31. Immaculate Conception and Assumption

Often heard: "Mary called God her Savior (Luke 1:47), so she was a sinner. All have sinned (Rom 3:23)."
Also heard: "Mary needed a Savior, and He saved her by keeping her from sin. The angel called her 'full of grace' (Luke 1:28)."

Mary, saved by grace like all believers

HELD BY Lutheran · Reformed · Anglican Articles · Methodist · Baptist

Mary was a godly woman and a believer, but a sinner saved by grace like everyone else. The Immaculate Conception and Assumption are not in Scripture and were declared only in 1854 and 1950.

VERSES CITED

Rom 3:23; 5:12; Luke 1:47; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 11:27–28; John 2:4.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

These doctrines were long debated inside Catholicism: Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas questioned the Immaculate Conception, while Duns Scotus (c. 1300) defended it. Protestants rejected both once they were defined as dogma.

Mary immaculately conceived and assumed into heaven

HELD BY Catholic · Orthodox Dormition; not IC

Mary needed a Savior and had one: she was saved by being preserved from original sin at her conception, through the merits of Christ, rather than being cleansed afterward. The angel greets her as "full of grace" (*kecharitōmenē*, already and lastingly graced). She is the New Eve and the Ark of the New Covenant. The Assumption teaches that at the end of her life she was taken body and soul into heaven, as Enoch and Elijah were taken. Rom 3:23 has obvious exceptions (Jesus, and infants who have committed no personal sin).

VERSES CITED

Gen 3:15; Luke 1:28, 42–49; 2 Sam 6:9 // Luke 1:43; Rev 11:19–12:6; Ps 132:8; Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:11; Matt 27:52–53.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Mary as the New Eve: Justin, *Dialogue* 100; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 370) praises her as without stain. Augustine (*Nature and Grace* 36.42) excludes Mary from his discussion of sin. A feast of her conception existed in the East by the 8th century. Accounts of her Dormition circulated by the 5th–6th centuries, and the feast was universal in the Byzantine empire by about 600.

No church ever claimed her body or bones (medieval churches did display relics of her hair and milk, which Calvin mocked in his *Treatise on Relics*, 1543).

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 411, 490–493, 966; Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854); Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950).

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

Mary was preserved from original sin from her conception by the merits of Christ, her Savior, and at the end of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory; both are defined dogmas (1854, 1950). The full case is set out above.

Sources: CCC 411, 490-493, 966; Pius IX, Ineffabilis Deus (1854); Pius XII, Munificentissimus Deus (1950).

Orthodox

The Orthodox Church honours the Theotokos as All-Holy and teaches that she committed no personal sin, yet truly needed to be saved by Christ. It does not accept the Immaculate Conception as defined in 1854, holding that humanity inherits the consequences of Adam's sin, not its guilt. At the Dormition (15 August) she died as all people die and was taken into Christ's kingdom in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence; this is celebrated as a feast, not defined as a dogma.

Sources: Longer Catechism of St. Philaret, Q 190; Thomas Hopko, The Orthodox Faith vol. 2, Church Year: Dormition of the Theotokos (oca.org); OCA Questions & Answers, "Mary / Prayer / Death" and "Sinlessness of Mary" (oca.org).

Lutheran

The Lutheran Confessions honour Mary as "pure, holy" and truly the mother of God, and the Apology calls her "most worthy of the most ample honors," but they define neither an Immaculate Conception nor an Assumption, and they teach that all born in the natural way are born in sin. Doctrines not taught in Scripture cannot bind consciences. Many Lutheran churches keep 15 August as a festival of "Mary,

Reformed

Reformed confessions teach that the guilt of Adam's sin and a corrupted nature are conveyed to all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation, and that Christ took our nature "yet without sin," His holiness covering the sin in which we were conceived. Mary is honoured as the virgin mother of the Lord (the Second Helvetic Confession says "ever virgin"), but the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are rejected as doctrines that

Mother of Our Lord" rather than of her Assumption.

Sources: Smalcald Articles I.4; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VIII.24; Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXI.27; Augsburg Confession II; ELCA, Living Lutheran, "Mary, Mother of Our Lord" (31 Aug 2018).

Scripture does not teach and so cannot bind the conscience.

Sources: Westminster Confession 6.3, 8.2; Heidelberg Catechism Q 35-36; Second Helvetic Confession ch. 11.

Anglican

Article XV teaches that Christ alone was without sin, and Article VI that nothing may be required as an article of faith unless proved from Scripture; the Articles neither affirm nor deny that Mary was preserved from sin. The 1662 calendar kept Mary's Conception, Nativity, Annunciation, Visitation and Purification but no Assumption. Common Worship (2000) keeps 15 August as her principal feast, and ARCIC II (2005), a commission text neither communion has adopted, judged both dogmas, as it explained them, "consonant" with Scripture.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles VI, IX, XV; Book of Common Prayer (1662), Calendar; ARCIC II, Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2005), paras 45-46, 58-63, 78; Jeremy Haselock, "Celebrating Mary with Common Worship", New Directions (2017).

Methodist

Methodist doctrine confesses the virgin birth (Art. II) and teaches that original sin is "the corruption of the nature of every man" descended from Adam (Art. VII); it makes no exception for Mary. Article V requires that nothing be believed as an article of faith that cannot be proved from Scripture, so Methodists do not hold the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption as doctrine, though Wesley honoured Mary as "a pure and unspotted virgin."

Sources: Methodist Articles of Religion II, V, VII (Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church); John Wesley, A Letter to a Roman Catholic (1749), para. 7.

Baptist

Mary was a godly believer but a sinner saved by grace like everyone else; the Immaculate Conception and Assumption are not in Scripture and were declared only in 1854 and 1950. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Rom 3:23; 5:12; Luke 1:47; 11:27-28.

Where it gets contested: The late definitions and Aquinas's hesitation are real. Catholics compare them to the Trinity, which was believed from the start but defined in precise terms only in 325 and 381.

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