

Life: Neither history nor the Bible recorded the early life of the Virgin Mary. The church tradition named Sts. Joachim and Anne as her parents. The church assigned September 8 every year as the Virgin Mary's birth date, nine months after the church celebrates her Immaculate Conception (December 8). According to legend, when Mary was three years old, her parents dedicated her to the Temple, and the church celebrates this feast on November 21. The church celebrates these liturgies to tell us that the Virgin Mary received abundant blessings from the very beginning of her life, her childhood, and her whole life, and these have paved the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Luke recorded that when Mary was in Nazareth, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that she would be pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit. At that time, Mary was betrothed to Joseph. The gospel then records the deeds we are familiar with, including Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the birth of Jesus, dedication of Jesus to the Temple, flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, the Holy Family's return to Nazareth, Jesus' staying alone in the Temple when he was twelve years old and so on. When Jesus began his public ministry, Mary was always with him. During Jesus' passion, she was by his side and Jesus entrusted her to his beloved disciple. Scholars calculated that Jesus died when he was 33 years old, and Mary was about 48 years old. The Bible records that Jesus resurrected and appeared to many people after three days. Although Mary was not mentioned, it did not deny the possibility that she might have seen Jesus as well. After Jesus ascended to heaven, Mary and the disciples gathered and prayed eagerly until Pentecost. This was the last time the Bible mentions about Mary. In her old age, Mary lived in Jerusalem and Ephesus, and she might also have followed St. John to other cities.

Dogmas: Catholics believe in four dogmas about the Virgin Mary:

1. **Mother of God:** Jesus is fully God and fully man. He became the son of Mary after she became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the second person of the Blessed Trinity; He Himself is God. Therefore, the church calls Mary the mother of God.
2. **Immaculate Conception:** The church believes that God had redeemed Mary in advance, so Mary was conceived and born without sin. This is not because of Mary's own virtue, but the special grace given to her by God, so that her son Jesus would be born in the state of no original sin.
3. **Perpetual virginity:** The Gospels of Luke and Matthew mentioned many times that Mary was a virgin. She conceived our Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the consummation of marriage. The doctrine that Mary has perpetual virginity not only emphasizes chastity of her physical body, but also points out that Mary dedicated her entire life to God.
4. **Assumption into heaven:** Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

Reflection/Imitation: How do we ordinary people imitate the mother of God? Jesus reminds us compared to God's blessing on the one who nurtured Him, "Blessed rather are those who hear God's word and obey it." (Luke 11:28). In fact, Mary is one such person. She always seeks to obey God's sacred will. Even when facing confusion and danger, she remains humble. The most obvious example is that when the angel Gabriel predicted the birth of the saviour to her, Mary, even facing the danger of being stoned to death (punishment of crime of adultery) still accepted to be the mother of God. Mary is the most faithful Christian. From Cana's wedding banquet to the suffering on Mount Calvary, the Virgin Mary was beside Jesus and offered herself without reservation, and be involved in God's redemption plan.

Prayer: We can also learn Mary's prayers. The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55) quoted many beautiful verses and phrases in the Old Testament; it shows that Mary was familiar with the Old Testament. When she was with Jesus, she also had doubts but she chose to ponder, reflect, and keep them in her heart. When we cannot discern God's plan, we can learn from her to calm down, listen and meditate on God's words.

May we imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary in seeking and obeying God's will.

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.