

**UNDERSTANDING  
CATHOLICISM'S  
VIRGIN MARY  
AND  
IMMACULATE  
CONCEPTOIN**

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**Understanding Catholicism's  
"Virgin" Mary  
&  
Immaculate Conception**

The Catholic Church has a large membership and most all of us have contact at some time with someone who is Catholic. Catholic's have a unique belief regarding Mary, the mother of Jesus, that is not shared by most other Christian denominations. If this belief is in error, we must first understand what that belief is so that we might have the appropriate scriptures and arguments to combat a false teaching. This study is not intended to provide the scriptures to confound this belief, but rather is a presentation of the Catholic beliefs regarding Mary and their reasons for our understanding.

The basis for the Catholic belief regarding Mary comes from a theology which believes that a sinner could not produce a sinless child. Therefore in order for Jesus to be perfect, there must have been some event or events that allowed Mary to be perfect.

**Anne Catherine Emmerich  
Saint Bridget**

Much of the current theology stems from visions received by Saint Bridget of Sweden and Anne Catherine Emmerich. Bridget was born in 1303 and died July 23, 1373 and Anne Catherine Emmerich was an Augustinian nun who was born on September 8, 1774 and died on February 9, 1824. In Emmerich's vision she sees Mary's parents, Joachim and Ann meeting in an underground passageway of the Temple in Jerusalem. Here she witnesses a barrier between them removed and they are enveloped in bright light and surrounded by angels.

"After passing through about a third of the passage Joachim came to a place in the midst of which stood a pillar in the form of a palm-tree with hanging leaves and fruits. Here he was met by Anna, radiant with happiness. They embraced each other with holy joy, and each told the other their good tidings. They were in a state of ecstasy and enveloped in a cloud of light. I saw this light issuing from a great host of angels, who were carrying the appearance of a high shining tower and hovering above the heads of Anna and Joachim. ... I saw that this tower seemed to disappear between Anna and Joachim, who were enveloped in a glory of brightness. I understood, that as a result of the grace here given, the conception of Mary was as pure as all conceptions would have been but for the Fall. I had at the same time an indescribable vision. The heavens opened above them, and I saw the joy of the Holy Trinity and of the angels, and their participation in the mysterious blessing here bestowed on Mary's parents. Anna and Joachim returned, praising God ...." <sup>1</sup>

"The tower vanished between Joachim and Anne, both of whom were encompassed by brilliant light and glory. At the same moment the heavens above them opened, and I saw the joy of the Most Holy Trinity and of the angels over the Conception of Mary. Both Joachim and Anne were in a supernatural state. I learned that, at the

moment in which they embraced and the light shone around them, the Immaculate Conception of Mary was accomplished." <sup>2</sup>

### **The Immaculate Conception**

It is the belief of Catholics that Joachim and Ann were cleansed of all sin while in the passageway of the Temple and in that state they obtained a perfect spiritual bonding above any physical union through which Mary was conceived and refer to this as the "Immaculate Conception". "Therefore, solely by the means of a most wonderful and singular miracle of God, the Virgin Mary was conceived of both her parents, Saint Joachim and Saint Ann, without sexual union and within their purity of body, heart, mind and soul." <sup>3</sup>

### **Saint Joachim and Saint Ann**

"The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary occurred in a most chaste and virginal manner by the power and Mercy of God. It is not that Saint Ann and Saint Joachim were virgins. They had a most holy and complete marriage. They had conceived a child, Mary Heli (cf John 19-25) many years earlier, in the usual way. Yet the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception occurred solely by a miracle of God, without marital relations and within her parents' complete purity of body, heart mind, and soul. God alone could bring about such a virginal and miraculous conception. Saint Joachim and Saint Ann had been separated for several months prior to their meeting in the passageway under the Temple. They had ceased from marital relations beginning at least several months before the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, and they never resumed having marital relations, because after the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary their union could not have produced a greater fruit for God and for all creation." <sup>4</sup>

### **The "Virgin Mary"**

To Catholics, "virgin" means more when referring to Mary than to most Christians. Most Christians accept for face value that Mary was a virgin i.e., had never had sexual relations, when the Holy Ghost conceived Jesus in her womb (Matthew 1:20).

However to Catholics:

- 1) She had a "virginal birth". In other words her mother did not go into labor, but Mary simply went from being in her mother's womb to being outside and born.
- 2) Mary was spiritually a virgin i.e., free from sin or error and completely pure.
- 3) Mary was physically a virgin i.e., never had sexual relations, both before the conception of Jesus and after.
- 4) The birth of Jesus was also a "virginal birth" i.e., with Jesus going from Mary's womb to the outside world without Mary being in labor.

"The Virgin Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. The Virgin Mary is entirely without stain of sin, being free from both original and personal sin throughout her entire life beginning from the first moment of her existence at her Immaculate Conception. The Virgin Mary is entirely perfect, lacking

in nothing, without flaw, omission, or imperfection. The Virgin Mary is like Sacred Scripture, in that both are entirely without flaw, omission, or imperfection.”<sup>5</sup>

“The life of the Virgin Mary is a perfect reflection of the life of Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary is perfect and is the chosen Mother of God because she resembles Christ in all things except His Divinity. The lives of Jesus and Mary are joined by God and cannot be separated. God gave a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth to the perfect-Virgin Jesus Christ. Therefore, God also gave a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth to His Mother, the perfect-Virgin Mary. God would not give Jesus Christ a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth without also giving His Holy Mother a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth. God wills that the Virgin Mary be like Christ in all things except His Divinity.”<sup>6</sup>

“The Virginitv of Mary is also entirely perfect, therefore she also must necessarily have a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth. It cannot be otherwise. The Virgin Mary is perfect, therefore her Virginitv must also be perfect. To be perfect is to be like Christ. Since Christ has a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth, Mary must also have a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth....To deny the Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth of the Virgin Mary is to deny her perfect Virginitv, which has been taught by the Holy Catholic Church and venerated by the saints and angels throughout the ages.”<sup>7</sup>

“In union with the whole Church we honor Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God.”<sup>8</sup>

“The title ‘ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ’ means not only that Mary kept a virgin marriage to Joseph, but also that she is always a true and complete Virgin, in every way, throughout her entire life. To be ever-virgin, Mary must have both a Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth. If the conception and birth of the Virgin Mary were not virginal and miraculous, then she would not be the ever-Virgin Mother of God that she is. Beginning with the first moment of her existence at her Immaculate Virgin Conception, the Virgin Mary remained always a Virgin, in every way and at all times, throughout her entire life, and continuing without ceasing through the end of her life on earth.”<sup>9</sup>

“The true and complete Virginitv of Mary includes her entire self. Never in her life did the least unchaste desire pass across her Virgin Heart. Never in her life was the least unchaste thought found even briefly in her Virgin Mind. The Virgin Mary never had the least unchaste desire, thought, word, or action. She was always completely pure and chaste in body, mind, heart, and soul.”<sup>10</sup>

“Saint Bridget says, ‘His flesh most clean from all filth or impurity,’ meaning that there was no blood or fluids or anything else on the body of Jesus when He was born. The miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ was perfect and complete. There was no need to cut an umbilical cord. There was no afterbirth. Everything necessary was provided by God miraculously. No midwife was needed because the miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ was not lacking in any way. And the same is true for the miraculous birth of the Virgin Mary.

The birth of Jesus Christ occurred solely and entirely by a miracle of God and not in the usual way. When Jesus was born, He went from His mother Mary's womb to the outside world immediately and directly by a miracle of God, without any part whatsoever of the usual process of delivery. First He was in the womb, then He was out of the womb, without having to travel through any places in between. God alone could bring about such a virginal and miraculous birth. The Virgin Births of both Jesus and Mary occurred solely, entirely, and necessarily by means of a miracle of God and not in the usual way."<sup>11</sup>

"The phrase 'without loss of her virginity' means that Jesus left the womb of the Virgin Mary solely by a miracle of God and not in the usual way. Jesus went from being inside the womb to being outside the womb solely by means of the power of God. This is what is meant by a virgin birth; other explanations are insufficient and unacceptable. The births of both Jesus and Mary were Virgin Births."<sup>12</sup>

"Other holy disciples of Christ have been called 'virgin' by the Church. Other true disciples of Christ have kept themselves pure for Christ. But, compared to the perfect Virgin Mary, not even the holiest of Saints can be called a perfect Virgin. Even the most virginal of Saints does not have virginity in the manner and to the degree of the most pure Virgin Mary. Some virgins have sinned against virginity by the least impure thought or desire, and so their virginity is not perfect. Other virgins are not entirely virginal in body and soul, having been conceived and born in the usual way, having been conceived and born with original sin. And even if some holy person was to remain entirely free from every unchaste thought, desire, and action for a long period of time, such a one would not have anywhere near to the degree of presence of purity found in Mary, the perfect imitator of the Son of God. Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are true perfect virgins; everyone else falls short of the mark. Next to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, no other human being is perfect in virginity.

The complete Virginity of Mary includes every aspect of virginity, in body, mind, heart, and soul, throughout her entire life, on earth as in Heaven. The Virgin Mary never failed in the least to please God in all things throughout her entire being and throughout her entire life. So complete was the Virgin Mary's love for God that she was entirely faithful to God in every way and at all times. The Virgin Mary's complete and total dedication to God made possible her complete and total Virginity, and the Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth of her Divine Son Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup>

### **Papal Proclamation**

In 1854 The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, defined the Catholic Church's belief regarding the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It reads in part as follows:

The Virgin Mary is: "immaculate in every respect; innocent, and verily most innocent; spotless, and entirely spotless; holy and removed from every stain of sin; all pure, all stainless, the very model of purity and innocence; more beautiful than beauty, more lovely than loveliness; more holy than holiness, singularly holy and most pure in

soul and body; the one who surpassed all integrity and virginity; the only one who has become the dwelling place of all the graces of the most Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Exalted**

Referencing Matthew 11:11 and Luke 7:28 – “Here Jesus teaches us that no one is greater than John the Baptist among that group of persons called ‘those born of women.’ Birth implies conception. If a child has been born, that child must also have been conceived. So, when Jesus says “those born of women,” He means those conceived and born of women. No one among that group of persons conceived and born of women is greater than John.

We know well that both Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are greater by far than John the Baptist. Therefore, Jesus and Mary are not members of that group referred to as ‘those born of women.’ Yet we also know that both Jesus and Mary were conceived and born of women. Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born as her Son. The Virgin Mary was conceived in the womb of Saint Ann and born as her daughter. Both Jesus and Mary had mothers. Therefore, the expression ‘those born of women’ does not refer to all those who have mothers, nor to all those who have been conceived and born.

Jesus was conceived of a woman, but by means of a miracle of God in a Virgin Conception, not in the usual manner of conception. Jesus was born of a woman, but by means of a miracle of God in a Virgin Birth, not in the usual manner of birth. That is why Jesus is not included as one of “those born of women.” Jesus was not conceived and born in the usual, merely human way, but was conceived and born by means of a miracle of God. The phrase “those born of women” means those conceived and born in the usual way, and not by means of a miracle of God. The expression “those born of women” refers only to those persons whose conceptions and births are not accomplished in a miraculous and virginal manner. And this phrase cannot refer to Jesus and Mary, since they are both greater than John the Baptist.

Since the Virgin Mary is also not one of “those born of women,” she who is most like Christ was also not conceived and born in the usual human way, but rather was conceived and born solely by a miracle of God, in a manner which was wholly virginal and pure. The humanity of the Virgin Mary is like the humanity of Jesus Christ in all things, even in conception and birth. The Virgin Mary is the perfect reflection of the humanity of Christ: like Him in His perfect Virginity, like Him in His Virgin Conception, like Him in His Virgin Birth, like Him in all things except His Divinity. The life of the Virgin Mary is lacking in nothing, flawless and perfect in all things, yet the life of Christ Jesus is greater still.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Part of Christ’s “Temple”**

Referencing John 2:18-21 – “Sacred Scripture is telling us that the body of Jesus had, at that point in time, taken 46 years to build, beginning with the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The rebuilding of the Second Temple of Jerusalem is also counted as beginning 46 years earlier. So then, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary occurred at the time of the rebuilding of the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

God would not allow the perfect and holy Christ to be born of a sinful woman. So, in order to build the Perfect Temple of the Body of Jesus Christ, God began by preserving the Virgin Mary from sin, from all sin and all tendency towards sin, from the first moment of her existence in the womb of her mother, Saint Ann.”<sup>16</sup>

### Summary

To Catholics, Mary is perfect in all ways. She is the mirror image of Christ and only lacking in His divinity from being equal to Christ. She is above all other men or women and subordinate only to Christ.

“Mary is not only a virgin (later made sinless—the immaculate conception), a mother, a partner in redemption, but Rome has made her an intercessor—a mediator. In the Middle Ages it became difficult for many to believe that Jesus was really a man (with Deity). They thought of Him solely as divine, and that while here on earth, He had been obedient in the power of His divine nature. Since we mortals do not have this advantage, they reasoned, Mary was looked to for compassion. How could Jesus really understand our dilemma when temptations befall us? How can He, solely divine, have compassion? But Mary, on the other hand, is human (though sinless). She enjoyed pleasing God without a divine nature. Therefore, she can have pity on us for our sins and our temptations. She will pray to her Son for us. And her Son cannot really deny His mother's requests. Thus, to get to God, pray to Mary first, and she in turn will influence her Son, who in turn will counsel with the Father.”<sup>17</sup>

—For most Catholics the “Virgin Mary” has been superimposed over the role of the Holy Ghost to which other Christians look to assist them in their relationship with God.

<sup>1</sup> Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1970), pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations*, (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 137-138.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald L. Conte Jr., *The Virginity of Jesus and Mary*, (2001) p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal and Hymnal*, (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1974), Eucharistic Prayer I, In Communion with the Saints, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald L. Conte Jr., *The Virginity of Jesus and Mary*, (2001) p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ineffabilis Deus*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald L. Conte Jr., *The Virginity of Jesus and Mary*, (2001) pp. 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Boyd, *World's Bible Handbook*, (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 445.