

The Fathers of the Church taught that Mary received a number of distinctive blessings in order to make her a more fitting mother for Christ and the prototypical Christian (follower of Christ). These blessings included her role as the New Eve (corresponding to Christ's role as the New Adam), her Immaculate Conception, her spiritual motherhood of all Christians, and her Assumption into heaven. These gifts were given to her by God's grace. She did not earn them, but she possessed them nonetheless.

The key to understanding all these graces is Mary's role as the New Eve, which the Fathers proclaimed so forcefully. Because she is the New Eve, she, like the New Adam, was born immaculate, just as the First Adam and Eve were created immaculate. Because she is the New Eve, she is mother of the New Humanity (Christians), just as the first Eve was the mother of humanity. And, because she is the New Eve, she shares the fate of the New Adam. Whereas the First Adam and Eve died and went to dust, the New Adam and Eve were lifted up physically into heaven.

Of particular interest in the following quotations from the Fathers are those that speak of Mary's immaculate nature. We will all one day be rendered immaculate (sinless), but Mary, as the prototypical Christian, received this grace early. God granted her freedom from sin to make her a fitting mother for his Son.

Even before the terms "original sin" and "immaculate conception" had been defined, early passages imply the doctrines. Many works mention that Mary gave birth to Jesus without pain. But pain in child-bearing is part of the penalty of original sin (Gen. 3:16). Thus, Mary could not have been under that penalty. By God's grace, she was immaculate in anticipation of her Son's redemptive death on the cross. The Church therefore describes Mary as "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (CCC 508).

### THE ASCENSION OF ISAIAH

"[T]he report concerning the child was noised abroad in Bethlehem. Some said, 'The Virgin Mary has given

birth before she was married two months.' And many said, 'She has not given birth; the midwife has not gone up to her, and we heard no cries of pain'" (*Ascension of Isaiah* 11 [A.D. 70]).

### THE ODES OF SOLOMON

"So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies. And she labored and bore the Son, but without pain, because it did not occur without purpose. And she did not seek a midwife, because he caused her to give life. She bore as a strong man, with will . . ." (*Odes of Solomon* 19 [A.D. 80]).

### JUSTIN MARTYR

"[Jesus] became man by the Virgin so that the course which was taken by disobedience in the beginning through the agency of the serpent might be also the very course by which it would be put down. Eve, a virgin and undefiled, conceived the word of the serpent and bore disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, for which reason the Holy One being born of her is the Son of God. And she replied 'Be it done unto me according to your word' [Luke 1:38]" (*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 100 [A.D. 155]).

### IRENÆUS

"Consequently, then, Mary the Virgin is found to be obedient, saying, 'Behold, O Lord, your handmaid; be it done to me according to your word.' Eve, however, was disobedient, and, when yet a virgin, she did not obey. Just as she, who was then still a virgin although she had Adam for a husband—for in paradise they were both naked but were not ashamed; for, having been created only a short time, they had no understanding of the procreation of children, and it was necessary that they first come to maturity before beginning to multiply—having become disobe-

dient, was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary, betrothed to a man but nevertheless still a virgin, being obedient, was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. . . . Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith" (*Against Heresies* 3:22:24 [A.D. 189]).

"The Lord then was manifestly coming to his own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation that is supported by himself. He was making a recapitulation of that disobedience that had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience that was upon a tree [i.e., the cross]. Furthermore, the original deception was to be done away with—the deception by which that virgin Eve (who was already espoused to a man) was unhappily misled. That this was to be overturned was happily announced through means of the truth by the angel to the Virgin Mary (who was also [espoused] to a man). . . . So if Eve disobeyed God, yet Mary was persuaded to be obedient to God. In this way, the Virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin. Virginal disobedience has been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way, the sin of the first created man received amendment by the correction of the First-Begotten" (*ibid.*, 5:19:1 [A.D. 189]).

### TERTULLIAN

"And again, lest I depart from my argumentation on the name of Adam: Why is Christ called Adam by the apostle [Paul], if as man he was not of that earthly origin? But even reason defends this conclusion, that God recovered his image and likeness by a procedure similar to that in which he had been robbed of it by the devil. It was while Eve was still a virgin that the word of the devil crept in to erect an edifice of death. Likewise through a virgin the Word of God was in-

troduced to set up a structure of life. Thus what had been laid waste in ruin by this sex was by the same sex reestablished in salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. That which the one destroyed by believing, the other, by believing, set straight" (*The Flesh of Christ* 17:4 [A.D. 210]).

### PSEUDO-MELITO

"If therefore it might come to pass by the power of your grace, it has appeared right to us your servants that, as you, having overcome death, do reign in glory, so you should raise up the body of your Mother and take her with you, rejoicing, into heaven. Then said the Savior [Jesus]: 'Be it done according to your will'" (*The Passing of the Virgin* 16:2–17 [A.D. 300]).

### EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

"You alone and your Mother are more beautiful than any others, for there is no blemish in you nor any stains upon your Mother. Who of my children can compare in beauty to these?" (*Nisibene Hymns* 27:8 [A.D. 361]).

### AMBROSE OF MILAN

"Mary's life should be for you a pictorial image of virginity. Her life is like a mirror reflecting the face of chastity and the form of virtue. Therein you may find a model for your own life . . . showing what to improve, what to imitate, what to hold fast to" (*The Virgins* 2:2:6 [A.D. 377]).

"The first thing which kindles ardor in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater [to teach by example] than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom Glory Itself chose? What more chaste than she who bore a body without contact with another body? For why should I speak of her other virtues? She was a virgin not only in body but also in mind, who stained the sincerity of its disposition by no guile, who was humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind, sparing of words, studious

in reading, resting her hope not on uncertain riches, but on the prayer of the poor, intent on work, modest in discourse; wont to seek not man but God as the judge of her thoughts, to injure no one, to have goodwill towards all, to rise up before her elders, not to envy her equals, to avoid boastfulness, to follow reason, to love virtue. When did she pain her parents even by a look? When did she disagree with her neighbors? When did she despise the lowly? When did she avoid the needy?" (ibid., 2:2:7).

"Come, then, and search out your sheep, not through your servants or hired men, but do it yourself. Lift me up bodily and in the flesh, which is fallen in Adam. Lift me up not from Sarah but from Mary, a virgin not only undefiled, but a virgin whom grace had made inviolate, free of every stain of sin" (*Commentary on Psalm 118:22–30* [A.D. 387]).

### AUGUSTINE

"Our Lord . . . was not averse to males, for he took the form of a male, nor to females, for of a female he was born. Besides, there is a great mystery here: that just as death comes to us through a woman, life is born to us through a woman; that the devil, defeated, would be tormented by each nature, feminine and masculine, as he had taken delight in the defecation of both" (*Christian Combat 22:24* [A.D. 396]).

"That one woman is both mother and virgin, not in spirit only but even in body. In spirit she is *mother*, not of our head, who is our Savior himself—of whom all, even she herself, are rightly called children of the bridegroom—but plainly she is the mother of *us* who are his members, because by love she has cooperated so that the faithful, who are the members of that head, might be born in the Church. In body, indeed, she is the Mother of that very head" (*Holy Virginity 6:6* [A.D. 401]).

"Having excepted the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom, on account of the honor of the Lord, I wish to have absolutely no question when treating of

sins—for how do we know what abundance of grace for the total overcoming of sin was conferred upon her, who merited to conceive and bear him in whom there was no sin?—so, I say, with the exception of the Virgin, if we could have gathered together all those holy men and women, when they were living here, and had asked them whether they were without sin, what do we suppose would have been their answer?" (*Nature and Grace 36:42* [A.D. 415]).

### TIMOTHY OF JERUSALEM

"Therefore the Virgin is immortal to this day, seeing that he who had dwelt in her transported her to the regions of her assumption" (*Homily on Simeon and Anna* [A.D. 400]).

### JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN

"[T]he Lord said to his Mother, 'Let your heart rejoice and be glad, for every favor and every gift has been given to you from my Father in heaven and from me and from the Holy Spirit. Every soul that calls upon your name shall not be ashamed, but shall find mercy and comfort and support and confidence, both in the world that now is and in that which is to come, in the presence of my Father in the heavens'" (*The Falling Asleep of Mary* [A.D. 400]).

"And from that time forth all knew that the spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise" (ibid.).

### GREGORY OF TOURS

"The course of this life having been completed by blessed Mary, when now she would be called from the world, all the apostles came together from their various regions to her house. And when they had heard that she was about to be taken from the world, they kept watch together with her. And behold, the Lord Jesus came with his angels, and, taking her soul, he gave it over to the angel Michael and withdrew. At daybreak, however, the apostles took up her

body on a bier and placed it in a tomb, and they guarded it, expecting the Lord to come. And behold, again the Lord stood by them; the holy body having been received, he commanded that it be taken in a cloud into paradise, where now, rejoined to the soul, [Mary's body] rejoices with the Lord's chosen ones and is in the enjoyment of the good of an eternity that will never end" (*Eight Books of Miracles 1:4* [A.D. 584]).

"But Mary, the glorious Mother of Christ, who is believed to be a virgin both before and after she bore him, has, as we said above, been translated into paradise, amid the singing of the angelic choirs, whither the Lord preceded her" (ibid., 1:8).

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.  
Bernadene Carr, STL, 10 August 2004

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permission to publish this work is hereby granted.  
+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, 10 August 2004

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## Mary & the Saints

THE FATHERS KNOW BEST

