

Adult Catechism Class October 20, 2014

Part 1: Scripture verses about the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God:

Luke 1:26-56: 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

John 19:26-27: 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Part 2: Eastern Christian teaching of Mary as Theotokos, the God-Bearer, Mother of God

As a title for the Virgin Mary, Theotokos was recognized by the Orthodox Church at the Third Ecumenical Council held at Ephesus in 431. It had already been in use for some time in the devotional and liturgical life of the Church. Theotokos literally translated means "The One who bore God" or "the God bearer" which is much more accurate, and profound than "Mother of God." Theotokos actually has no English equivalent, and is a title for Mary, and as such it should not be translated. "Theotokos" is theologically more significant and better describes the significance of Mary's role. The name Theotokos stresses the fact that the Child whom Mary bore was not a "simple man," not simply a human person, but the only-begotten Son of God,

"One of the Holy Trinity," yet Incarnate. This is obviously the corner-stone of our Eastern Christian faith. The Eternal Son of God was made man. This constitutes the mystery of the divine Motherhood of the Virgin Mary. Calling Mary the Theotokos or the Mother of God was never meant to suggest that Mary was coeternal with God, or that she existed before Jesus Christ or God existed. The Church acknowledges the mystery in the words of this ancient hymn: "He whom the entire universe could not contain was contained within your womb, O Theotokos."

Mary "has found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). She was chosen and ordained to serve in the Mystery of the Incarnation. And by this eternal election or predestination she was in a sense set apart and given an unique privilege and position in the whole of mankind, nay in the whole of creation. She was given a transcendent rank, as it were. She was at once a representative of the human race, and set apart. She was put into a unique and unparalleled relation to God, to the Holy Trinity, even before the Incarnation, as the prospective Mother of the Incarnate Lord, just because it was not an ordinary historical happening, but an eventful consummation of the eternal decree of God. She has a unique position even in the divine plan of salvation. Through the Incarnation human nature was to be restored again into the fellowship with God which had been destroyed by the Fall. The sacred Humanity of Jesus was to be the bridge over the abyss of sin. Now, this humanity was to be taken of the Virgin Mary. The Incarnation itself was a new beginning in the destiny of man, a beginning of the new humanity.

From the most holy Theotokos we learn meekness, humility, purity, obedience, love, service to God and to mankind, faith and hope. No other ordinary human being has ever been called to such a great service as she was. No other person has ever received such grace from God or been made so holy by Him as she was. By God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary was made to be the highest of all human kind, and lifted higher than all the angels. The angels stand close to God, but she had God dwelling in her womb. She held Him in her arms and bore Him in her heart in that special way that only a mother can.

Part 3: Mary is Ever-Virgin

The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus. God specially equipped Mary to be the Mother of God, spouse of the Holy Spirit, the mother of the Church, and a leader in the battle against evil. He preserved her from all sin to enable her to fulfill these roles perfectly and to give her maximum power against Satan. Thus she was immaculately conceived. Mary was to have perfect spiritual intactness, that is sinlessness. This is why God chose to miraculously preserve her virginity when she gave birth to Jesus.

The traditional ancient Christian position is that the "brothers of Jesus" were actually step-brothers from Joseph's earlier marriage (he was a widower). Jesus commits the care of the Virgin Mary to the Apostle John. This would have been absolutely unacceptable if she had other

children. If the oldest child dies, the care of the mother falls to the next oldest child. If the oldest child is the only child, it is his responsibility to appoint someone to care for his mother in the case that he dies. We can see that Jesus acts as if He is the only child of Mary.

Part 4: Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary

On October 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX infallibly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in these words: The Most Holy Virgin Mary was, in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin. (Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*).

Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her existence. Not only was Mary free from original sin, she was also completely preserved from any stain (effects) of original sin. This means she had no corrupt nature. The Immaculate Conception only deals with Mary's freedom from original sin. However, the Church also teaches the doctrine that Mary was never touched by personal sin. Mary had freedom from all sin. This privilege was given to Mary in view of Christ's merits. Jesus was Mary's Savior. She was redeemed by Jesus Christ just as we are, except that Mary's redemption was proactive. The fruit of Christ's redemption was applied to preserve Mary from sin, as it is applied to us to remove the sin we have contracted through our actions.

Part 5: Dormition of Theotokos

The Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15 each year. The Feast commemorates the repose (dormition and in the Greek *kimisis*) or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Feast also commemorates the translation or assumption into heaven of the body of the Theotokos. At the time of her death, the disciples of our Lord who were preaching throughout the world returned to Jerusalem to see the Theotokos. Except for the Apostle Thomas, all of them including the Apostle Paul were gathered together at her bedside. At the moment of her death, Jesus Christ himself descended and carried her soul into heaven. Following her repose, the body of the Theotokos was taken in procession and laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane. When the Apostle Thomas arrived three days after her repose and desired to see her body, the tomb was found to be empty. The bodily assumption of the Theotokos was confirmed by the message of an angel and by her appearance to the Apostles.

The Icon of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos shows her on her deathbed surrounded by the Apostles. Christ is standing in the center looking at His mother. He is holding a small child clothed in white representing the soul of the Virgin Mary. With His golden garments, the angels above His head, and the mandorla surrounding Him, Christ is depicted in His divine glory. The posture of the Apostles direct attention toward the Theotokos. On the right Saint Peter censes

the body of the Theotokos. On the left Saint Paul bows low in honor of her. Together with the Apostles are several bishops and women. The bishops traditionally represented are James, the brother of the Lord, Timothy, Heirotheus, and Dionysius the Areopagite. They are shown wearing episcopal vestments. The women are members of the church in Jerusalem. In front of the bed of the Theotokos is a candle that helps to form a central axis in the icon. Above the candle is the body of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Standing over His mother is Christ holding her most pure soul. Above Christ the gates of heaven stand open, ready to receive the Mother of God.

This great Feast of the Church and the icon celebrates a fundamental teaching of our faith—the Resurrection of the body. In the case of the Theotokos, this has been accomplished by the divine will of God. Thus, this Feast is a feast of hope, hope in Resurrection and life eternal. Like those who gathered around the body of the Virgin Mary, we gather around our departed loved ones and commend their souls into the hands of Christ. As we remember those who have reposed in the faith before us and have passed on into the communion of the Saints, we prepare ourselves to one day be received into the new life of the age to come. We also affirm through this Feast as we journey toward our heavenly abode that the Mother of God intercedes for us. Through Christ she has become the mother of all of the children of God, embracing us with divine love.

Part 6: Conclusions about Catholic Teachings about the Virgin Mary

Catholics worship God alone, but we honour the Virgin Mary. By making her His mother, God honoured Mary more than we ever could. Scripture calls Mary “blessed” and promises that all generations will do likewise (Luke 1:42, 48). We honour Mary because Jesus honoured her and we are called to imitate Christ.

All prayer has God as its object. When we “pray to Mary”, we are really praying to God through Mary. We are asking Mary to intercede and present our petitions to God. Mary’s intercession is completely subordinate to, and dependent upon, Jesus. We single out Mary’s intercession because she is God’s most righteous saint and “the prayer of a righteous person has great power . . .” (James 5:16)

Mary is the obedient woman who undoes Eve’s disobedience. Mary is the New Eve, the supernatural mother of all who live in Christ. The devil, a fallen angel, brought words of death to Eve, the Angel Gabriel brought words of life to Mary. Mary is Jesus’s mother and a perfect disciple. Jesus is the New Adam, and with Mary the New Eve, they are victorious over sin and death.

There are many prayers we have to honour Mary (the rosary, Moleben, Akathist, etc.) The more we say these prayers in honour of our Theotokos, the more she will bring our prayers to her Son Jesus Christ.

Part 7: Major Feast Days in October:

October 1: The Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary: The Feast of the Protection commemorates the appearance of the most holy Theotokos in the Church of Blachernae in Constantinople in the early sixth century, as recorded in the life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ's sake. While the multitudes of the faithful were gathered in church, Epiphanius, the friend of Saint Andrew, through the Saint's prayers, beheld the Virgin Mary above the faithful and spreading out her veil over them, signifying her unceasing protection of all Christians. Because of this we keep a yearly feast of gratitude, imploring our Lady never to cease sheltering us in her mighty prayers.

TROPAR (Tone 4): Protected by your coming, O Mother of God, the faithful people solemnly celebrate today; and gazing upon your immaculate image, they humbly say: "Watch over us with your noble protection and deliver us from all evil, by asking your Son, Christ our God, to save our souls."

KONDAK (Tone 3): Today, the Virgin is present in the Church, and with the armies of saints invisibly prays to God for us. The angels worship with the archangels, and the apostles rejoice with the prophets, because in our behalf, the Mother of God prays to the eternal God.

October 26: Feast of Christ the King: The Feast of Christ the King was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 as an antidote to secularism, a way of life which leaves God out of man's thinking and living and organizes his life as if God did not exist. The feast is intended to proclaim in a striking and effective manner Christ's royalty over individuals, families, society, governments, and nations. Christ is God, the Creator of the universe and hence wields a supreme power over all things; "All things were created by Him"; Christ is our Redeemer, He purchased us by His precious Blood, and made us His property and possession; Christ is Head of the Church, "holding in all things the primacy"; God bestowed upon Christ the nations of the world as His special possession and dominion.

TROPAR (Tone 4): Christ, Our God, Your Kingship has taken us out of the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of Your love. You who are eternal, appeared as a King. Lord, glory be to You.

KONDAK (Tone 7): Let us adore and fall down before the immortal King of the ages, the only all-wise God Christ, saying: "Power, honor and kingdom have been bestowed upon You, and for this reason all the nations will serve You. Your power is everlasting and Your kingdom will not crumble, because the eternal King Christ became King for our sake!

Part 8: Homework for Next Class:

- 1. Think about who your favorite Saint is. What do you know about the Saints? Do you have a patron Saint?**
- 2. Read the following Scripture Verses: Psalms 37:28; Ephesians 4:1-3; John 15:4-5**
- 3. Pray every day!**