

THE WORD BECAME FLESH IN MARY'S WOMB

BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman..."¹ Mary as the Mother of God has been a subject of discussion throughout the years. It is uniquely joined with the Incarnation of Christ - for without she would not be the Mother of God. To explore the Church's teaching on this dogma one could look throughout history at the many councils that contributed to it. One could also read through some of the Church's greatest modern figures writings, Encyclicals and Apostolic Letters alike and see this dogma unraveled through the centuries.



The Church proclaimed the dogma of Divine Motherhood at the Council of Ephesus in 431, which was held to refute Nestorius who wanted Mary to "be called only Mother of Christ and not Mother of God."² When one believes Christ to be a mere man instead of God made man, there is no longer a need for the Mother of God. In his audience Blessed John Paul explains, "the Council defined that Christ is the same eternal Word, God from God, who as Son is generated from eternity by the Father, and according to the flesh was born in time from the Virgin Mary. Therefore, since Christ is only one being, Mary has every right to the title "Mother of God," as had already been expressed for a long time in Christian prayer and in the thought of the Fathers."³ "Thus, the dogma of Divine Motherhood becomes an integral part of the Christological dogma. This does not diminish its definitive and binding character."⁴ Mary never claims any glory for herself, but rather her whole life is pointing towards Our Savoir, towards Her beloved Son, "do whatever he tells you."⁵ Her divine motherhood would continue to be a topic discussed throughout the years as the Church grew in her identity and wisdom.

Twenty years (451) later, that is after the Council of Ephesus, during the Council of Chalcedon, Mary's motherhood was again brought to discussion, "Theotokos at Ephesus indicates motherhood in the normal sense; in Chalcedon it means motherhood in the true sense..."⁶ Over all the Council expressed a desire to further develop what the Incarnation and motherhood truly mean in the life of the Church. Bastero says, "the creed of Chalcedon says about Mary a dogmatic formulation of the doctrine already contained in Galatians 4:4 (a text which we regard as leaving no doubt about her divine motherhood), even though Paul did not actually mention Mary by name; or more implicitly still in John 1:14, because both of these pericopes talk about the incarnation (the humanization) of the pre-existent Word, an incarnation brought about (an historical event) in the womb of the woman called Mary."⁷

We can begin to see how this dogma starts to develop, revolving around the Incarnation, the central point to Mary's motherhood. "It is thus referring to an election connected with the very core of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word - the reality that he is Son of man, descendant of Adam and head of the human race."⁸ The Incarnation necessarily implies that Mary is the Mother of God.

In the year 553, a second Council of Constantinople was called, again to refute the teachings of Nestorius, who we mentioned earlier as believed that Mary was only the mother of Christ and not of God. During this Council, repeated is "the doctrine of the two births of Christ" 'the divine word was born of the Father before time and in recent times was incarnate and born of her (Mary)', and it points out that the Virgin Mary is 'really and truly Mother of God.'⁹ As the Church began to grow in its understanding of Mary's motherhood and formalized its beliefs, controversy faded away. Thus, the Church has proclaimed, Mary the Theotokos, ever since. Thereafter, many have undertaken to further study Mary's motherhood and its relation to the Church.

In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* Blessed John Paul II tells us, "the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary was solemnly confirmed as a truth of the Church's faith. Mary is the Mother of God (=Theotokos), since by the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived in her virginal womb and brought into the world Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is of one being with the Father."¹⁰

Therefore, he continues, "the dogma of the divine motherhood of Mary was for the Council of Ephesus and is

for the Church like a seal upon the dogma of the Incarnation, in which the Word truly assumes human nature into the unity of his person, without cancelling out that nature.¹¹ Von Balthasar, explains "...the Theotokos is an Christological declaration which opened up further reflection on Mary as the archetype or model of the Church.¹² Further on, Mary as model of the Church will be further explored.

In modern times, Scott Hahn says something to the effect of, mothers being by nature and definition relational. "They can be considered as mothers only in their relationship with their children. That is where they focus their attention, and that is where they would focus ours.¹³" We can clearly see this as we contemplate the relationship of the Blessed Mother and her beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary always points us toward her Son and as one grows in knowledge and love of God, one grows in knowledge and love of Our Lady. "We cannot begin to know her if we do not, first, have clear notions about Him - about God, His providence, and His dealings with His people¹⁴." Mary simply said yes "and the Word became flesh¹⁵," and she became the Mother of God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "what the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ.¹⁶" The Church does not teach preference over one or the other, but rather that She guides towards her Son.

The Blessed Mother "has a precise and singular place in the plan of salvation, for 'when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman.'¹⁷" One cannot understand Her apart from salvation history, God chose Her to bring about redemption. Juan Luis Bastero in his book *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer*, expresses "the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood constitutes her *raison d'être*, the deepest explanation of her life and of the place she occupies in God's plan of salvation. Her divine motherhood is, in effect, the central mystery of our Lady's life, on which are based all the other mysteries connected with her.¹⁸" In union with Her Son and His plan for redemption - she became the mother of mankind. She becomes the guiding star that leads us towards her Son. "Totally united to her Son, in her life and her assumption, she becomes our mother as the work of grace. She is a model of faith, hope and charity.¹⁹" She was in the fullness of time brought into this same plan, into the Mystery of Christ, "it marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ.²⁰" We cannot say that something new was conceived but rather that the Second person of the Trinity became man, the Word indeed became flesh. Otherwise it would imply "a twofold generation of the Divine Word: one eternal in the bosom of the Father, the other temporal in the womb of Mary. Mary therefore did not bear a 'mere man' but the 'true God'.²¹"

Of title, Theotokos, meaning Mother of God origin not clearly known, Jaroslav Pelikan explains, "that the first completely authenticated instances of the use of this title came from the city of Athanasius, Alexandria. Alexander referred to Mary as the Theotokos in his encyclical of circa 319 about the heresy of Arius.²²" He goes on to further explain, "for the term Theotokos was apparently an original Christian creation that arose in the language of Christian devotion to her as the mother of the divine Savior and that eventually received its theological justification from the church's clarification of what was implied by the orthodox witness to him.²³" Of the word "Theotokos," Bastero says, "...it shows that this incarnation derives from a simultaneous double principle - the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, - thereby affirming both Mary's divine motherhood and her virginal motherhood.²⁴" "Called in the Gospels 'the mother of Jesus,' Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as the 'mother of my Lord.'²⁵" Her assent to the Father's will make her the Mother of God, the Mother of mankind and Mother of the Church. "It is because she is Mother of the Church that the Virgin is also the Mother of each one of us, members of the Mystical Body of Christ.²⁶"

On December 25th, 1931 Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical *Lux Veritatis*, says "that the Blessed Virgin Mary is to be acknowledged and venerated by all as really and truly the Mother of God; and likewise that in matters of faith and morals...²⁷" Again, he denotes the erroneous teachings of Nestorius and affirms that Christ is God not separating His humanity from His divinity. "He who is conceived in the Virgin's womb by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who is born, who lies in a manger, who calls Himself the son of man, who suffers and dies, fastened to the cross, is the very same who, in a solemn and marvelous manner, is called by the Eternal Father 'my beloved Son'.²⁸" He later states, "And, indeed, if the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary is God, assuredly she who bore him is rightly and deservedly to be called the Mother of God. If there is only one person in Christ, and this is Divine, without any doubt Mary ought to be called, by all, not the mother of Christ the man only, but Theotocos, or God-bearer.²⁹" Thus, she who was completely united body, heart and soul - for it is said that she conceived Him in her heart before she conceived Him in her womb, becomes the model by which the faithful are to grow in union with Christ.

On October 11th, 1962 the first session of Vatican Council II was held from which sixteen conciliar texts

emerged. One in particular, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated on November 21st of 1964, dedicated an entire chapter to Our Lady. "It is important to note how the Council illustrates Mary's maternal role as it relates to the mediation of Christ. Thus we read: "Mary's maternal function towards mankind in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its efficacy," because "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

This maternal role of Mary flows, according to God's good pleasure, "from the superabundance of the merits of Christ; it is founded on his mediation, absolutely depends on it, and draws all its efficacy from it." It is precisely in this sense that the episode at Cana in Galilee offers us a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation, wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.^{30"}

Chapter eight of this document begins quoting Galatians chapter four verse 4 and goes on to say, "the Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and brought forth life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as truly the mother of God and of the Redeemer."^{31"} Here again the Church reiterates and confirms the importance of Mary's role in the life of the Church "she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ."^{32"}

Specifically in reference to Our Lady's motherhood towards the Church the document explains, "by reason of the gift and role of her divine motherhood, by which she is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with her unique graces and functions, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united to the church."^{33"} The Catechism teaches,

"Mary is the perfect Orans (prayer), a figure of the Church. Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' mother into our homes, for she has become the mother of all the living."^{34"} Many documents and Church teachings depict Mary as a figure of the Church, reference her motherhood with that of the Church's motherhood towards its faithful. "The church contemplating her hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother."^{35"}

Blessed John Paul II, in his Apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, speaks of Mary's motherhood. He articulates, "the event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can only belong to the 'woman', Mary: the union between mother and son." The Virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God.^{36"} This revelation of Mary's role can not only be grasped through the councils and documents, but one can also observe her role revealed throughout the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament writings, "she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was give to our first parents after their fall into sin."^{37"} Jesus himself states from Calvary that Mary is the mother of man, when he says, "Behold, your mother"^{38"} to his beloved disciple. An essential element of Our Lady's motherhood is to intercede for man, "Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle," that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother."^{39"} As any mother, she desires nothing but the best for her children, she wants them to be happy, "she knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind."^{40"} Thus, the Church acknowledges her powerful intercession, "the prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary and united with it in hope."^{41"}

"Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the Covenant, the place where the glory of God dwells. She is 'the dwelling of God [...] with men.'^{42"} As Catholics, ones heart should be like hers, to be a place "in whom the Lord himself made his dwelling" this necessarily means ones heart should resemble hers. One should strive daily to make progress in obtaining her same virtues, make every effort to have her openness, her willingness, her availability, and her dispositions. How does one become the dwelling of the Lord? Christ should enter ones heart through faith. Faith, to have faith is the answer. The kind of faith that blindly trusts in the will of the Father, His designs and plan, a faith that does not question or doubt but rather in total abandonment says yes. It is faith that binds Our Lady in union and communion with her Son, this is quite possibly beyond our understanding.

She is chosen from all time to be the womb through which salvation would come to man. "her predestination is unique and essentially different from the predestination of the rest of redeemed mankind. The eminent nature of Mary's redemption is indissolubly linked to her motherhood -and her motherhood is equally linked to the decree of redemption. Thus Mary's entire being can be seen to be absolutely and totally Christocentric; she is the Mother of the Redeemer, predestined along with him for the redemption of the world."^{43"}

We refer once again to the fact that her whole life is her Son, she was created in and through Him, she is totally united to Him and desires nothing more than to lead humanity to Him. She teaches mankind how to reach out to her Son's heart, but more importantly she directs humanity on how to prepare their hearts as a proper dwelling to her Son, "when she is the subject of preaching and honor she prompts the faithful to come to her Son, to his sacrifice and to the love of the Father."⁴⁴ Henri de Lubac expresses, "...this motherhood is as real as the presence of Christ is real in the Eucharist, or as real as the supernatural life that exists in the children of God."⁴⁵

Our Lady's relationship with God the Father was one of total abandonment to His will. She humbly offered herself for His mysterious plan. "Mary has shown the way for all future Marian devotion: it is to be praise of God as he is mirrored in his graciousness to men."⁴⁶ She was in constant communion with Him and even more so when the Son of God dwelt in her womb. She was and is always in union with her Son. One can deduce she was with the women who followed Him during His public ministry and it is known she was at the foot of the Cross - her life was and is Jesus and one should strive to have Him as the center of one's life. He should be the measure by which one measures all actions, thoughts and sentiments.

Throughout history it has been made clear that Mary is in fact the Mother of God, the Theotokos. As the Church continues to explore and deepen Our Lady's role not only throughout history but today and in the future - a renewed devotion to the Mother of God is rekindled and encouraged. The faithful venerate Mary and worship Christ. "Let us all, therefore, venerate the tender Mother of God, whom her cousin Elizabeth saluted as "the Mother of my Lord" (Luke i. 43), who, in the words of Ignatius Martyr, brought forth God (Ad Ephes. vii. 18-20); and from whom, as Tertullian professes, God was born; whom the Eternal Godhead has gifted with the fullness of grace and endowed with such great dignity."⁴⁷ One can reflect on her role and presence in the life of the Church, on her mediation, her care and love for the children of God and one should grow in gratitude towards the immense gift given by God, for He has given mankind His mother. Blessed John Paul II says, "the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and on her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church. For they are words which celebrate together the love of the Father, the mission of the Son, the gift of the Spirit, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born, and our own divine filiations, in the mystery of the 'fullness of time'⁴⁸." The Lord came through the Blessed Mother and one should go through Her to Him.

Blessed Mother, pray for us!

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¹ Gal 4:4

² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/alpha/data/aud19880316en.html

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⁴ <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/mary/general-information/the-four-marian-dogmas/>

⁵ Jn 2:5

⁶ Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, pg. 161

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*, pg. 154

- ⁹ibid
¹⁰RM #4
¹¹ibid
¹²The Marian Profile, pg. 21
¹³Hail Holy Queen, pg. 13
¹⁴ibid, pg. 17
¹⁵Jn 1:14
¹⁶CCC #487
¹⁷Redemptoris Mater #1
¹⁸Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, pg. 154
¹⁹<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/mariandogmas.html>
²⁰ibid
²¹The World's First Love, pg. 74
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²³ibid
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²⁵CCC #495
²⁶http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080102_en.html
²⁷<http://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P11VERIT.HTM>
²⁸ibid
²⁹ibid
³⁰Redemptoris Mater # 22
³¹Lumen Gentium #53
³²ibid
³³LG #63
³⁴CCC #2679
³⁵LG #64
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³⁷ibid
³⁸John 19:27
³⁹RM #21
⁴⁰ibid
⁴¹CCC 2676
⁴²ibid
⁴³Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, pg. 164
⁴⁴LG #65
⁴⁵The Motherhood of the Church, pg. 39
⁴⁶Dogma and Preaching pg. 355
⁴⁷<http://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P11VERIT.HTM>
⁴⁸RM #1

[Back to Main Page of Teachings of SCTJM...](#)



Return to main page
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