

# THE VIRGIN MARY

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**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.**

Gen. 3:15

**Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.**

Isaiah 7:14 NABRE

**The angel Gabriel said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ..... Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”**

Luke 1:28-33, 38

**To obey in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment.**

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 144

**The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that “nothing will be impossible with God,” and was able to magnify the Lord: “For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 273

# THE VIRGIN MARY

## INTRODUCTION

1. From the perspective of religious history, Mary was the most ordinary, extraordinary person who ever lived. She was not of noble birth yet she gave birth to the King of Kings. She was not wealthy but she carried the most precious of all jewels in her womb. She was not a scholar but raised and nurtured the wisest man who ever lived.
2. Mary's greatness comes not from her birth or life but from her complete trust in God; her willingness to say yes to God without thought of the consequences. Her acceptance of God's will changed the course of mankind's history. Mary believed God the way God wants to be believed.
3. Mary loves God the way God wants to be loved. Mary serves God the way God wants to be served. Mary trusts God the way God wants us to trust Him. Man serves God the way man wants to serve God. Man loves God the way man wants to love God. Man trusts God the way man wants to trust God.
4. Mankind was shown that the real battle for supremacy was not in conquering others but in conquering self. Not in dominance but in yielding to God's will. Not in possessions but in freeing oneself from slavery to possessions. Mankind's strength, power, understanding, and wisdom, all come from self-sacrifice and obedience to God.<sup>1</sup>
5. Mary never sought prominence or preeminence. The Gospels tell us that she was by her son's side at every critical point in his life. In his public ministry, she always took a subservient role.
6. At the beginning of his public ministry Mary and Jesus were at a wedding feast in Cana.<sup>2</sup> The newlyweds ran out of wine and Mary said to Jesus, "*They have no wine.*" Mary then said to the servers, "*Do whatever he tells you.*"<sup>3</sup> She brought the problem to Jesus and let him decide if and how he would resolve it.
7. That is the example we are to follow. Bring our problems to Jesus and let him resolve them for us. Mary did not get in Jesus' way. She simply interceded then, as she does now. Would Jesus deny any request from his mother? In Mary we have a great intercessor who was with Jesus his whole life and was there to support him and suffer with him. As she looked at him on that cross, her suffering must have been unfathomable. As she is with him now glorified, her grace is unfathomable.
8. Legends arose about Mary in the early church. Since Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived, it is no wonder that his mother would be given a very special place in his Church. Legends usually contain some truth that gets embellished over time. But the Gospels give us more grounded insights into Mary's life. This writing will be a reflection on what the Gospels tell us, but will also incorporate some information from legend taken from the Family Rosary Commemorative Edition of

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 4:1-11

<sup>2</sup> John 2:1-11 (NABRE)

<sup>3</sup> John 2:5

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the Catholic Bible issued in remembrance of the Marian Year.<sup>4</sup>

9. Legends about religious figures of antiquity such as the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, or the Saints are stories that often include a mix of historical fact and unhistorical embellishments. In the course of oral transmission, the historic narrative may be supplemented and embellished by the people according to the theological conceptions and inclinations of their time. Legends are not divine revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ or by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>
10. Tradition in the ecclesiastical sense refers to things (doctrines, accounts, or customs) initially transmitted orally from one generation to another that are accepted as revealed truths. They are Divine traditions not specifically outlined in Sacred Scripture, revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ or by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and transmitted by the Apostles to the Church. These unwritten traditions were documented by the early Church Fathers and became part of the body of faith of the Church. Legends are therefore different from Tradition as legends are not revelations made to the Apostles and transmitted to the Church by the Apostles. Legends are not accepted as part of the body of faith of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

## ASPECTS OF THE LIFE OF MARY

### THE LEGEND OF JOACHIM AND ANNE<sup>7</sup>

11. The Gospels make reference to Mary and her role in God's plan of salvation. God spoke to Mary through the Angel Gabriel; Mary accepted God's will; the birth of her son, Jesus the Savior, through whom Redemption was attained.
12. But to know anything about Mary's history we have to rely on the anecdotes that circulated in the early Christian communities. The imaginative and appealing stories were an inspiration to Christian writers and artists throughout the ages. However, the stories were essential to give us some understanding about the life of Mary through the eyes of the early Christian community and Christians in past centuries.
13. According to legend, Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, were pious Jews who lived in Jerusalem near the temple. Joachim was a prosperous and generous shepherd. But they were not blessed with children.
14. When Joachim came to the temple to offer his gifts he was deemed unworthy by the priest because he was the only one among the tribes that was unable to raise offspring.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Marian Holy Bible* (The Family Rosary Commemorative ed., pp. The Life of Mary). (1953). Chicago, IL: The Catholic Press, Inc.

<sup>5</sup> Günter, H. (1910). Legends of the Saints. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 2, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09128a.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Bainvel, J. (1912). Tradition and Living Magisterium. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 2, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15006b.htm>

<sup>7</sup> *The Marian Holy Bible* (The Family Rosary Commemorative ed., pp. The Life of Mary). (1953). Chicago, IL: The Catholic Press, Inc.

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15. Joachim withdrew to the desert where he fasted for forty days. At the end of the fast Joachim received an angelic visitor in the desert, and at the same time Anne received an angelic visitor in Jerusalem. They were told that God had mercy on them and would answer their prayers and bless them with a child.

### THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

16. Joachim and Anne were blessed with a child they named Mary. She was filled with God's grace and was destined to bring into the human world 'The Incarnate Word.'
17. In order that the devil would not for an instant have any power over the Mother of God, when she was conceived, her soul was created free from original sin. The Church defined this privilege as the Immaculate Conception.
18. The Catechism, citing the proclamation of Pope Pius the IX in 1854, states, "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the anticipated merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."<sup>8</sup>
19. The doctrine of the absolute sinlessness of Mary is found often in the theology of the early Church Fathers. Some of the poetic terms applied to Mary by the early Church Fathers and the great Doctors of the Church in the early centuries are: "Immaculate and perfectly Immaculate; Innocent and very Innocent; All Holy, All Chaste, All Inviolable; Model and very Form of purity and innocence; fairer and more graceful than beauty and grace itself...."
20. Even Mohammed glorifies Mary in his Koran writing, "The Angel shall say to Maryam. 'Allah has chosen thee; He has thee exempt from all stain.'"
21. The Divine Maternity of Mary was proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431. A thousand years later the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854 in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.<sup>9</sup> Mary herself acknowledged the title, "the Immaculate Conception" when she appeared at Lourdes in 1858.<sup>10</sup>
22. Lourdes is a town at the foot of the Pyrenees mountain range in southwest France. It is famous for the Sanctuaries Notre-Dame de Lourdes, a major Catholic pilgrimage site. Every year, millions visit the Grotto of Massabielle where, in 1858, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared 18 times to Bernadette Soubirous between February 11, 1858 and July 16, 1858.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 138, para.491) Print.; Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854: DS 2803.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Pius IX, . (1954, December 8). THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION *Ineffabilis Deus* Apostolic Constitution. In *Papal Encyclicals Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>

<sup>10</sup> *The Marian Holy Bible* (The Family Rosary Commemorative ed., pp. The Life of Mary). (1953). Chicago, IL: The Catholic Press, Inc.

<sup>11</sup> Bertrin, G. (1910). Notre-Dame de Lourdes. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved September 6, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09389b.htm>

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## THE EARLY LIFE OF MARY<sup>12</sup>

23. Ancient legends afford us many details about the birth and upbringing of Mary (Miriam, Maryam). It is alleged that she was born in Jerusalem around 20 B.C during the Feast of Succoth (Tabernacles).
24. She was an extremely beautiful child and, when she was three years old, she was brought to the temple and consecrated to God. The Eastern legend of the Church say that she remained there as a ward of the priests. The Western legend has it that she returned home after her presentation and received her education from St. Anne.

## THE ANNUNCIATION

25. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter. They were both from the line of David. According to legend, Mary told Joseph that she had dedicated her virginity to God and he still accepted her to be his wife.
26. She was surprised when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, *“Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you..... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*<sup>13</sup>
27. Mary was puzzled because she was a virgin, but Gabriel’s reply was even more confusing. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”*<sup>14</sup>
28. Even though Mary had little understanding of God’s plan for her, she said to Gabriel, *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”*<sup>15</sup>

## MARY’S VISIT TO ELIZABETH

29. Gabriel also told Mary, *“Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren.”*<sup>16</sup> Mary visited Elizabeth in the hill country in a town of Judah.<sup>17</sup> When Mary greeted Elizabeth, the infant John, *“leaped in her womb.”*<sup>18</sup> This was more than ordinary excitement and surprise.
30. The Angel Gabriel had visited Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah six months before. Zechariah was a temple priest, and both he and his wife Elizabeth were righteous in

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<sup>12</sup> *The Marian Holy Bible* (The Family Rosary Commemorative ed., pp. The Life of Mary). (1953). Chicago, IL: The Catholic Press, Inc.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:28-33

<sup>14</sup> Luke 1:35

<sup>15</sup> Luke 1:38

<sup>16</sup> Luke 1:36

<sup>17</sup> Luke 1:39

<sup>18</sup> Luke 1:41

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the eyes of God.<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth was barren and they were now elderly. Zechariah had been chosen to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. The angel of the Lord visited Zechariah in the sanctuary and told him, “*Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John.*”<sup>20</sup> John would later be known as John the Baptist who, “*went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*”<sup>21</sup>

31. Scripture tells us that when Mary and Elizabeth met, they were both filled with the Holy Spirit and Elizabeth exclaimed, “*Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*”<sup>22</sup> Mary in response said a psalm of praise which is called the “Canticle of Mary”.<sup>23</sup>

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS

32. Mary remained with Elizabeth for three months and then returned to Joseph. Joseph was confused and troubled by Mary’s pregnancy but was reassured by an angel in a dream that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife.<sup>24</sup> They went up to the town of Bethlehem outside of Jerusalem for a census and while she was there, she gave birth to Jesus.<sup>25</sup>
33. Church doctrine tells us that Mary, in the same way that she conceived Jesus without losing her virginity, also gave birth without suffering the pains of childbirth and without losing her virginity. This is the miracle and doctrine of the Virgin Birth.<sup>26</sup> The Gospel of Matthew tells us, “*For God all things are possible.*”<sup>27</sup> The doctrine of the Virgin Birth should not be confused with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception where Mary was conceived without from Original Sin.<sup>28</sup>
34. On the night when baby Jesus was born, there were shepherds nearby watching their flocks. An angel appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The angel told them that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem and the shepherds went looking for him. They found baby Jesus lying in a manger. After relating what the angel had told them they returned glorifying God.<sup>29</sup>
35. When he was eight days old, the baby was circumcised and given the name Jesus as directed by the angel Gabriel. After forty days, Mary went up to the temple for the rite of purification and took Jesus to present him. While at the temple, a righteous

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 1:6

<sup>20</sup> Luke 1:5-13

<sup>21</sup> John 3:3

<sup>22</sup> Luke 1:42

<sup>23</sup> Luke 1:46-55

<sup>24</sup> Matt. 1:20

<sup>25</sup> Luke 2:1-6

<sup>26</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 143, para.510) Print.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 19:26

<sup>28</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 138, para.491) Print.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 2:8-20

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and devout man named Simeon, and a prophetess Anna, gave praise to God for Jesus who was to restore God's rule in Israel.<sup>30</sup>

36. Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem looking for the, "Newborn king of the Jews" to pay him homage. They found baby Jesus, paid him homage and gave him gifts of gold and spices.<sup>31</sup>
37. King Herod was very troubled when he heard that the Magi were looking for the King of the Jews and he decreed that all boys in Bethlehem under the two years of age should be killed. Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus fled to Egypt. When Herod died in the Spring of 4 B.C., they returned to the town of Nazareth in Galilee.<sup>32</sup>

### THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

38. Jesus grew and became strong under the guidance of Mary and Joseph. The Gospels did not record any miracles done by Jesus when he was a child.
39. One incident written in the Gospels is that when Jesus was 12 years old, he went to Jerusalem for Passover. When the Passover feast was concluded, Mary and Joseph left for home assuming that Jesus was with family in the caravan but Jesus had remained in Jerusalem. They could not find Jesus after a day so they returned to Jerusalem in distress and found him sitting in the temple questioning the teachers. When asked why he had remained behind he replied, "*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*"<sup>33</sup> Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men.
40. Nothing more was documented about Jesus' childhood or when he was a young adult. The next documented information about Jesus came when he began his three year public ministry at the age of 30 years.

### THE MINISTRY, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

41. We were not given much information about Mary and Jesus' family during his public ministry. We know that Mary played a subordinate role during Jesus' ministry. Jesus was sent by God to redeem mankind, to play the preeminent role in reconciling man with God. So even though Mary was the mother of Jesus, all focus had to be on him as he did his Father's will.
42. When Jesus was arrested, scourged and crucified, Mary and a few other women stood helplessly by the cross on Calvary where Jesus suffered through his agony. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was also standing by the cross. Jesus looked down from the cross and 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."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Luke 2:22-38

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 2:1-12

<sup>32</sup> Matt. 2:13-23

<sup>33</sup> Luke 2:41-52

<sup>34</sup> John 19:26-27



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43. Mary watched helplessly as Jesus, having accomplished all that his Father had sent him to do, died on the cross. When Jesus was taken down from the cross, Mary held his lifeless body in her arms and wept.
44. Mary followed the lifeless body of her son to the tomb where he was wrapped in burial clothes along with spices. A large stone was rolled before the entrance of the tomb.
45. After Jesus' resurrection, Mary stayed with the disciples in Jerusalem and prayed with them. After Pentecost Scripture does not provide any further information about Mary.
46. There is nothing certain known about the day, year or manner of Mary's death. Traditional belief is that Mary died painlessly and was assumed body and soul into heaven. This was defined as a dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

## MARY'S ROLE IN SALVATION HISTORY

47. Mary, the Mother of the Son of God, occupies a special and unique place in God's plan of salvation. From ancient time to the present day, the Catholic Church honors the exceptional role of Mary, the woman chosen to be the mother of the Redeemer, with special reverence and devotion.
48. The Old Testament spoke of Mary in the creation story in Genesis. When God planted a garden in Eden, He gave Adam this order, "*You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.*"<sup>35</sup>
49. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. God told the evil one who tricked them, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel."<sup>36</sup>
50. As the disobedience of Adam and Eve resulted in the fall from grace, the Cross resulted in restoration to friendship with God.
51. Her position as the woman who is to be at enmity with the serpent, and who through her seed is to crush its head, coupled with St. Paul's writing that Jesus is the second Adam,<sup>37</sup> easily lead us to the principle so strongly asserted in early Tradition, that Mary is the second Eve. As Eve was the mother of all the living in the physical order, so Mary is the mother of all the living in the spiritual order.
52. The prophet Isaiah in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was told by God that the restoration of mankind would be through a woman, "*the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel,*"<sup>38</sup> which means, "*God with Us.*"<sup>39</sup> Not

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<sup>35</sup> Gen 2:16-17

<sup>36</sup> Gen 3:15

<sup>37</sup> Rom. 5:14

<sup>38</sup> Is 7:14

<sup>39</sup> Matt. 1:23

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only does Isaiah foresee a singular miracle of a virgin giving birth, but of a woman who would be identified with the Divine.

53. Seven hundred years later, Mary received the Word of God in her heart and in her body from of the angel Gabriel. She conceived, gave birth to, and nourished Jesus, presented Him to God in the Temple, and shared in her Divine Son's suffering on the Cross. Through her "yes" to God, she occupies a place in Salvation History, in the Church and in the lives of believers.
54. By the mere fact that Mary was the mother of the Savior through whom Redemption was to be attained, she is the very beginning of the act of Salvation.  
"The union of Mary with her Son in the work of Salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's conception up to His death; made manifest above all at the hour of His Passion. She persevered in the union with her Son unto the Cross, in keeping with the Divine Plan, joining herself with His sacrifice in her mother's heart, lovingly consenting to His immolation."<sup>40</sup>
55. Mary has also been referred to as, "The ark of the Covenant" by the Church. Just as the Israelites carried the Ark containing the stone tablets of the law, the old covenant, Mary carried the new covenant, the Incarnate Word of God, within her. The Ark of the Old Covenant could be considered as one of the purest and richest symbols of the realities of the New Law. The Ark could be regarded as a mystical representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>41</sup>
56. On the occasion of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple, Simeon addressed Mary, saying, "*Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*"<sup>42</sup> These words directed to Mary coming immediately after Simeon's prediction of Christ as "a sign of contradiction" insinuated a co-passion of Mary in her role as co-redemptrix.<sup>43</sup>
57. At the wedding feast at Cana, Mary, concerned with possible embarrassment of the newly married couple, speaks to Jesus that there was no more wine. Jesus questions her, "*How does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.*"<sup>44</sup> Mary's intercession to her Son speaks of her awareness and anticipation of His work of salvation with who she will be in cooperation until its ultimate fulfillment.
58. Pope St. John Paul II, at his Papal audience in Rome on April 9, 1997, spoke of Mary, "During the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary co-operated during the event itself and in the role of Mother; thus her co-operation embraces the whole of Christ's

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<sup>40</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 273, para.964) Print.

<sup>41</sup> Souvay, C. (1907). Ark of the Covenant. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 18, 2016 from New Advent:  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01721a.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Luke, 2:34-35

<sup>43</sup> The partner with Jesus in the redemption of human beings. (Encyclopedia Britannica – Mariology)

<sup>44</sup> John 2:4

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saving work. She alone was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of all mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to Him, Mary is the woman, the new Eve, united to the New Adam in restoring to humanity to its original dignity. The co-operation with her Son continued for all time in the universal motherhood which she enjoys in the order of Grace.”

59. We credit Mary with the title of co-redemptrix. She freely consented to give life to the Redeemer, to share in His life, suffer with him under the Cross, and offer sacrifice to the Father for the sake of man’s redemption.

### KEY POINTS

- ❖ Mary, the Mother of the Son of God, occupies a special and unique place in God’s plan of salvation.
- ❖ Her “yes” to God was uttered in the name of all human nature; by her obedience she becomes the New Eve, mother of the living.<sup>45</sup>

The “Hail Mary” is a prayer that echoes the unique role of Mary in the plan of our Redemption.

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<sup>45</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 143, para.511) Print.