

As St. Irenaeus says, "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."¹⁴¹ Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert . . . : "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."¹⁴² Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary "the Mother of the living" and frequently claim: "Death through Eve, life through Mary."¹⁴³

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Mary's divine motherhood

495 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."¹⁴⁴ In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*).¹⁴⁵

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Mary's virginity

496 From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed."¹⁴⁶ The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century says:

You are firmly convinced about our Lord, who is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin, . . . he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate . . . he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen.¹⁴⁷

141 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959A.

142 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959A.

143 LG 56; Epiphanius, *Haer.* 78, 18: PG 42, 728CD-729AB; St. Jerome, *Ep.* 22, 21: PL 22, 408.

144 Lk 1:43; Jn 2:1; 19:25; cf. Mt 13:55; *et al.*

145 Council of Ephesus (431): DS 251.

146 Council of the Lateran (649): DS 503; cf. DS 10-64.

147 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn.* 1-2: Apostolic Fathers, ed. J. B. Lightfoot (London: Macmillan, 1889) II/2, 289-293; Sch 10, 154-156; cf. Rom 1:3; Jn 1:13.

497 The gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility.¹⁴⁸ "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée.¹⁴⁹ The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."¹⁵⁰

498 People are sometimes troubled by the silence of St. Mark's Gospel and the New Testament Epistles about Jesus' virginal conception. Some might wonder if we were merely dealing with legends or theological constructs not claiming to be history. To this we must respond: Faith in the virginal conception of Jesus met with the lively opposition, mockery, or incomprehension of non-believers, Jews and pagans alike;¹⁵¹ so it could hardly have been motivated by pagan mythology or by some adaptation to the ideas of the age. The meaning of this event is accessible only to faith, 90 which understands in it the "connection of these mysteries with one another"¹⁵² in the totality of Christ's mysteries, from his Incarnation to his Passover. St. Ignatius of Antioch already bears witness to this connection: 2717 "Mary's virginity and giving birth, and even the Lord's death escaped the notice of the prince of this world: these three mysteries worthy of proclamation were accomplished in God's silence."¹⁵³

Mary – "ever-virgin"

499 The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man.¹⁵⁴ In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it."¹⁵⁵ And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the "Ever-virgin."¹⁵⁶

500 Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus.¹⁵⁷ The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact James and Joseph, "brothers of Jesus," are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls "the other Mary."¹⁵⁸ They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.¹⁵⁹

148 Cf. Mt 1:18-25; Lk 1:26-38.

149 Mt 1:20.

150 Isa 7:14 in the LXX, quoted in Mt 1:23 (Gk.).

151 Cf. St. Justin, *Dial.*, 99, 7: PG 6, 708-709; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1, 32, 69: PG 11, 720-721; *et al.*

152 *Dei Filius* 4: DS 3016.

153 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Eph.* 19, 1: AF II/2, 76-80; SCh 10, 88; cf. 1 Cor 2:8.

154 Cf. DS 291; 294; 427; 442; 503; 571; 1880.

155 LG 57.

156 Cf. LG 52.

157 Cf. Mk 3:31-35; 6:3; 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:19.

501 Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save: "The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, that is, the faithful in whose generation and formulation she cooperates with a mother's love."¹⁶⁰ 969 970

Mary's virginal motherhood in God's plan

502 The eyes of faith can discover in the context of the whole of Revelation the mysterious reasons why God in his saving plan wanted his Son to be born of a virgin. These reasons touch both on the person of Christ and his redemptive mission, and on the welcome Mary gave that mission on behalf of all men. 90

503 Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures."¹⁶¹ 422

504 Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven."¹⁶² From his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God "gives him the Spirit without measure."¹⁶³ From "his fullness" as the head of redeemed humanity "we have all received, grace upon grace."¹⁶⁴ 359

505 By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in *the new birth* of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith. "How can this be?"¹⁶⁵ Participation in the divine life arises "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."¹⁶⁶ The acceptance of this life is virginal because it is entirely the Spirit's gift to man. The spousal character of the human vocation in relation to God¹⁶⁷ is fulfilled perfectly in Mary's virginal motherhood. 1265

506 Mary is a virgin because her virginity is *the sign of her faith* "unadulterated by any doubt," and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will.¹⁶⁸ It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Savior: 148 1814

158 Mt 13:55; 28:1; cf. Mt 27:56.

159 Cf. Gen 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; etc.

160 LG 63; cf. Jn 19:26-27; Rom 8:29; Rev 12:17.

161 Council of Friuli (796): DS 619; cf. Lk 2:48-49.

162 1 Cor 15:45, 47.

163 Jn 3:34.

164 Jn 1:16; cf. Col 1:18.

165 Lk 1:34; cf. Jn 3:9.

166 Jn 1:13.

167 Cf. 2 Cor 11:2.

168 LG 63; cf. 1 Cor 7:34-35.

"Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ."¹⁶⁹

- 507 At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: "the Church indeed . . . by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse."¹⁷⁰

IN BRIEF

- 508 From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. "Full of grace," Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (SC 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.
- 509 Mary is truly "Mother of God" since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.
- 510 Mary "remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin" (St. Augustine, *Serm.* 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is "the handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:38).
- 511 The Virgin Mary "cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation" (LG 56). She uttered her yes "in the name of all human nature" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.
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¹⁶⁹ St. Augustine, *De virg.*, 3: PL 40, 398.

¹⁷⁰ LG 64; cf. 63.

Paragraph 3. The Mysteries of Christ's Life

512 Concerning Christ's life the Creed speaks only about the mysteries of the Incarnation (conception and birth) and Paschal mystery (passion, crucifixion, death, burial, descent into hell, resurrection, and ascension). It says nothing explicitly about the mysteries of Jesus' hidden or public life, but the articles of faith concerning his Incarnation and Passover do shed light on the *whole* of his earthly life. "All that Jesus did and taught, from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven,"¹⁷¹ is to be seen in the light of the mysteries of Christmas and Easter. 1163

513 According to circumstances catechesis will make use of all the richness of the mysteries of Jesus. Here it is enough merely to indicate some elements common to all the mysteries of Christ's life (I), in order then to sketch the principal mysteries of Jesus' hidden (II) and public (III) life. 426, 561

I. CHRIST'S WHOLE LIFE IS MYSTERY

514 Many things about Jesus of interest to human curiosity do not figure in the Gospels. Almost nothing is said about his hidden life at Nazareth, and even a great part of his public life is not recounted.¹⁷² What is written in the Gospels was set down there "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."¹⁷³

515 The Gospels were written by men who were among the first to have the faith¹⁷⁴ and wanted to share it with others. Having known in faith who Jesus is, they could see and make others see the traces of his mystery in all his earthly life. From the swaddling clothes of his birth to the vinegar of his Passion and the shroud of his Resurrection, everything in Jesus' life was a sign of his mystery.¹⁷⁵ His deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."¹⁷⁶ His humanity appeared as "sacrament," that is, the sign and instrument, of his divinity and of the salvation he brings: what was visible in his earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine sonship and redemptive mission. 126 609, 774 477

¹⁷¹ Acts 1:1-2.

¹⁷² Cf. Jn 20:30.

¹⁷³ Jn 20:31.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Mk 1:1; Jn 21:24.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Lk 2:7; Mt 27:48; Jn 20:7.

¹⁷⁶ Col 2:9.

Characteristics common to Jesus' mysteries

516 Christ's whole earthly life – his words and deeds, his
 65 silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking
 – is *Revelation* of the Father. Jesus can say: "Whoever has seen me
 has seen the Father," and the Father can say: "This is my Son, my
 Chosen; listen to him!"¹⁷⁷ Because our Lord became man in order
 to do his Father's will, even the least characteristics of his mysteries
 2708 manifest "God's love . . . among us."¹⁷⁸

517 Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption
 606 comes to us above all through the blood of his cross,¹⁷⁹ but this
 1115 mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:

– already in his Incarnation through which by becoming poor he
 enriches us with his poverty;¹⁸⁰

– in his hidden life which by his submission atones for our disobe-
 dience;¹⁸¹

– in his word which purifies its hearers;¹⁸²

– in his healings and exorcisms by which "he took our infirmities
 and bore our diseases";¹⁸³

– and in his Resurrection by which he justifies us.¹⁸⁴

518 Christ's whole life is a mystery of recapitulation. All Jesus
 did, said, and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his
 original vocation:

When Christ became incarnate and was made man, he reca-
 pitulated in himself the long history of mankind and pro-
 cured for us a 'short cut' to salvation, so that what we had
 lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God,
 we might recover in Christ Jesus.¹⁸⁵ For this reason Christ
 668, 2748 experienced all the stages of life, thereby giving communion
 with God to all men.¹⁸⁶

177 *Jn* 14:9; *Lk* 9:35; cf. *Mt* 17:5; *Mk* 9:7 ("my beloved Son").

178 *1 Jn* 4:9.

179 Cf. *Eph* 1:7; *Col* 1:13-14; *1 Pet* 1:18-19.

180 Cf. *2 Cor* 8:9.

181 Cf. *Lk* 2:51.

182 Cf. *Jn* 15:3.

183 *Mt* 8:17; cf. *Isa* 53:4.

184 Cf. *Rom* 4:25.

185 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 18, 1: PG 7/1, 932.

186 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 18, 7: PG 7/1, 937; cf. 2, 22, 4.

Our communion in the mysteries of Jesus

519 All Christ's riches "are for every individual and are every-
body's property."¹⁸⁷ Christ did not live his life for himself but *for* 793
us, from his Incarnation "for us men and for our salvation" to his 602
death "for our sins" and Resurrection "for our justification."¹⁸⁸ He
is still "our advocate with the Father," who "always lives to make
intercession" for us.¹⁸⁹ He remains ever "in the presence of God on
our behalf, bringing before him all that he lived and suffered for 1085
us."¹⁹⁰

520 In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is
"the perfect man,"¹⁹¹ who invites us to become his disciples and 459, 359
follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to 2607
imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty
he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may
come our way.¹⁹²

521 Christ enables us *to live in him* all that he himself lived, and 2715
he lives it in us. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a
certain way united himself with each man."¹⁹³ We are called only 1391
to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his
Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model:

We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of
Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect
and realize them in us and in his whole Church. . . . For it is
the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church
partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue
them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for
fulfilling his mysteries in us.¹⁹⁴

II. THE MYSTERIES OF JESUS' INFANCY AND HIDDEN LIFE

The preparations

522 The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such
immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He
makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, 711, 762

187 John Paul II, *RH* 11.

188 1 Cor 15:3; Rom 4:25.

189 1 Jn 2:1; Heb 7:25.

190 Heb 9:24.

191 GS 38; cf. Rom 15:5; Phil 2:5.

192 Cf. Jn 13:15; Lk 11:1; Mt 5:11-12.

193 GS 22 § 2.

194 St. John Eudes, *LH*, Week 33, Friday, OR.

figures and symbols of the "First Covenant."¹⁹⁵ He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.

523 *St. John the Baptist* is the Lord's immediate precursor or
 717-720 forerunner, sent to prepare his way.¹⁹⁶ "Prophet of the Most High,"
 John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last.¹⁹⁷ He
 inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb wel-
 comes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the
 bridegroom," whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes
 away the sin of the world."¹⁹⁸ Going before Jesus "in the spirit and
 power of Elijah," John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by
 his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.¹⁹⁹

524 When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year,
 1171 she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by
 sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the
 faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.²⁰⁰ By
 celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church
 unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must de-
 crease."²⁰¹

The Christmas mystery

525 Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family.²⁰²
 Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this
 437 poverty heaven's glory was made manifest.²⁰³ The Church never
 2443 tires of singing the glory of this night:

The Virgin today brings into the world the Eternal
 And the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible.
 The angels and shepherds praise him
 And the magi advance with the star,
 For you are born for us,
 Little Child, God eternal!²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁵ *Heb* 9:15.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Acts* 13:24; *Mt* 3:3.

¹⁹⁷ *Lk* 1:76; cf. 7:26; *Mt* 11:13.

¹⁹⁸ *Jn* 1:29; cf. *Acts* 1:22; *Lk* 1:41; 16:16; *Jn* 3:29.

¹⁹⁹ *Lk* 1:17; cf. *Mk* 6:17-29.

²⁰⁰ Cf. *Rev* 22:17.

²⁰¹ *Jn* 3:30.

²⁰² Cf. *Lk* 2:6-7.

²⁰³ Cf. *Lk* 2:8-20.

²⁰⁴ *Kontakion* of Romanos the Melodist.

526 To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom.²⁰⁵ For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become "children of God" we must be "born from above" or "born of God."²⁰⁶ Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us.²⁰⁷ Christmas is the mystery of this "marvelous exchange":

O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, 460
born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.²⁰⁸

The mysteries of Jesus' infancy

527 Jesus' *circumcision*, on the eighth day after his birth,²⁰⁹ is the sign of his incorporation into Abraham's descendants, into the people of the covenant. It is the sign of his submission to the Law²¹⁰ and his deputation to Israel's worship, in which he will participate 580
throughout his life. This sign prefigures that "circumcision of 1214
Christ" which is Baptism.²¹¹

528 The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) 439
from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.²¹² In the *magi*, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The *magi's* coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations.²¹³ Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning toward the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament.²¹⁴ The Epiphany shows that 711-716
"the full number of the nations" now takes its "place in the family 122

205 Cf. Mt 18:3-4.

206 Jn 3:7; 1:13; 1:12; cf. Mt 23:12.

207 Cf. Gal 4:19.

208 LH, Antiphon I of Evening Prayer for January 1st.

209 Cf. Lk 2:21.

210 Cf. Gal 4:4.

211 Cf. Col 2:11-13.

212 Mt 2:1; cf. LH, Epiphany, Evening Prayer II, Antiphon at the Canticle of Mary.

213 Cf. Mt 2:2; Num 24:17-19; Rev 22:16.

214 Cf. Jn 4:22; Mt 2:4-6.

of the patriarchs," and acquires *Israelitica dignitas*²¹⁵ (are made "worthy of the heritage of Israel").

529 The *presentation of Jesus in the temple* shows him to be the
firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord.²¹⁶ With Simeon and Anna,
583 all Israel awaits its *encounter* with the Savior – the name given to
439 this event in the Byzantine tradition. Jesus is recognized as the
long-expected Messiah, the "light to the nations" and the "glory of
Israel," but also "a sign that is spoken against." The sword of
614 sorrow predicted for Mary announces Christ's perfect and unique
oblation on the cross that will impart the salvation God had "pre-
pared in the presence of all peoples."

530 The *flight into Egypt* and the massacre of the innocents²¹⁷
make manifest the opposition of darkness to the light: "He came to
his own home, and his own people received him not."²¹⁸ Christ's
574 whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. His own share
it with him.²¹⁹ Jesus' departure from Egypt recalls the exodus and
presents him as the definitive liberator of God's people.²²⁰

The mysteries of Jesus' hidden life

531 During the greater part of his life Jesus shared the condi-
tion of the vast majority of human beings: a daily life spent without
evident greatness, a life of manual labor. His religious life was that
2427 of a Jew obedient to the law of God,²²¹ a life in the community.
From this whole period it is revealed to us that Jesus was "obedi-
ent" to his parents and that he "increased in wisdom and in stature,
and in favor with God and man."²²²

532 Jesus' obedience to his mother and legal father fulfills the
fourth commandment perfectly and was the temporal image of his
2214-2220 filial obedience to his Father in heaven. The everyday obedience of
Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the
obedience of Holy Thursday: "Not my will. . . ."²²³ The obedience
612 of Christ in the daily routine of his hidden life was already inaugu-

215 St. Leo the Great, *Sermo 3 in epiphania Domini* 1-3,5: PL 54, 242; LH, Epiphany, OR; *Roman Missal*, Easter Vigil 26, Prayer after the third reading.

216 Cf. Lk 2:22-39; Ex 13:2, 12-13.

217 Cf. Mt 2:13-18.

218 Jn 1:11.

219 Cf. Jn 15:20.

220 Cf. Mt 2:15; Hos 11:1.

221 Cf. Gal 4:4.

222 Lk 2:51-52.

223 Lk 22:42.