her spotless innocence and immunity from all stain of sin in many wonderful ways. One of these ways to instruct the faithful was interpreting the Scriptures. For example, they found an image of Mary and Jesus in Genesis 3:15. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed”. They taught that Mary united with Jesus her son by a most intimate bond triumphed over the evil serpent and “crushed his head with her immaculate foot”.¹²¹

In Canticle 5:2, the Fathers also saw a reference to the victory of the Immaculate Mother. “Open to me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one”. For the Hebrew phrase, “my perfect one”, the Latin text has the meaning *immaculate mea* and this was one of the titles given to the Blessed Mother in earlier times. Here, the bride greeted by God is the Blessed Mother. God “longed for this bridal union with humanity

¹¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *A Year with Mary*, 32.

¹¹⁹ *LG* 56

¹²⁰ *LG* 56.

¹²¹ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 12-13.

in the spotless womb of the virgin.”¹²²The story of the Annunciation is another reference to Mary’s spotless state. The Angel Gabriel greeted Mary “full of grace”. Besides Mary, no one in the Bible is greeted by the same word of address. According to the Fathers of the Church, the angel’s greeting indicates that Mary is the “seat of all divine graces and is adorned with all gifts of the Holy Spirit. To them Mary is an almost infinite treasury, an inexhaustible abyss of these gifts, to such an extent that she was never subject to the curse”¹²³

By the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Mary became a figure of the Church which is the spotless bride of Christ. Mary’s Immaculate Conception is a sign of the love of Christ for his bride, the Church. God’s grace conquered the power of original sin and he prepared a perfect mother for his son.¹²⁴After the definition of the dogma, congregations and religious communities were founded in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In order to venerate the Blessed Mother, monasteries, hospitals, altars, or churches are also established under the title of “Immaculate Conception”.¹²⁵ This title is used in the Sacred Liturgy and in solemn prayers to invoke the Blessed Mother. In conclusion, the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception teaches us that Mary, our mother is exceptionally holy from her very beginning because she was destined to be the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹²² Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, 18.

¹²³ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 14.

¹²⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Behold Your Mother, Woman of Faith: A Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Washington:United States Catholic Conference, 1973), no.56.

¹²⁵ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 6.

The Assumption

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared the dogma of the Assumption. In his Apostolic Constitution titled *Munificentissimus Deus* we read:

“By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own proper authority we pronounce, declare, and define as Divinely revealed dogma that Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God ever virgin, after finishing the course of her life on earth, was taken up in soul and body to heavenly glory.”¹²⁶

The New Testament says nothing about Mary’s Assumption. History does not give us any trace about the end of Mary’s earthly life. The earliest known writer on the subject of the death of Mary was St. Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis. He brought out his concern about the last days of Mary’s life on the earth in his *Panarion*, a famous letter to the Christians of Arabia, in 377. In his *Panarion*, he wrote:

“...the death of Mary, nor about whether she died, nor about whether she was buried or was not buried...scripture has kept complete silence because of the greatness of the prodigy, in order not to strike the mind of man with excessive astonishment. For my own part, I do not dare speak of the matter. I shall keep my mind on it to myself and remain silent” (*Panarion*, 78, 10-11).¹²⁷

Epiphanius was unable to find out about the Assumption of Blessed mother. He does not even know whether she died or not.¹²⁸ There are some reasons why Mary’s death was unknown to the people. Mary was naturally humble and hidden. Probably, only after her

¹²⁶ Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books, 1950), no. 44.

¹²⁷ *Panarion* 78, 10-11 as found in Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 67.

¹²⁸ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 67.

death, the Church began to reflect on her status as mother of Jesus. By that time, the information about the events of her death might have been quite limited.¹²⁹

A strong devotion to Mary had developed by the third and fourth centuries. There were some heretical groups who worshiped Mary. There are some apocryphal treatises which were written about the end of Mary's life. The earliest written apocryphal treatise is available from the fourth or fifth century. This treatise *De Obitu S.Dominae* reports that Mary was "assumed" bodily into heaven.¹³⁰ There was a simple story which existed in fifth century and is recounted by Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem. According to Bishop Juvenal, "the apostles gathered at Mary's deathbed, buried her, but when they opened the tomb she was gone".¹³¹

In regard to writings about the assumption of Mary, Scripture testifies that the receiving of a human being bodily into heaven is an event that has occurred. It has happened in the case of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). Transportation also is recorded in Scripture in the case of Philip (Acts 8:39-40) and possibly Ezekiel (3:14, 8:3) and Paul (2 Cor. 12:3-4). Hence we can say that the transportation of the apostles to Mary's deathbed and Mary's being assumed bodily into heaven are possible. However, all Catholic scholars agree that there is no historical evidence for the miraculous transportation of apostles or of the receiving of Mary bodily into heaven. Moreover, the death of Mary is not mentioned in any of the writings of the earliest Church fathers.¹³²

We do not base the dogma of the assumption on any of the apocryphal writings. It is hard to explain how the Assumption of Blessed Mother occurred, but the story of it

¹²⁹ Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic Evangelical Debate*, 120.

¹³⁰ *ibid*; 117.

¹³¹ *Ibid*; 121.

¹³² *Ibid*; 119-120.

was handed down by oral tradition.¹³³ According to the oldest tradition, Mary's death was called a dormition or a "falling asleep". The Feast of the Dormition was first celebrated in about 600 AD on August 15.¹³⁴ The Church celebrates the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the same day.

It is noticeable how Mary is designated in the dogma of the Assumption. The titles "the Immaculate Mother of God," and "Mary ever Virgin" have dogmatic value here. The body of immaculate Mary preserved from all sin, the body of the virgin mother of God whose virginity was preserved even after the birth of Jesus, did not undergo death. Instead, the Immaculate Mother of God, ever a Virgin, rejoined Christ in the communion of glory.¹³⁵ Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* says that Mary is "united by a close and indissoluble bond" to Christ. As virgin and Mother, Mary was united with Christ in his first coming. Likewise, through her continued relationship with him in heaven she will be united with him in his second coming also.¹³⁶ The dogma helps us to understand the Church eschatologically. The Church will attain its perfection only in the end, but, it receives traces of the final glory to encourage it on its way.¹³⁷

The dogma of assumption does not answer where, when, or how the assumption of Mary took place. Besides, it does not specify whether Mary died or not. Thus, the question raised by St. Epiphanius remains unanswered.¹³⁸ However, the opinion that Mary passed through death as her son did, has the stronger support in tradition.

¹³³ Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic Evangelical Debate*, 124.

¹³⁴ Jon M. Sweeney, *Strange Heaven*, 155.

¹³⁵ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 250.

¹³⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no.41.

¹³⁷ Avery Dulles, "The Dogma of Assumption," in *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 294.

¹³⁸ Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, 249.

In conclusion, the four dogmas about Mary give us a better understanding of who she is. While the two early dogmas, the Divine Motherhood and the Perpetual Virginity, highlight Mary's role in the Incarnation, the modern dogmas the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are closely related with Mary's person. These four dogmas stress Mary's unique relationship with God and, also, teach us the reason why we can look at Mary as a model for Christian life. If Mary is the model for Christian life, we can certainly say that she is the perfect example for Religious life. In the next chapter, we will focus on Mary's place in the Religious life especially in the SABS Congregation to which I belong.

Chapter Three

Mary's place in the Religious Life and the SABS Congregation

In the first two chapters, we have seen how Mary cooperated with the will of God to become an instrument in the salvific plan. Mary is the first person who was consecrated unconditionally to God. Furthermore, she was consecrated to God in the most perfect way as was evident in the Annunciation which was discussed in chapter one. Mary is the model and example for consecrated people. Now, I would like to look at Mary's place in the life of consecrated people especially in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) to which I belong.

He went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him". (Mk 3:13). The consecrated life is a special gift from God that He alone can give. "The Consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit".¹³⁹ By responding to the call of Jesus' "follow me," consecrated people leave everything behind, and put themselves at the service of the Kingdom of God imitating Jesus' *way of life*.¹⁴⁰ As a sign of their consecration to God, Religious profess vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. Mary is the perfect model for the Religious to live in the spirit of these three vows. Pope John Paul II in his apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* states:

"How *poor* she was on Bethlehem night and how poor on Calvary! How *obedient*

¹³⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), no.1.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*; no.14.

she was at the moment of the Annunciation, and then at the foot of the cross-*obedient* even to the point of assenting to the death of her Son! How *dedicated* she was in all her earthly life to the cause of the kingdom of heaven *through most chaste love.*"¹⁴¹

God the Father chose Mary to become the Mother of Jesus and thus to participate in the salvation of the world. Mary said "yes" to the will of God. By her great "yes", the Incarnate Word became flesh in her womb and humanity was saved from the bondage of sin. Mary was ready to accept the will of God by surrendering her life into the hands of God. Like Mary, by the vow of obedience, Religious are ready to accept God's will in their lives. This vow requires from the Religious, obedience to the rules and regulations of the Congregations which includes submission to their legitimate superiors who hold the place of God.¹⁴² Thus they imitate Mary who said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).¹⁴³ In Nazareth, Mary had a hidden, humble life. She did not have many possessions. She did not even have a room to give birth to Jesus, but only a stable. By the vow of poverty, Religious do not possess anything as their own.

It was Mary's "yes" at the Annunciation which expressed her consecration to God. With a great purity of heart, she received the God's plan for her and for the world.¹⁴⁴ As Pope John Paul II states "Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him".¹⁴⁵ Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *On the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council* states: "...the value and the fruitfulness of

¹⁴¹ John Paul II, *Redemptionis Donum* (Boston, MA; St. Paul Books, 1984), no. 17.

¹⁴² *Redemptionis Donum*, no.13.

¹⁴³ *ibid*;

¹⁴⁴ James Hickey, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 37.

¹⁴⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, no.28.

chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of his Virgin Mother...”¹⁴⁶

Following Mary’s example, each Religious is chosen by God to bear witness to Jesus in this world. If Mary carried Jesus in her womb, Religious are called to bear Jesus in their hearts and share God’s love with the people whom they meet through a life of holiness. Many Religious communities have accepted Mary’s name in different forms as the title of their Congregations. True devotion to Mary is an important element to follow Jesus in a perfect way. Throughout the history of the Church, consecrated persons, both men and women, find their inspiration in the Virgin Mary.¹⁴⁷ Mary remains as an unique model for consecrated people in their endeavor to live a holy life.

The Blessed Mother and the SABS Congregation

Historical Origins

Before reflecting upon Mary’s place in the SABS Congregation, I would like to describe how our Congregation was founded. The Congregation of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) started on 8 December 1908 at Champakulam, Archdiocese of Changanacherry, Kerala, India. It had its origin from the deep, Eucharistic experience of the Venerable Mar Thomas Kurialacherry (1873-1925), a zealous devotee of the Holy Eucharist. He received the inspiration that “Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament should always and everywhere be known, loved, and adored by

¹⁴⁶ Pope Paul VI, *On the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council*, no.15.

¹⁴⁷ *Behold Your Mother, Woman of Faith: A Pastoral Letter on the Virgin Mary*, no.128

all.”¹⁴⁸ Following this inspiration, he founded the Congregation in collaboration with Mother Mary Francis De Chantal, who is the first member of the Congregation.

The charism of the Congregation is the single minded devotion to the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharistic devotion consists in a life of total surrender which comes from the deep personal attachment to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.¹⁴⁹ Like Mary who served her cousin Elizabeth who was in the hour of her need, the Sisters undertake various apostolic activities in any part of the world according to the needs of the Church and special needs of the time. The Eucharistic apostolate, education and healing ministry are some of the apostolic areas of our ministry. Pope Paul VI raised the SABS Congregation to pontifical status on 11 February 1968. Responding to the call of evangelization Sisters work in different parts of the world. At present, there are about 5000 Sisters in the Congregation who are working for the growth of the Eternal Kingdom by leading the people of God to the Holy Eucharist through their prayers and different apostolic activities.

Marian Aspects of SABS

Venerable Mar Thomas Kurialacherry, the founder of the SABS Congregation was an ardent devotee of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. She was a constant inspiration and model for him. In his spiritual journey, Mary was his guide and support and he

¹⁴⁸ SABS Constitution, *The Nature and Goal of Our Congregation*, Chapter 1 (Kothamangalam: Sanjo Press, 2003), no.2.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*; no.4.

wanted the Sisters of the SABS Congregation also to experience the same.¹⁵⁰ At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary interceded to her Son on the behalf of the people who are in need. In his pastoral letter, he wrote that Mary is the secret ladder to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.¹⁵¹ He entrusted our Congregation to the protection of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. He encouraged us to practice her special virtues, namely modesty, humility, holiness and submission to the will of God.¹⁵² Mar Thomas Kurialacherry exhorted us to pray many rosaries. He says, “Those who recite the rosary will surely experience its super human power”.¹⁵³

Mother Chantal, the co-foundress of the Congregation also had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother. In her diary notes she wrote that “For any favor to be obtained, I used the rosary as my weapon.”¹⁵⁴ Besides praying many rosaries daily, she fasted on Saturdays until her death. “Through the Holy Virgin to the Eucharistic Lord”- it was her vision of life.¹⁵⁵

The Blessed Virgin Mary, who was obedient to the will of God from the Annunciation to Calvary, is the model of our prayer life.¹⁵⁶ We seek her intercession in all our needs and the needs of the world. Like Mary who prayed with the Apostles in Upper Room, we are called to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to share this Spirit with the people who are alienated or separated from the Lord. “The Mother of God who sanctified every moment of her life by virtue of her unshakable faith, unending hope,

¹⁵⁰ Sr.Anitha Puthenpurayil, “The Founder of SABS and His Vision,” in *Centenary Musings*, ed. Dr. Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (Ujjain: Akirati Offset, 2008), 26.

¹⁵¹ Mar Thomas Kurialacherry, *Pastoral Letters*, 2nd ed. (Kothamangalam: Sanjo Press, 2001), no.1.

¹⁵² SABS Constitution, no.8.

¹⁵³ Mar Thomas Kurialacherry, no.24.

¹⁵⁴ Sr. Benjamin Mary and Sr. Josy, *The Brave Woman* (Kothamangalam: Sanjo Press, 2001), 60.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*; 60.

¹⁵⁶ SABS Constitution, no.85.

and immense love is always the inspiration and model for our consecrated life.”¹⁵⁷ Following Mary’s example, we surrender our lives to the will of God and strive to grow in filial love and devotion to her.

In order to grow in the devotion to the Blessed Mother, our founder exhorted us to say some prayers to Mary everyday. Thus “O, Mary, you are all beautiful”, “Mary, Mother of God”¹⁵⁸ are the two prayers that we pray as the part of our daily prayer. We pray the rosary everyday and in the month of May, we pray the “Memorare” or “Hail Holy Queen” and sing a Marian hymn.¹⁵⁹ To honor Mary, we conduct rosary procession in the months of May and October.

The Congregation was founded on December 8, feast day of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is the special patroness of the Congregation.¹⁶⁰ On the first Saturdays, we renew our consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by saying the prayer¹⁶¹ and singing a Marian hymn. Since our Congregation is dedicated to our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate this feast solemnly. As a preparation for this feast, the previous day is a day of prayer and fasting. On the feast day, the superior of the community gives a talk to the sisters and all professed sisters renew their vows during the Holy Mass. Afterwards, the superior says a prayer dedicating the community to the Immaculate Conception and the community sings praises of the Blessed Mother.¹⁶² In addition to the feast of the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate the feasts of the Nativity, the Annunciation, the

¹⁵⁷ SABS Constitution, no.62.

¹⁵⁸ SABS Prayer Book , *Morning Prayers* (Thrikkakara: Little Flower Offset Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁵⁹ SABS Directory, *Prayer Life*, Chapter 1 (Kothamangalam: Sanjo Press, 2003), no.61.

¹⁶⁰ SABS Constituton, no.11.

¹⁶¹ SABS Prayer Book, *Prayers for Consecration*, 78.

¹⁶² SABS Directory, no.82.

Presentation, and the Assumption in a special way. In preparation for the feast of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, we make a Novena¹⁶³ and sing a Marian hymn.

The SABS religious habit expresses our special devotion to the Blessed Mother. It includes a white habit which reflects the purity of the Blessed Mother, a blue belt and a rosary with black beads. A blue colored cord with the SABS medal that we wear with our habit also symbolizes our loyalty to Mary. This medal consists of the picture of the Immaculate Mary on one side and on the other side there is a monstrance which indicates the Eucharistic devotion of our community. The blue color of the cord and belt stands for the patronage of the Blessed Mother.

In conclusion, the Blessed Virgin Mary has an indispensable place in the life of a SABS Sister. Each SABS Sister consecrates her life totally to Jesus her spouse through the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. During the sacred moments of professing vows, Sisters invoke the intercession of the Blessed Mother. She is our model, our teacher and our inspiration. Through the vow of obedience, we imitate Mary's submission to the will of God. Mary who was conceived without sin and remained a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus is our inspiration to lead a life of consecrated chastity. Likewise, we learn from Mary our mother to place our total dependence on God as we share in the poverty of Jesus through the vow of poverty.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ SABS Prayer Book, *Novenas*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁴ SABS Constitution, nos.41-42.

Conclusion

In our search for Mary, we have seen that she has a powerful place in the life of every Christian. God has given us Mary as a model of the perfect Christian. By her cooperation with the will of God, she stands as the model of what we are destined to become in our Christian life.¹⁶⁵ We are Christians today because of Mary's great 'yes' to God. Knowing that God was seeking entrance to her heart, she constantly surrendered her life to the holy designs of God. She accepted the gift of God's love and thus she became the Mother of God.

Mary is an indispensable instrument in the history of salvation. She stands at the centre of salvation history. Prophecies in the Old Testament (Is 7:14) were fulfilled through her virginal conception. On the cross, Jesus gave to his beloved disciple Mary as his mother. Thus, Mary became the mother of all the future disciples of Jesus. This motherhood which started at Nazareth, continues down through the whole of salvation history.¹⁶⁶

Conceived Immaculate by God's special grace, Mary was never separated from God's love. She remained with Jesus from the moment of his conception until the foot of the cross. Mary was with Jesus in the cruel exile to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15), in the moment of his Presentation (Lk 2: 22-38), and the prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:34-35). She was with him during the years of his hidden life. She was with him at times during his public ministry.¹⁶⁷ In the end, Mary was with Jesus as he died on the cross. Although she was

¹⁶⁵ George A. Maloney, *Mary: The Womb of God* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1976), 16.

¹⁶⁶ Lucien Deiss, *Mary: Daughter of Sion*, 197.

¹⁶⁷ James Hickey, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, 16.

silent most of the time, her pure faith and love in following the plans of God made her blessed in the sight of God.

Mary, ever Virgin is the exemplar of consecrated people who give witness to Christ keeping the evangelical counsels, poverty, chastity and obedience. The Blessed Virgin Mary was the perfect contemplative and was attentive to the needs of the others. We have seen this in her visitation to Elizabeth (Lk 1: 39-45) and at the Cana event (Jn 2:1-11). Following the example of Mary, consecrated people work for the Kingdom of God through their prayer and different apostolic activities.

As Christians, we are called to imitate the integrity of Mary in heart and mind and thus to surrender to God developing obedience and faith like hers. Like Mary, we must follow Jesus even in the darkest moments of our lives. Then God will give us the Crown of Glory in the life after death. Mary ever Virgin received the gift from the Holy Spirit to bear witness to God's graceful love.¹⁶⁸ We also are called to give birth to Jesus in our daily lives by bearing witness to him. Mary, Mother of Jesus is our mother on whom we can focus our hearts to find the ways to follow Jesus in a perfect way. She is our model. She is the model of perfect Christian discipleship.

¹⁶⁸George A. Maloney, *Mary: The Womb of God*, 94.

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