

BOOKLET TO PRINT

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 15

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IN BRIEF

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Mother of Jesus and Mother of God, honored by the Church as the first of the saints.

Feast day	August 15, January 1, March 25, May 31, September 8, December 8
Born	late 1st century BC (date unknown), Galilee or Judea, according to different traditions
Died	date unknown (Assumption), Jerusalem or Ephesus, according to different traditions
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	mothers, the United States, the Philippines, France

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary Before the Assumption

Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon

Credits and sources

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LIFE

The Blessed Virgin Mary

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus. A young Jewish woman from Nazareth, she agreed, according to the Gospel of Luke, to become the mother of the Son of God, followed him all the way to the cross, and prayed with the apostles on the day of Pentecost. The Church honors her as the Mother of God and places her above all the saints. She is celebrated throughout the year, especially on January 1, on August 15 for her Assumption and on December 8 for her Immaculate Conception.

Who is the Virgin Mary?

The Gospels say little about Mary, but every word counts. She lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, and was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter descended from King David. Her parents are not named in the New Testament: the names Joachim and Anne come from an ancient non-biblical account, the *Protoevangelium of James*, written in the second century and widely received by tradition. Neither the date of her birth nor the date of the end of her earthly life is known.

What the Gospels remember of her is an attitude: Mary listens, asks questions, consents, then "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She is not a distant figure but a believer who moves forward in faith without understanding everything, and whom the Church offers as a model to every disciple.



The Annunciation, fresco by Fra Angelico in the convent of San Marco, Florence (c. 1440-1445).

Key dates in the life of the Virgin Mary

- **c. 7-5 BC**: In Nazareth, the angel Gabriel announces that she will be the mother of the Messiah (the Annunciation).
- **Shortly after**: Visits her cousin Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist; Mary sings the *Magnificat*.
- **c. 6-4 BC**: Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, then the flight into Egypt according to the Gospel of Matthew.
- **Twelve years later**: Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem.
- **c. 28-30**: At the wedding at Cana, she tells the servants: "Do whatever he tells you."
- **c. 30**: She stands at the foot of the cross; Jesus entrusts her to the disciple he loved.
- **Pentecost**: She prays with the apostles in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14).

- **431**: The Council of Ephesus proclaims her *Theotokos*, "Mother of God."
- **December 8, 1854**: Pius IX defines the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.
- **November 1, 1950**: Pius XII defines the dogma of the Assumption.

From the Annunciation to the Cross

The account of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) is the heart of Mary's vocation. Troubled by the angel's greeting, she asks a question, then answers: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." This free "yes" opens the history of salvation. At once, Mary sets out in haste to the hill country of Judea to help Elizabeth: faith sends her toward others.

During Jesus' public life, she remains in the background. We see her at Cana, where she intercedes for a newly married couple who have run out of wine, then in the crowd looking for her son. The Gospel of John finally shows her standing at the foot of the cross, with a few women and the beloved disciple. Jesus says to her: "Woman, behold your son," then to the disciple: "Behold your mother." Christian tradition has seen in this scene the gift of Mary as mother to all believers.

What the Church believes about Mary

Four dogmas sum up the Catholic faith about Mary. The Council of Ephesus, in 431, calls her *Mother of God*, because the child she carried is truly the Son of God made man. Tradition also affirms her *perpetual virginity*. In 1854, Pius IX's bull *Ineffabilis Deus* teaches that she was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception: this is the *Immaculate Conception*, not to be confused with the virginal conception of Jesus. Finally, in 1950, Pius XII's constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* declares that at the end of her earthly life, Mary was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory: this is the *Assumption*.

The Church does not define whether Mary died before her Assumption. Eastern Christians speak of her "Dormition," and two traditions place the end of her life either in Jerusalem or in Ephesus, where she is said to have followed the apostle John. The Second Vatican Council devoted the last chapter of the constitution *Lumen Gentium* (1964) to Mary, presenting her as the model and mother of the Church.



The Assumption of the Virgin by Titian, Frari Basilica, Venice (1516-1518).

Feasts and Marian prayer

The liturgical calendar is marked by Mary's feasts: Mary, Mother of God on January 1, the Annunciation on March 25, the Visitation on May 31, the Assumption on August 15, her Nativity on September 8, Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15, Our Lady of the Rosary on October 7 and the

Immaculate Conception on December 8. In the Americas, Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated on December 12. The month of May is traditionally dedicated to her, and October to the rosary.

Why is Mary the patroness of so many nations?

Christians turn to Mary as to a mother, which is why so many peoples have placed themselves under her protection. In 1638, Louis XIII placed the kingdom of France under her care, and in 1922 Pius XI proclaimed Our Lady of the Assumption principal patroness of France, with Saint Joan of Arc as secondary patroness.

In the English-speaking world, the bishops of the United States chose Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception as patroness of their country in the nineteenth century, and the Philippines are also placed under the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady of Guadalupe, who appeared to Saint Juan Diego in 1531, is honored as patroness of the Americas. Mothers in particular entrust their children to her.



Michelangelo's Pietà, Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome (1498-1499).

What her holiness teaches us

Mary's holiness is not made of dazzling deeds but of complete trust. She says yes without knowing where it will lead her; she goes through exile, misunderstanding and the pain of watching her son die, and she remains faithful. Catholics entrust to her births, families, the sick, difficult causes and the hour of death, as the end of the Hail Mary says.

Symbols and how to recognize the Virgin Mary in art

- **The blue mantle**, often over a red or white robe.
- **The Child Jesus in her arms**, in the countless images of the Madonna and Child.
- **The lily**, sign of purity, especially in scenes of the Annunciation.

- **The crown of twelve stars and the crescent moon**, drawn from the woman of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 12:1).
- **The heart pierced by a sword**, for Our Lady of Sorrows.

Where to pray to the Virgin Mary

- **Nazareth** (Israel): the Basilica of the Annunciation.
- **Lourdes** (France): the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes and the grotto of Massabielle, where she appeared to Bernadette in 1858.
- **Paris**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, reopened in December 2024, and the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, rue du Bac, linked to the apparitions of 1830.
- **Chartres and Lyon** (France): Chartres Cathedral, which keeps the veil of the Virgin, and the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière overlooking Lyon.
- **Mexico City**: the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, one of the most visited shrines in the world.
- **Washington, D.C.**: the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.
- **Ireland and England**: the Knock Shrine in County Mayo and the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk.

PRAYER

Prayers to the Virgin Mary: the Hail Mary and the Memorare

The Hail Mary and the Memorare are the two most widely prayed prayers to the Virgin Mary in the English-speaking world. The first is taken almost word for word from the Gospel; the second, more recent, is a plea full of trust. Below you will find their traditional English text and their origin, followed by an original prayer of trust.

The Hail Mary

> *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*
>
> *Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*
>
> *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.*
>
> *Amen.*

Source: the first part takes up the greeting of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:28) and that of Elizabeth (Luke 1:42). The second part, the petition "Holy Mary, Mother of God," took shape at the end of the Middle Ages and was fixed in the Roman Breviary published by Saint Pius V in 1568. Traditional text in the public domain. It is the prayer repeated in the rosary.



The Virgin Mary in prayer.

The Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

Source: this prayer, called the *Memorare* after its first word in Latin, is often attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who did not write it. It comes from a longer prayer of the late Middle Ages and was spread in the seventeenth century by the Paris priest Claude Bernard, known as "the poor priest," which probably explains the confusion. Traditional text in the public domain.

Prayer to the Virgin Mary for trust

Virgin Mary, you said yes to God without understanding everything: teach me to trust him in what I cannot yet see.

You set out in haste to visit your cousin Elizabeth: make me attentive to those who need me. At Cana you noticed that the wine had run out: look at what is lacking in my life and in the lives of my loved ones, and present it to your Son.

You stood at the foot of the cross: stay close to those who suffer, the sick, families in distress and those who are dying. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Mother of God and our Mother, keep me in peace and lead me to Jesus. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray these prayers

You can pray to Mary every day, especially through the rosary or the Angelus, traditionally said morning, noon and evening. Her great feasts are January 1 (Mary, Mother of God), March 25 (the Annunciation), August 15 (the Assumption), September 8 (the Nativity of Mary) and December 8 (the Immaculate Conception); the months of May and October are dedicated to her.

The Memorare is especially loved in times of distress, before an exam, a surgery or a hard decision. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to the Virgin Mary and read the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

NOVENA

Novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary Before the Assumption

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the stages of the Virgin Mary's life told in the Gospels, from the Annunciation to the Assumption. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of the Assumption, start on August 6; it ends on August 14, and the feast falls on August 15. You can also pray it from November 29 to December 7, before the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God through Mary, read the meditation and the prayer of the day, then say an Our Father and three Hail Marys. The small act suggested for each day helps you live it in the spirit of the Virgin.

You can pray it alone, as a family or with a parish group, and you may add a decade of the rosary or the Memorare. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Mary does not ask for perfect prayer, only for a heart that keeps returning to her Son.

The nine days walk with Mary through the Gospel: Nazareth, her yes, the Visitation and the Magnificat, Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, Cana, the cross and finally the glory of the Assumption. Keep a Bible within reach, since several days point to a passage from the Gospel of Luke. Reading it slowly, as Mary pondered all these things in her heart, is already a way of praying with her.

Day 1: Nazareth, listening

The angel Gabriel comes to Mary in a village of no importance. She is troubled, she reflects, she asks a question. Listening to God does not stop us from seeking to understand.

Prayer: Mary, you welcomed the angel's word: teach me to listen to God in my ordinary life.

Today: Read Luke 1:26-38 slowly.

Day 2: The yes of the handmaid

"May it be done to me according to your word." Mary does not know the future, but she trusts. Her yes is not resignation: it is a free act.

Prayer: Faithful Virgin, help me say yes to what God asks of me today, even if I cannot see the whole road.

Today: Accept wholeheartedly a task you would have preferred to avoid.

Day 3: The Visitation, hurrying toward others

As soon as she has received the message, Mary sets out to help her elderly cousin. God's joy is shared through service.

Prayer: Mary, send me toward those who are waiting for a visit, some help or a kind word.

Today: Visit or call an elderly or isolated person.

Day 4: The Magnificat, giving thanks

In Elizabeth's home, Mary sings the wonders of God, who lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. Her canticle is both praise and a promise to the poor.

Prayer: With you, Mary, I want to give thanks for the graces I have received, and believe that God raises up the little ones.

Today: Pray the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and write down three reasons to be grateful.

Day 5: Bethlehem, welcoming poverty

There is no room for them in the inn. Mary gives birth to her child in simplicity and lays him in a manger.

Prayer: Mother of Jesus, teach me to recognize God in what is small and poor.

Today: Give to an organization that helps homeless families.

Day 6: Exile and waiting

The Holy Family flees to Egypt, then lives hidden years in Nazareth. Mary knows exile, daily work and long waiting.

Prayer: Mary, I entrust to you refugees and all who have had to leave their country. Give me the patience of ordinary days.

Today: Pray for a migrant or a displaced family.



Praying with the Virgin Mary.

Day 7: Cana, interceding

Mary notices that the wine has run out and tells Jesus. Then she turns to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." She intercedes and points to her Son.

Prayer: Mary, look at what my family lacks and present it to Jesus. Teach me to do whatever he tells me.

Today: Write down a difficult intention and entrust it to Mary.

Day 8: At the foot of the cross

Mary stands by the cross. She can prevent nothing, but she stays. Jesus gives her as mother to the disciple he loved.

Prayer: Mother of Sorrows, stay close to those who suffer and those who keep watch over a sick person. Never leave us alone.

Today: Check in on someone who is sick or grieving.

Day 9: The Assumption, hoping for heaven

Mary prays with the apostles at Pentecost, then, at the end of her life, she is taken up into heaven. What God did for her, he promises to all who love him.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, raised up in glory, I place my intention in your hands. Keep alive in me the hope of heaven and lead me to your Son. Amen.

Today: Attend Mass for the Assumption or for a feast of Our Lady.

Closing prayer

Holy Mary, Mother of God, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I carry. You believed the word of the Lord: obtain for me faith, hope and love. Pray for me, for my family and for the world, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

To go further, read the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and pray the Hail Mary and the Memorare.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon

The Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière has overlooked Lyon from the hill where the forum of the Roman city once stood. Since the Middle Ages, the people of Lyon have climbed it to entrust their city, their families, and their trials to the Virgin Mary. It is one of the great Marian shrines of France, alongside Lourdes, Chartres, and Notre-Dame de Paris.

A hill consecrated to Mary since the Middle Ages

A chapel dedicated to the Virgin is attested on the hill as early as the 12th century. It became a beloved place of pilgrimage for the people of Lyon. In 1643, as plague threatened the city, the aldermen, that is, the municipal magistrates, made a vow to climb to Fourvière every year to place Lyon under Mary's protection. This "vow of the aldermen" is renewed every September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, by the city authorities, who offer a candle and a gold écu.



Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon.

The golden statue and December 8

In 1852, a gilded bronze statue of the Virgin, the work of the sculptor Joseph-Hugues Fabisch, was placed at the top of the bell tower of the old chapel. Its inauguration, planned for September, was postponed to December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. That evening, the people of Lyon spontaneously lit their windows with small candles. The tradition has endured: it is the origin of today's Festival of Lights, whose heart remains, for believers, the procession and prayer at Fourvière on December 8.

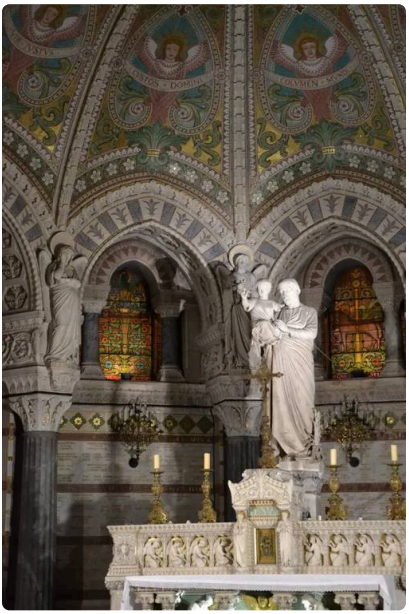
The basilica of Pierre Bossan

During the war of 1870, as Prussian troops approached, the archbishop and the faithful of Lyon vowed to raise a larger church if the city was spared. The basilica was built beginning in 1872 to plans by the architect Pierre Bossan and consecrated in 1896. Its white four-towered silhouette has become the emblem

of Lyon. Inside, mosaics, stained glass, and marble tell the story of Mary in the Church and in France; the crypt is dedicated to Saint Joseph. The old chapel, still open, stands right next door. Pope John Paul II came to pray there in October 1986.

Praying at Fourvière

Before you climb, you may wish to reread the life of the Virgin Mary. On site, many pilgrims begin with the old chapel, which is more intimate, where they light a candle, before going on to the basilica. From the viewing terrace, you can entrust to Mary the whole city spread out at the foot of the hill, and recite the Memorare for a particular intention. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.



Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon, the interior.

Other great shrines of Mary

- **Lourdes**: the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, site of the apparitions of 1858 to Bernadette.
- **Paris**: Notre-Dame Cathedral and the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal on Rue du Bac, linked to Saint Catherine Labouré.
- **Chartres**: Notre-Dame Cathedral and its veil of the Virgin.
- **Le Puy-en-Velay**: Notre-Dame Cathedral, one of the oldest Marian pilgrimages in France.
- **Nazareth**: the Basilica of the Annunciation; in Mexico City, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Practical information

The basilica can be reached on foot by the climbs from Vieux-Lyon, or by the funicular that leaves from the Vieux-Lyon Cathédrale Saint-Jean station. On feast days, especially September 8 and December 8, the crowds are very large. Mass, confession, and guided tour times are published by the shrine; check them before you come.

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