

Mary in the New Testament



The Development of Veneration of and Thought about Mary

Gospel of James (150-200AD)

“And he sat her down on the third step of the altar, and the Lord God poured grace upon her.”

Birth of Jesus: “A great light appeared in the cave, so that their eyes could not bear it. And a little later, the light withdrew until an infant appeared. And he came and took the breast of his mother, Mary.”

In the Second Century...

...theologians contrast Mary, the obedient woman, with Eve, the disobedient woman, and this becomes a common theme. In Genesis, in the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, God says to Eve that she will experience pain in bearing children (Genesis 3:16). In the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of James, Mary does not experience pain in Jesus' birth.

In the Following Two Centuries...

...Eve becomes associated with impurity, sexual lust, emotion, while Mary is the opposite. This epoch in history is known for its asceticism, the practice of denial of the body. Mary's virginity, including after the birth of Jesus, becomes the highest image and symbol of bodily and spiritual purity.

A Major Event...

...in the development of Marian belief and doctrine was Jerome's translation of the New Testament in the last part of the 4th century, which was to be the authoritative translation of the Catholic Church until the modern period (the "Vulgate").

Jerome Teaches...

...that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were the children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. But most important is his translation of the words of the angel to Mary in the annunciation story of the Gospel of Luke 1:28: Jerome translates: “Hail, full of grace,” which in later tradition becomes “Hail, Mary, full of grace.”

We Know the Phrase, “Hail Mary, Full of Grace”

From the prayer of the Rosary (which dates from the Middle Ages): “Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.”

In Genesis 3:15 God Curses the Serpent

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers: he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” In the early centuries of the church this text will be changed to say “she will strike your head, and you will strike her heel.” In this, Mary is powerful. In the Middle Ages she will be prayed to for protection and justice.

In the Fifth Century

In the year 431, a council of the church will give Mary the title “Theotokos,” “mother of God” (of Jesus, the Son of God). Following this, commemorations of Mary in the churches developed and became traditions.

Seventh Century

Quran of Muhammed, 16th Sura (Chapter): “Mary” – Based on Luke’s depiction of Mary in the Christmas Story: The angel announces the birth of a “good son.” She is a model of obedient faith. Jesus is a prophet, but not “Son of God.”

In the Church of the Middle Ages

All meanings of Mary are amplified. In the 8th century a church council set a limit to this development by distinguishing levels of adoration: Latria (God), Dulia (angels and saints), later Hyperdulia (Mary).

A Famous Theologian, Bonaventura

A famous theologian, Bonaventura, gave an important warning: "One has to be careful not to minimize the honor of Christ" through the veneration of Mary. But another theologian, Duns Scotus, could write that "it is better to say too much than too little about Mary."

Mary's Virginal Purity...

...is magnified even more. She is purified with divine grace and overflowing with divine grace. She is “mediatrix” (feminine form of “mediator”) who mediates between humanity and God. She brings the prayers of men and women before Christ and God the Father.

According to Thomas Aquinas

Mary "was so full of grace that it overflows on to all mankind."
"It is necessary that whosoever desires to obtain favors with God, should approach this mediatrix, approach her with a most devout heart because, since she is the Queen of Mercy, possessing everything in the kingdom of God's justice, she cannot refuse your petition."

Remembering Mary's "Ancient Mercies"...

...aroused in the believer the hope and confidence to "return to you, Mary, and through you to God the Father and to your only son," that it was possible to "demand salvation of you."

As the mother of Jesus, Mary is the "gate of paradise." "Her assent to the word and will of God made the incarnation and therefore the redemption possible."

Mary “Overflows with Grace to Us”

Mary is the “mother of mercies” who appeals to God on behalf of all in need, especially those who pray to her.

She is “Mother of the Church,” as she is Jesus’ mother. This stems from the Gospel of John 19:27: from the crucified Jesus’ words to “the beloved disciple,” speaking of Mary: “Here is your mother.”

Mary Is Also the “Mother of Sorrows”

As the mother of the crucified Jesus, she sorrows with and for those who sorrow in their own lives. From this has come the traditional hymn “stabat mater” in worship services commemorating Mary. It depicts the mother standing and weeping at the foot of the cross.

Heiko Oberman, Historian of the Middle Ages and the Reformation

Writes that these very high doctrines of Mary have to do with the way Jesus and God are understood. Jesus is typically portrayed as the crucified on the cross, as the bearer of humanity's sins, and present in the sacrament of the body and blood, and as the resurrected Son of God who is with God the Father in heaven.

Mary becomes the one close to us who mercifully grants “free access” to God through prayer to her. For Protestantism, she takes over a large part of the meaning of Christ.

