

The Four Dogmas of the Virgin Mary

The Roman Catholic Church affirms four truths concerning the role of the Virgin Mary in God's plan of salvation:

1. The perpetual virginity of Mary: The perpetual virginity of Mary of Nazareth is expressed in 3 parts: in her virginal conception of Christ; in giving birth to Christ, and her continuing virginity after His birth:

Virginitas ante partum: virginity before birth [CCC#396; 510]

Virginitas in partu: virginity during birth [CCC#510]

Virginitas post-partum: virginity after birth [CCC# 510]

The usage of this triple formula to express the fullness of this mystery of faith became standard with St. Augustan [354-430AD], St. Peter Chrysologus [c. 400-450AD], and Pope St. Leo the Great [440-461AD]. See CCC # 496-507; 964.

CCC499: The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it." And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as Aeiparthenos, the "Ever-virgin."

[Note: The so called "brothers" of Jesus mentioned in Scripture are His kinsmen. In Hebrew there was no designation for siblings, or half-brothers, or step-brothers. The Greek word used to designate Jesus' brothers adelphos is the same word used for kinsmen, brothers like St. James and John Zebedee, and all "brothers" in the faith].

2. Mary the Mother of God: That Mary was the mother of Jesus who is God was defined as dogma at the very city where Mary had lived for several years at the Council of Ephesus in 431AD. CCC# 495: Called in the Gospels "the mother of Jesus," Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as "the mother of my Lord," In fact, 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). Also #509.
3. Immaculate Conception of Mary: That Mary of Nazareth was conceived without original sin was defined as dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854. See CCC# 491-492; 508. CCC# 508: From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. "Full of grace," Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemptions" (SC 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

4. Assumption of Mary into heaven: That Mary's body did not experience corruption but was assumed into heaven was defined as dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950. See CCC# 966; 974. CCC# 974: The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body.

Each of these truths concerning the role of Mary of Nazareth in salvation history were teachings within the Church from the very beginning of the Church's formation but became defined more fully as God the Holy Spirit expanded the Church's understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ in Christian doctrine and theology through the centuries. For example the oldest canonical feast of Mary in the Church is the Feast of the Assumption which was already celebrated on its own feast day by the 5th century. The doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin is also part of the Tradition reflected in the writings of the early Church fathers even though Pius XII defined it as dogma in 1950. The same is true of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which was formally defined by Pope Pius XI in 1854.

While Scripture reveals nothing about Mary's death, St. John Damascene [died 749] recorded a story reportedly shared at the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD that Mary had died in the presence of the Apostles but when the tomb was opened they found it empty, "wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven." From this testimony the Church has taught that Mary was assumed bodily and now tastes the Resurrection for which all Christians hope. Early Church hymns speak of "Mary conceived without sin" and the teaching is explicitly stated in the writings of Sts. Ambrose, Augustan, Andrew of Crete, Germain of Constantinople and other Fathers of the Church. This teaching was also celebrated in the early Church liturgy. A feast commemorating the Immaculate Conception of Mary was celebrated by the seventh century in the East and was formally approved and given a standardized liturgy in the West by Pope Sixtus IV in 1475. It was extended as a feast to the world Church by St. Pius V in the 1568. Each dogma is also consistent with Sacred Scripture. For example the Immaculate Conception is supported by Genesis 3:15 and Luke 1:26-31 which have always been interpreted by the Church as implying the Virgin Mary's exemption from original sin [i.e. the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary using a perfect past participle concerning her condition of grace: "Hail has-been graced"]. The Virgin Mary's birthday the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Mother is celebrated on September the 8th, which is 9 months after the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

<http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/documents/The%20Four%20Marian%20Dogmas.htm>