

# CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY

## AN AMERICAN APOSTOLIC OLD CATHOLIC PARISH

**Fully Inclusive**

**Fully Apostolic**

**Fully Catholic**

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### Solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021



Welcome to the Old Catholic Church of the Nativity!  
We are very glad you are here.

We are a parish within the American Apostolic Old Catholic communion.

All are welcome here, Catholic or not, gay or straight, gender diverse, singled-married-divorced-remarried....we exclude no one from Christ's healing sacraments.

**Our Eucharist is open to all baptized Christians who believe as we do: that the bread and wine ARE the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to his own words. If you are willing to believe that these elements are more than a mere symbol and that something sacred is happening at the altar, but do not fully understand how or what is happening, you ARE WELCOME to receive the Eucharist.**

**If you have avoided the Eucharist in the Roman Church because you are divorced and/or remarried, gay, or were told by a Roman priest not to receive because of some other impediment, please approach Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament. It is Christ who calls you to his Sacrament of love and we do not protect God from His people. Do not receive only if you are mindful of being in Mortal Sin.**

#### **Mass Times:**

Sundays 9:00 am at Campton Community Center

5N082 Old LaFox Road, Campton Hills, IL 60175

Broadcast live on Facebook: @americanoldcatholic

**Daily Mass Broadcast:** 9:00 am CST broadcast live on

Facebook: @americanoldcatholic

#### **Confessions:**

After all masses or by appointment. Please call Bishop

Rake at the Parish Center: 800.742.4743

**Sick calls:** anytime. Call: 800.742.4743

**“A great sign appeared in the sky...a woman clothed with the sun...”**  
**Readings for the 20<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**Sunday:** Revelation 11:19A; 21:1-6A, 10AB; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56.

**Monday:** Judges 2:11-19; Matthew 19:16-22.  
*St. Stephen of Hungary*

**Tuesday:** Judges 6:11-24A; Matthew 19:23-30.

**Wednesday:** Judges 9:6-15; Matthew 20:1-16.

**Thursday:** Judges 11:29-39A; Matthew 22:1-14.  
*St. John Eudes, priest*

**Friday:** Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14B-16, 22; Matthew 22:34-40.

**Saturday:** Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11, 4:13-17; Matthew 23:1-12.  
*Pope Sixtus X, Pope*

**This Week's Intercessions**

Please pray for the following church members:

- ✚ Tara
- ✚ Theresa
- ✚ Fr. Michael McNamara
- ✚ Mary
- ✚ Russ

**Archbishop Rake's Weekly Intentions:**

- ✚ For those in nursing homes who receive no visitors
- ✚ For transgender children who are abandoned by family
- ✚ For those who lost family businesses during COVID
- ✚ For the success of our seminary
- ✚ For our orphans in Kenya and those who care for them

**This Sunday's Mass Prayers**

**Collect:** Almighty ever-living God, who assumed the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of your Son, body and soul into heavenly glory, grant we pray, that, always attentive to the things that are above, we may merit to be sharers of her glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

**Prayer over the Gifts:**

May this oblation, our tribute of homage, rise up to you, O Lord, and, through the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you assumed into heaven, may our hearts, aflame with the fire of love, constantly long for you Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Preface:**

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people; rightly you would not allow her to see the corruption of the tomb since from her own body she marvelously brought forth your incarnate Son, the Author of all life. And so, in company with the choirs of Angels, we praise you, and with joy we proclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts....

**Prayer after Communion:**

Having received the Sacrament of salvation, we ask you to grant, O Lord, that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you assumed into heaven, we may be brought to the glory of the resurrection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Today's Mass Readings

### Reading I

Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

God's temple in heaven was opened,  
and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have salvation and power come,  
and the Kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Anointed One.”

### Responsorial Psalm

**R. *The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.***

The queen takes her place at your right hand  
in gold of Ophir.

**R. *The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.***

Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear,  
forget your people and your father's house.

**R. *The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.***

So shall the king desire your beauty;  
for he is your lord.

**R. *The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.***

They are borne in with gladness and joy;  
they enter the palace of the king.

**R. *The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.***

### Reading II

1 Cor 15:20-27

Brothers and sisters:

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order:

Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for “he subjected everything under his feet.”

### Gospel

Lk 1:39-56

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

And Mary said:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever.”

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

## Incorrect Assumptions about the Assumption

*Is this teaching, controversial in Old Catholic Circles, as ancient as is claimed?*

*By T.L.Frazier from Catholic Answers (a Roman group)*

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/assumptions-about-mary>

The Bible is mute either way as to what happened to Mary after Pentecost. Is the Bible silent because the fate of Mary is unimportant? I didn't believe so, just as I didn't think my own fate is unimportant merely because I am not directly mentioned in Scripture. Still, it seemed to me that if God had worked a big miracle in Mary's life, somehow it should have ended up in the Bible.

But does God record all his miracles in the Bible? The apostles were given the authority to perform many miracles in Jesus' name (Mark 16:17-18), even performing greater miracles than the ones Jesus himself performed (John 14:12), yet we hear nothing of the fate of most of these apostles after Pentecost. Surely not all of their miracles are recorded in the Bible. Indeed, not even all of Jesus' own miracles are recorded in the Bible (John 20:30). No, there seemed to be more to the question of the Assumption than simply whether or not it is recorded in the Bible.

I had misconceptions about the Catholic doctrine of the Assumption, the biggest being that I tended to confuse "Assumption" with "Ascension." I believe part of the reason for this confusion is that the Assumption of Mary and the Ascension of Christ are portrayed identically in artistic representations (except that it is Mary floating in the air and not Jesus). Consequently I perceived the doctrine of the Assumption as part of a Catholic conspiracy to deify Mary: As Christ ascended into heaven, so did this pagan-Catholic goddess named Mary. To be assumed into heaven is to enter heaven both body and soul, meaning complete personhood and not the soul alone, by a direct act of God. Thus "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him away" (Gen. 5:24; cf. Heb. 11:5). Elijah was assumed into heaven, though in a more grandiose style (2 Kings 2:11). Catholics believe that Mary entered heaven in this same manner, though they generally believe that she died before being assumed. Mary is seen not as a petty goddess, but as a redeemed Christian granted a special privilege through the love of Christ.

On the other hand, to *ascend* into heaven is to enter heaven by one's own power, and "no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (John 3:13). Only Jesus, being God, could ever ascend into heaven. Once I understood this distinction, I came a long way toward understanding the Catholic belief in the Assumption.

I began to see it was very similar to the Evangelical doctrine of the rapture where, at the end of time, Christ snatches living Christians off the face of the Earth, glorifies them, and transports them both body and soul into heaven. The same idea of being physically snatched away into heaven before the general resurrection lies behind both the Assumption and the rapture. There seemed little reason to say that the rapture was scripturally feasible while maintaining the Assumption wasn't.

But I did try to find objections. Paul writes, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him" (1 Cor. 15:22-23). As a Protestant I was taught that these verses precludes the possibility of Mary's bodily assumption. Yet if this verse rules out the possibility that Mary could be taken bodily into heaven before the Second Coming, then wouldn't it also rule out the possibility of a rapture occurring seven years before the Second Coming? I concluded that I could find no refuge in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23. It doesn't invalidate belief in the Assumption because with Christ's death the Redemption was accomplished and the final dispensation of grace, the "end times" (e.g. 1 John 2:18), was initiated. Consider Matthew 27:52-53: At the death of the Lord, "the tombs

broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." Dorcas was raised to life by Peter (Acts 9:40), and Eutychus was resurrected by Paul (Acts 20:9-12). Obviously these incidents occurred before the Second Coming. As to a bodily assumption, Paul admits the possibility of his own bodily assumption: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to Paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2-4a). Who could label the generic concept of assumption "unbiblical" after reading that?

Yet another objection: I thought of John's vision of heaven in the book of Revelation, which was written around A.D. 95, well after Mary's alleged Assumption. Why don't we see Mary in heaven in the book of Revelation?

Actually, the twelfth chapter of Revelation, in which a woman appears in heaven giving birth to a child, has been seen by Catholics as a vision of Mary in heaven. The child she gives birth to is Jesus because he is "to rule all the nations" and ascends "up to God and to his throne" (v. 5). The woman flees into "the desert" in verse 6 because of the enmity of the "dragon" who pursues her (cf. verses 13-14), even as Mary fled into the deserts of Egypt to escape Herod (Matt. 2:14). The dragon wars on the "rest of her offspring" (v. 17), which evokes the image of Herod's slaughter of the Innocents in Matthew 2:17. The entire vision of John is reminiscent of Genesis 3:15, where there is predicted a great enmity between the serpent and the mother of the Messiah.

As an Evangelical/Fundamentalist, I saw the issue of Mary's bodily Assumption as a simple question of historical fact. Either she was or she was not physically assumed into heaven at a specific point in time. If she was not, the doctrine was a superfluous accretion to the historic Christian faith and must be rejected as having no value. No lie can come from the truth (cf. 1 John 2:21). If Mary was in fact assumed into heaven, then I understood that I was obliged to accept the doctrine because knowing and living the truth is liberating and makes us disciples of Jesus (John 8:31-32).

For lack of clear scriptural or theological warrants to reject the doctrine of the Assumption, it was the question of history that most led me to consign Mary to the grave. Like the talk show host, I too assumed the doctrine of the Assumption was a myth (and a foolish one at that) without any ground in the historic Christian faith. If the Assumption had been a historical reality, the early Christians would have known about it and believed it. The early Christians didn't believe it, and it wasn't even a dogma officially defined by the Church until 1950. End of report.

These assumptions were to change into the Assumption as I began to school myself in the subject. I began by studying the popular fiction enjoyed by early Christians, and I discovered a whole genre devoted to just this single theme of the Assumption of Mary. Called the *Transitus Mariae* (*Passage of Mary*) literature, these are popular novels and reflect the piety of the Christians who wrote and read them. (The book I read was *The Apocryphal New Testament* by Montague R. James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; reprinted 1980). Pages 194-224 contain *Transitus* accounts taken from the Coptic, Greek, Latin, and Syriac texts.)

The *Transitus* exploded onto the scene after the Council of Ephesus in 431. This council had ended over a century of Christological controversy by unambiguously stating that the person born of Mary was the Second Person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, and was therefore God (cf. John 1:1, 14). As Jesus was God, humanity and divinity being fully united under the *Logos*, the mother of Jesus was therefore the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). (The Council of Ephesus didn't "invent" the title "Mother of God." It merely employed a title long in use among the faithful. In 1917 there was discovered in Egypt a piece of papyrus dating to about A.D. 250. Its ten lines of Greek included this: "Under cover of your motherly heart we flee for refuge, Mother of God [*Theotokos*]; do not brush aside our entreaties in our distress, but rescue us from danger, you, peerlessly holy and blessed." This ancient version of the *Sub Tuum* is now housed in the John Rylands Library (Papyrus 470) in Manchester.) Adopting the title *Theotokos* into official dogma sparked an intense Marian devotion, out of which grew the *Transitus Mariae* literature.

Since we have texts in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic (Egyptian), and Arabic, there would seem to be little doubt that the Assumption was a catholic (i.e. universal) belief among early Christians. While popular Christian literature has never been entirely reliable historically or theologically (it rarely is even today), yet there is much to be learned from the *Transitus* about the faith of the average Christian sitting in the

pew. For example, all the *Transitus* literature agrees that Mary was assumed after having died a natural death and was neither martyred nor immortal. No doubt if we could talk to a fourth or fifth century Christian today, this is what he would tell us about Mary.

Behind legends there is often some basis in fact. Even a small detail can be revealing. For example, take this detail from the Pseudo-Melito account of the Assumption: “Then the Savior spake, saying: Arise, Peter, and take the body of Mary and bear it unto the right-hand side of the city [Jerusalem] toward the East, and thou wilt find there a new sepulchre wherein ye shall place it, and wait till I come unto you....[T]he apostles carrying Mary came into the place of the valley of Jehosha-phat which the Lord had showed them and laid her in a new tomb and shut the sepulchre.”

Excavations in 1972 around Jerusalem strongly support this traditional site as the burial spot of Mary. It is near Gethsemane and tends to substantiate the ancient belief that Mary’s tomb is in the Kidron Valley (traditionally identified as the Valley of Jehoshaphat), which is also near Gethsemane (cf. John 18:1). Jerusalem also happens to be the starting point for the feast of the Assumption, though there was originally considerable diversity as to its name, it being called variously the feast of the Dormition (falling asleep), the Passing, and the Assumption.

What does the *Transitus* literature teach us? It teaches that the Assumption didn’t just pop up out of nowhere in 1950, which is often the vague assumption of non-Catholics. Indeed, the belief was so widespread in the fifth century that it is hard not to conclude that it must have originated at a much earlier date. Many scholars place the Syriac fragments of the *Transitus* stories as far back as the third century, and noted Mariologist Michael O’Carroll adds, “The whole story will eventually be placed earlier, probably in the second century—possibly, if research can be linked with archaeological findings on Mary’s tomb in Gethsemani, in the first [century].”(Michael O’Carroll C.S.Sp., *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1982) s.v. “Assumption Apocrypha,” 59.) This conclusion would seem to be supported by the fact that the doctrine flourished without anyone, especially the bishops, protesting against a growing “superstition.”

While Pope Pius XII didn’t refer to the *Transitus* accounts in his promulgation of the dogma, I felt they constituted a powerful testimony to the antiquity of the belief among the early Christians. But aside from the early development of the *Transitus*, were there any other indications that the Assumption was a general Christian belief during the first 400 years of the Church? Or, contrariwise, was there anything which pointed toward my belief that the ante-Ephesian Church believed Mary remained in the grave awaiting the general resurrection of the dead? Yes, there was: the issue of her relics.

Early Christians were known to be nearly fanatical about preserving the relics of the saints. Look, for example, at the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, written by the Church at Smyrna to the Church at Philomelium around A.D. 156. In discussing the brave martyrdom of Polycarp, who was made bishop of Smyrna by the apostle John, the Church there gives a typical example of the widespread veneration of relics:

“But the jealous and envious Evil One...took care that not even his poor body should be taken away by us, though many desired to do this, and to claim our share in the hallowed relics. Accordingly he put it into the head of Nicetas...to make an application to the Governor not to release the body, ‘in case,’ he said, ‘they should forsake the Crucified and take to worshipping this fellow instead’...Little do they know that it could never be possible for us to abandon the Christ who died for the salvation of every soul that is to be saved in all the world—the Sinless One dying for sinners—or to worship any other. It is to him, as the Son of God, that we give our adoration, while to the martyrs, as disciples and imitators of the Lord, we give the love they have earned by their matchless devotion to their King and Teacher....So after all, we did gather up his bones—more precious to us than jewels and finer than pure gold—and we laid them to rest in a spot suitable for the purpose. There we shall assemble, as occasion allows, with glad rejoicings, and with the Lord’s permission we shall celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom” (17-18). I found this to be the common attitude toward relics among the early Christians.

Relics of all the apostles and other New Testament saints emerged very early in Christian history. Churches were built on the graves of the apostles, and their bones were eventually distributed to other churches for veneration.(For an interesting treatment of the subject of relics and the source of the following information, see Joan Carroll Cruz’s book *Relics* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1984). Cruz is also the author of the bestseller *The Incorruptibles*.) The remains of Mary Magdalene, one New Testament saint, are kept in the monastery at Villalata, France, where she is supposed to have died. The remains of Lazarus were originally kept in the church which maintained his tomb on the isle of Cyprus.

Relics became enclosed in large shrines and were the objects of pilgrimages, which could become quite lucrative for the city possessing the shrine (not unlike a city hosting the Olympic Games in today's post-Christian world). Sometimes, through varying traditions or outright greed, two different cities would claim the same relic.

Whether genuine or not, anything which could be said in any way to be connected to the mother of Christ was highly prized because of the strong devotion to her throughout the Church. A piece of green ribbon which is believed to have been worn by Mary as a belt is claimed today by the cathedral of Prato in Italy. For over a thousand years the cathedral of Chartres, France has owned a piece of fine material which is said to be a piece of Mary's veil. The cathedral of Aachen in Germany even claims to possess the shroud that Mary was buried in. Both the ancient cities of Ephesus and Jerusalem claim to have the tomb of Mary, and pilgrimages to both cities have been common.

Yet among all the relics there is not to be found a single one said to be a relic of Mary's actual body. This is especially significant when it is kept in mind how hard the Church at Smyrna worked to obtain the body of Polycarp. If the ante-Ephesian Church believed that Mary rotted and remained in the grave, as I believed, then we should expect to find some mention of the veneration of her remains somewhere in the Church, as we do of the apostles and other New Testament saints. Yet not even the powerful motivator of greed could elicit so much as one attempt at a claim to a relic of Mary's bodily remains. It is almost as though no one dared to claim such a relic out of fear of immediately being accused of fraud—quite understandable if the common belief was that she had been assumed into heaven.

An argument from silence? Yes, but what a profound silence! How is it that in the 400 years before the Council of Ephesus not one Christian was so obliging as to venerate one bone and thus imply belief in something other than what is recounted in the *Transitus Mariae* literature?

Yet there is the patristic silence as well, I countered. The earliest patristic mention (around 600) of the Assumption in the East is from Theoteknos, bishop of Livias on the left bank of the Jordan, who speaks of the feast of the Assumption of Mary and not of her Dormition (falling asleep). In the West Gregory of Tours is the first Church Father to discuss Mary's bodily Assumption in his *In Gloria Martyrum*, written about A.D. 590. Usually when talk show hosts speak of the "paucity" of historical evidence for the Assumption, it is this lack of patristic evidence before the sixth century which is being referred to. Evangelicals, though, are unaware of the vast Assumption literature which predates these patristic references. If a few of them are aware of the *Transitus*, they dismiss it with question-begging epithets and then attempt to reaffirm the charge that there is no historical evidence for the belief in the Assumption before the sixth century!

Evangelicals rarely present the full picture. Investigating my own belief that Mary lay in the grave, I found that the earliest recorded *doubt* about the Assumption was a comment by Adamnan (625-704). In *De Locis Sanctis* he describes the two-storied church dedicated to Mary in the valley of Jehoshaphat: "In the eastern portion of [the lower church] is an altar, and at the righthand side of the altar is the empty stone sepulchre of holy Mary, where she was once laid to rest. But how and when or by what persons her holy remains were removed from this sepulchre and where she awaits the resurrection no one, it is said, can know for certain." This one doubt influenced the Venerable Bede, who then echoed it.

The next stage in the development of the Protestant doctrine came from a sermon claiming the authorship of Augustine (Sermon 208: *Adest nobis*) which was forged by Ambrosius Autpertus (d. 784) and which advocated pious ignorance on the whole question. In the ninth century the Abbot of Corbie, Paschase Radbert (d. 865), forged a letter which claimed to be written by Jerome (Epistle 9: *Cogitis me*) and in which the Assumption is called into question (though not explicitly denied and maintaining the incorruptibility of her body). This forgery inadvertently became part of the readings in the Divine Office, and the ball was rolling.

A monk named Usuard (d. 875) was even more abusive of the idea of the Assumption, which he seemed to feel was "frivolous." Usuard's comments remained in the martyrology used in many monasteries and chapters during choir prayers, and Radbert's forgery remained in the breviary until the Tridentine reforms of Pope Pius V during the sixteenth century, raising doubts for nearly

seven hundred years! Radbert's work finally found its full fruition in the Reformation, when the Assumption was outright denied for the first time. If the Catholic belief suffered from lack of patristic evidence before the sixth century, my own beliefs looked altogether dubious.

Scripture instructs us not only to believe what is written in the Bible itself, but also the oral tradition (*paradosis*) of the faith (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6) as it has been passed down (Luke 1:2; 1 Cor. 11:23, 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21) by the Christian community. The Assumption of Mary appeared to qualify as one of those traditions which was believed from the beginning (cf. 1 John 2:24, Jude 3).

While the evidence I found could not prove the Catholic doctrine in a scientific sense, I was compelled to conclude that the Assumption had been part of the Christian faith from the second century and probably had its origins in the first. The historical case for my position as an Evangelical/Fundamentalist, on the other hand, looked decidedly unimpressive. I simply could not document anyone disbelieving in the Assumption prior to the Reformation. It was when the burden of proof had finally been laid upon me that I realized my assumption about Mary had been insupportable. The Catholic had reasons to offer for what he believed, and I had no reasons which could justify what I believed. It was that simple.

Around 1983, three years before leaving the Baptist Church, I decided my belief that the Mother of Christ moldered in the grave was completely without biblical foundation, lacked theological justification, and had absolutely no basis in the Christian history. Interestingly, to believe that Mary was assumed into heaven in a way similar to Enoch and Elijah contradicts nothing in fundamental Evangelical theology, only Evangelical prejudice and man-made tradition (see Matt. 15:1-9). In fact, I was able to function within the Baptist Church quite well without my belief in the Assumption opposing any Baptist doctrine.

Nearly ten years later, I still have not found any scriptural, theological, or historical basis for the Evangelical belief that Mary remains decomposed in the grave. Do I exaggerate? I believe not.

Look, for example, at the recent article by Elliot Miller in the *Christian Research Journal*, "The Mary of Roman Catholicism." (Summer, 1990, 14-15. *The Christian Research Journal* is the publication of the Christian Research Institute, which produces the nationally-syndicated "Bible Answer Man" radio program.) Miller does not even attempt any justification of his beliefs. In his examination of the Assumption, does he provide *one* Scripture citation upon which to base the Evangelical doctrine? No, he never refers to the Bible at all, not even in assessing the Catholic position. Does he find any basis in Church history for the Evangelical belief? He offers none because there is none. Does he have any overriding theological considerations which can substantiate the Evangelical belief? He offers none because there are none.

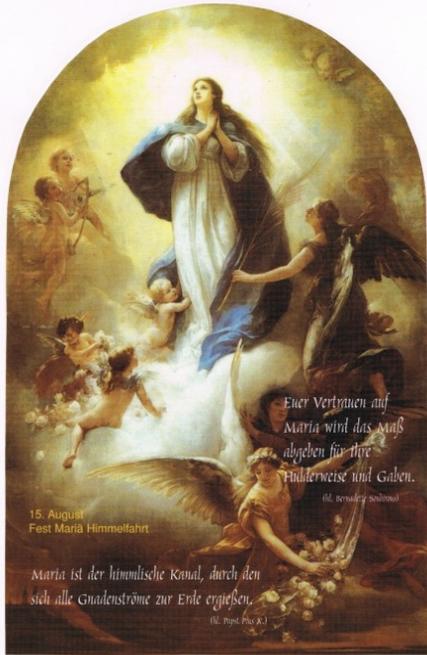
Miller never explicitly states that Mary remains in the grave. Like Radbert and Usuard before him, he merely appeals to a latent skepticism toward the supernatural and then invites us to make the assumption that Mary rotted and remains in the grave. As an ex-Protestant, I ask Elliot Miller this open question: Where is the scriptural proof that Mary rotted and remains in the grave?

If he can't quite manage this at the present moment, then perhaps he could offer us something concrete of a historical or theological nature. Unless he can offer something other than the same tired Evangelical prejudice, I extend to him instead the historic Christian belief in the Assumption of Mary.

Pope Pius XII, alluding to John 16:12-14, wrote in *Munificentissimus Deus* that "Since the universal Church, within which dwells the Spirit of Truth who infallibly directs it toward an ever more perfect knowledge of the revealed truths, has expressed its own belief many times over the course of the centuries, and since the bishops of the entire world are almost unanimously petitioning that the truth of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven should be defined as a doctrine of divine and Catholic faith (Out of 1181 residential bishops consulted by Pope Pius XII as to whether the Assumption should be defined as dogma, only 22 replied negatively. Of the 22, only six doubted that the Assumption was a divinely revealed truth, the rest feeling that the time was not yet appropriate for such a definition)...we believe that the moment appointed in the plan of divine providence for the solemn proclamation of this outstanding privilege of the Virgin Mary has already arrived" (41).

The moment *has* already arrived, and it is a Catholic moment, a moment of proclamation and witness. Across the centuries the Body of Christ has explicitly, implicitly, and overwhelmingly witnessed to the truth of the Assumption in its popular piety, in its solemn feasts, and in its theology. This is the witness of the *sensus fidelium*, the witness of which the Good Shepherd spoke when he promised that the Holy Spirit would forever guide his flock. Jesus *did* assume his Mother into his kingdom, and to assume anything else is simply to make the wrong assumption.

## This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15<sup>th</sup>).



The Assumption is the oldest feast day of Our Lady, but we don't know how it first came to be celebrated. Its origin is lost in those days when Jerusalem was restored as a sacred city, at the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine (c. 285-337). By then it had been a pagan city for two centuries, ever since Emperor Hadrian (76-138) had leveled it around the year 135 and rebuilt it as *Aelia Capitolina* in honor of Jupiter.

For 200 years, every memory of Jesus was obliterated from the city, and the sites made holy by His life, death and Resurrection became pagan temples.

After the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 336, the sacred sites began to be restored and memories of the life of Our Lord began to be celebrated by the people of Jerusalem. One of the memories about his mother centered around the "Tomb of Mary," close to Mount Zion, where the early Christian community had lived.

On the hill itself was the "Place of Dormition," the spot of Mary's "falling asleep," where she had died. The "Tomb of Mary" was where she was buried.

At this time, the "Memory of Mary" was being celebrated. Later it was to become our feast of the Assumption.

For a time, the "Memory of Mary" was marked only in Palestine, but then it was extended by the emperor to all the churches of the East. In the seventh century, it began to be celebrated in Rome under the title of the "Falling Asleep" ("Dormitio") of the Mother of God. Soon the name was changed to the "Assumption of Mary," since there was more to the feast than her dying. It also proclaimed that she had been taken up, body and soul, into heaven.

That belief was ancient, dating back to the apostles themselves. What was clear from the beginning was that there were no relics of Mary to be venerated, and that an empty tomb stood on the edge of Jerusalem near the site of her death. That location also soon

became a place of pilgrimage. (Today, the Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition of Mary stands on the spot.)

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, when bishops from throughout the Mediterranean world gathered in Constantinople, Emperor Marcian asked the Patriarch of Jerusalem to bring the relics of Mary to Constantinople to be enshrined in the capitol. The patriarch explained to the emperor that there were no relics of Mary in Jerusalem, that "Mary had died in the presence of the apostles; but her tomb, when opened later . . . was found empty and so the apostles concluded that the body was taken up into heaven."

In the eighth century, St. John Damascene was known for giving sermons at the holy places in Jerusalem. At the Tomb of Mary, he expressed the belief of the Church on the meaning of the feast: "Although the body was duly buried, it did not remain in the state of death, neither was it dissolved by decay. . . . You were transferred to your heavenly home, O Lady, Queen and Mother of God in truth." All the feast days of Mary mark the great mysteries of her life and her part in the work of redemption. The central mystery of her life and person is her divine motherhood, celebrated both at Christmas and a week later (Jan. 1) on the feast of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The Immaculate Conception

Conception (Dec. 8) marks the preparation for that motherhood, so that she had the fullness of grace from the first moment of her existence, completely untouched by sin. Her whole being throbbled with divine life from the very beginning, readying her for the exalted role of mother of the Savior.

The Assumption completes God's work in her since it was not fitting that the flesh that had given life to God himself should ever undergo corruption. The Assumption is God's crowning of His work as Mary ends her earthly life and enters eternity. The feast turns our eyes in that direction, where we will follow when our earthly life is over. The feast days of the Church are not just the commemoration of historical events; they do not look only to the past. They look to the present and to the future and give us an insight into our own relationship with God. The Assumption looks to eternity and gives us hope that we, too, will follow Our Lady when our life is ended.

**Excerpted from Fr. Clifford Stevens in *Catholic Heritage***

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm?date=2019-08-15>

## The Assumption of Mary

By  
Exequiel Monge Allen



*Ravensburger Schutzmantelmadonna*, c. 1480, attributed to Michel Erhart

Mary has been kidnapped. More than any other figure of the Gospel, she has been torn from her place, robbed of her own identity and turned upside down. And we have known her this way, blurred in prayer cards and processions, on altars and in songs. The celestial maiden, with the whitest of skins, rosy cheeks and thin lips, with eyes low and languid. Mary, obedient and submissive. Mary, the mute queen who with her example teaches women and the poor that their glory is in silence, meekness and resignation. Mary virgin, wife and mother, and therefore queen, rewarded for fulfilling all the roles of the good woman in the sacrosanct order of patriarchy.

Let us forget for a second the deformed portrait painted by power, and let us look at the Mary of the Gospels: the Hebrew girl, the young Nazarene woman. The one who, engaged to be married, is ready to throw it all away with her "yes" to the angel's announcement. The one who is ready to dishonour her family and the man who would be her husband. She who is ready to be scorned by her own people. Let us contemplate Mary's courage and admire her freedom, as God Himself contemplated and admired them to the point of getting down on His knees and begging her to be His companion, His ally for the liberation of the universe.

Mary does not ask permission. She is "the handmaid of the Lord" and therefore, of no one else. She does not ask permission from Joachim, her father, nor from Joseph, her future husband. Infinitely dignified, a direct heir of the ancient promises, she responds without hesitation and with

absolute sovereignty. Her God has spoken to her as He spoke to Moses at Horeb, and she responds more proudly than the ancient lawgiver, not in a timid murmur, but crying out in her poor woman's voice before the timeless face of Gabriel, "May it be according to thy word!"

Why, why is she willing to contravene the order established by her culture and religion? Because Mary is urged by God to do what the angel has promised her. Mary's "Yes" is rooted in her experience, in her awareness of the oppression of her people. Mary is a prophetess, like Miriam and Deborah. Her spirit is darkened, grieved by the injustice that reigns in the world around her. Like Job, like Jeremiah, she is full of bitterness and rebellion. Mary contemplates the suffering of the poor and is bewildered. When she prays, she prays with anger and hope. She is not calm. She is not comfortable. Mary's silence is a restless and anxious silence. We know this with certainty, because when she finally opens her lips before her cousin rejoices bring His justice: God will scatter the proud, he will

he will cast down the mighty from their thrones, He will send the rich away empty-handed. God will exalt the lowly and fill them with the good things they need!" Mary, as the Gospels show her, is a radical, a revolutionary, passionate for justice and the liberation of the people she sees languishing under the yoke of the powerful, of Rome and her local accomplices.

If we take the Magnificat as a key to reading, as a permanent point of view to read all that the Gospels tell us about Mary, a very different portrait emerges from the one that the late Roman tradition has tried to sell us. Mary who travels alone through the mountains of Judea to keep company to her old cousin Elizabeth in her pregnancy. Mary who gives birth in a filthy stable. Mary persecuted and migrant, who abandons her own land, who uproots her life and begins again in Egypt. Mary who reproaches her divine Son at Cana when he does not want to give wine to the poor.

Mary who demands to see Jesus, to speak to Him about God knows what tragedy that weighed on her soul, and faces His rejection. Mary who sees her Son become a political prisoner, a victim of political torture; to die as a political threat. Mary who receives the disfigured body of her Son when he is taken down from the cross and buried. Mary who, then, must have been shattered and furious and confused: wasn't that child, that young man, that man she had given birth to and raised, supposed to bring liberation?

Mary, the revolutionary mother of the Messiah, disappears from the biblical account at Calvary, but the tradition of the Apocrypha does not fail to speak of her. It makes her a leader of the community: she is with the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, remains in John's care (or she in his care) and migrates again, this time to Ephesus in Asia Minor. She returns to Jerusalem and, sensing the hour of her death approaching, she authoritatively summons the apostles to bid them farewell. And tradition tells us that her body disappears from the tomb (this is what the West calls the Assumption, and the East calls the Dormition), because Christ decides to spare His mother the corruption of the flesh.

But if we look at this story from the point of view of the Magnificat, we see something different: Mary, who had borne in her heart the pain of the oppressed and the

and the poor, is glorified at the end, is torn from the clutches of death, so that in her suffering humanity might be glorified. So that we, Mary's disciples, might know that we have been liberated.

Mary, Our Lady of the Forsaken, pray for us.



**St. John Eudes, Priest**

*St. John Eudes was a French priest who lived from 1601 to 1680. He was a noted preacher and speaker. He founded both the Order of Charity in 1641 and the Congregation of Jesus and Mary in 1643, also called "The Eudists." Following are a few quotes from the saint.*

"Every Saint belongs to the court of the Queen of Saints."

"The air that we breathe, the bread that we eat, the heart which throbs in our bosoms, are not more necessary for man that he might live as a human being than is prayer for the Christian that he may live as a Christian."

"A Christian has a union with Jesus Christ more noble, more intimate, and more perfect than the members of a human body have with their head."

"You must never separate what God has so perfectly united. So closely are Jesus and Mary bound up with each other that whoever beholds Jesus sees Mary; whoever loves Jesus loves Mary; whoever has devotion to Jesus has devotion to Mary."

## National Church News

- Fall 2021 classes at St. Hildegard Theological School are now open for registration! There are several courses in many different areas to choose from. All are taught by instructors with accredited Master's or Doctorate degrees. St. Hildegard Theological Seminary offers a Bachelor's in Theology, a Master's in Theological Studies, and a Master of Divinity degree, all for an extremely small cost. Check out the website for more information: [aaoccseminary.com](http://aaoccseminary.com).
- The orphanage in our Kenyan Diocese needs monthly sponsors to help feed the children. It costs \$1 per day per child to provide three daily meals. This orphanage is a ministry of Fr. Kennedy Andrew and his wife, Grace. Each child has gone through terrible trauma with parents who either wasted away from illness or were killed during local land disputes. If you can pledge even \$5 a month, it will help us keep the children fed. There are no administration costs. Every penny goes into the bellies of these angels. You can pledge a monthly amount on our website: [www.americancatholic.org](http://www.americancatholic.org).

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**\*NOTE:** The AAOCC does NOT collect donations during mass. To do so distracts followers from the true meaning of worship. However, we do pay rent and have other financial needs. There is a box in the back of the church that you can place donations in as you enter or leave. Thank you!

**Volunteer Opportunities:**

**Visitors Needed. Full Benefits. Inquire every Sunday at 9:00 am CST.**

**Church of the Nativity has many needs right now.**

- Our Most pressing need is a musician. We have a full, professional piano keyboard with bench, pedal, speaker, etc. It is available if we find someone who can play music each Sunday for the congregation so we don't have to rely on technology.
- We would also love to have someone with a talent for singing to cantor during mass.