

Paragraph 2. Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

I. WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT,

484 The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates "the fullness of
time,"¹¹⁹ the time of the fulfillment of God's promises and prepa-
rations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the "whole
461 fullness of deity" would dwell "bodily."¹²⁰ The divine response to
her question, "How can this be, since I know not man?" was given
721 by the power of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon
you."¹²¹

485 The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and
ordered to that of the Son.¹²² The Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver
689, 723 of life," is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and
divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the
Father in a humanity drawn from her own.

486 The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of
the Virgin Mary, is "Christ," that is to say, anointed by the Holy
437 Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the
manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the
shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples.¹²³ Thus
the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God
anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with
power."¹²⁴

II. BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

963 487 What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on
what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary
illuminates in turn its faith in Christ.

Mary's predestination

488 "God sent forth his Son," but to prepare a body for him,¹²⁵
he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all

119 *Gal* 4:4.

120 *Col* 2:9.

121 *Lk* 1:34-35 (Gk.).

122 Cf. *Jn* 16:14-15.

123 Cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:1-12; *Lk* 1:35; 2:8-20; *Jn* 1:31-34; 2:11.

124 *Acts* 10:38.

125 *Gal* 4:4; *Heb* 10:5.

eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary”:¹²⁶

The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.¹²⁷

489 Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women *prepared* for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a pos- 722
terity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise 410
that she will be the mother of all the living.¹²⁸ By virtue of this 145
promise, Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age.¹²⁹ Against
all human expectation God chooses those who were considered
powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises:
Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Deborah; Ruth; Judith and Esther;
and many other women.¹³⁰ Mary “stands out among the poor and 64
humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation
from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in
her, the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is
established.”¹³¹

The Immaculate Conception

490 To become the mother of the Savior, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.”¹³² The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace.”¹³³
In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her 2676, 2853
faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that
she be wholly borne by God’s grace. 2001

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God,¹³⁴ was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the 411

126 Lk 1:26-27.

127 LG 56; cf. LG 61.

128 Cf. Gen 3:15, 20.

129 Cf. Gen 18:10-14; 21:1-2.

130 Cf. 1 Cor 1:27; 1 Sam 1.

131 LG 55.

132 LG 56.

133 Lk 1:28.

134 Lk 1:28.

Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.¹³⁵

492 The “splendor of an entirely unique holiness” by which
Mary is “enriched from the first instant of her conception” comes
wholly from Christ: she is “redeemed, in a more exalted fashion,
2011 by reason of the merits of her Son.”¹³⁶ The Father blessed Mary
1077 more than any other created person “in Christ with every spiritual
blessing in the heavenly places” and chose her “in Christ before the
foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in
love.”¹³⁷

493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God
“the All-Holy” (*Panagia*) and celebrate her as “free from any stain
of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new
creature.”¹³⁸ By the grace of God Mary remained free of every
personal sin her whole life long.

“Let it be done to me according to your word . . .”

494 At the announcement that she would give birth to “the Son
of the Most High” without knowing man, by the power of the Holy
2617 Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith, certain that
148 “with God nothing will be impossible”: “Behold, I am the hand-
maid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.”¹³⁹
Thus, giving her consent to God’s word, Mary becomes the mother
of Jesus. Espousing the divine will for salvation wholeheartedly,
without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the
968 person and to the work of her Son; she did so in order to serve the
mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God’s
grace.¹⁴⁰

135 Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854: DS 2803.

136 LG 53, 56.

137 Cf. *Eph* 1:3-4.

138 LG 56.

139 *Lk* 1:28-38; cf. *Rom* 1:5.

140 Cf. LG 56.

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" (*Theo- 466, 2677 tokos*).¹⁴⁵

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
2717 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.

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

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

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." From his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God "gives him the Spirit without measure." From "his fullness" as the head of redeemed humanity "we have all received, grace upon grace."¹⁶² 359 ¹⁶³ ¹⁶⁴

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?" 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." 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 God is fulfilled perfectly in Mary's virginal motherhood. 1265 ¹⁶⁵ ¹⁶⁶ ¹⁶⁷

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

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 6. Mary—Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church

963 Since the Virgin Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit has been treated, it is fitting now to consider her place in the mystery of the Church. "The Virgin Mary . . . is acknowledged 484-507 and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. 721-726 . . . She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' . . . since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head."⁵⁰² "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church."⁵⁰³

I. MARY'S MOTHERHOOD WITH REGARD TO THE CHURCH

Wholly united with her Son . . .

964 Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death";⁵⁰⁴ it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion:

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus 534
dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these 618
words: "Woman, behold your son."⁵⁰⁵

965 After her Son's Ascension, Mary "aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers."⁵⁰⁶ In her association with the apostles and several women, "we also see Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation."⁵⁰⁷

502 LG 53; cf. St. Augustine, *De virg.* 6: PL 40, 399.

503 Paul VI, Discourse, November 21, 1964.

504 LG 57.

505 LG 58; cf. *Jn* 19:26-27.

506 LG 69.

507 LG 59.

... also in her Assumption

966 "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all
 491 stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished,
 was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by
 the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more
 fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin
 and death."⁵⁰⁸ The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular
 participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the
 resurrection of other Christians:

In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition
 you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were
 joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God
 and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death.⁵⁰⁹

... she is our Mother in the order of grace

967 By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's
 redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the
 2679 Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she
 is a "preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church";
 507 indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (*typus*)⁵¹⁰ of the Church.

968 Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes
 still further. "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her
 494 obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of
 restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother
 to us in the order of grace."⁵¹¹

969 "This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues
 149, 501 uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the
 Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath
 the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to
 heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold
 1370 intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation . . .
 Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the
 titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix."⁵¹²

508 LG 59; cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950): DS 3903; cf. Rev 19:16.

509 Byzantine Liturgy, *Troparion*, Feast of the Dormition, August 15th.

510 LG 53; 63.

511 LG 61.

512 LG 62.

970 "Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men . . . flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it."⁵¹³ "No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source."⁵¹⁴

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II. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

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971 "All generations will call me blessed": "The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship."⁵¹⁵ The Church rightly honors "the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. . . . This very special devotion . . . differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration."⁵¹⁶ The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an "epitome of the whole Gospel," express this devotion to the Virgin Mary.⁵¹⁷

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III. MARY—ESCHATOLOGICAL ICON OF THE CHURCH

972 After speaking of the Church, her origin, mission, and destiny, we can find no better way to conclude than by looking to Mary. In her we contemplate what the Church already is in her mystery on her own "pilgrimage of faith," and what she will be in the homeland at the end of her journey. There, "in the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity," "in the communion of all the saints,"⁵¹⁸ the Church is awaited by the one she venerates as Mother of her Lord and as her own mother.

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In the meantime the Mother of Jesus, in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world

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513 LG 60.

514 LG 62.

515 Lk 1:48; Paul VI, MC 56.

516 LG 66.

517 Cf. Paul VI, MC 42; SC 103.

518 LG 69.

to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God.⁵¹⁹

IN BRIEF

- 973 By pronouncing her “fiat” at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish. She is mother wherever he is Savior and head of the Mystical Body.
- 974 The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son’s Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body.
- 975 “We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ” (Paul VI, CPG § 15).
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ARTICLE 10

I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

976 The Apostle’s Creed associates faith in the forgiveness of sins not only with faith in the Holy Spirit, but also with faith in the Church and in the communion of saints. It was when he gave the Holy Spirit to his apostles that the risen Christ conferred on them his own divine power to forgive sins: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”⁵²⁰

(Part Two of the catechism will deal explicitly with the forgiveness of sins through Baptism, the sacrament of Penance, and the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Here it will suffice to suggest some basic facts briefly.)

519 LG 68; cf. 2 Pet 3:10.

520 Jn 20:22-23.