



Chapter 3

My Mother and the Saints



- Who is the most beloved person for a newborn baby in this world?
- Who rejoiced and pained the most at our birth?
- How does the love and care this person gives, influence our lives at every stage of our growth?

Should not we live to understand, love, obey, and respect our mother who desires only our well-being and prays for us as long as she has breath?

Our Jesus understood his beloved mother the most and lived a life of love, obedience, and respect towards her. Even at the time of His death, Jesus thought of His mother and entrusted her to His beloved disciple, John. Jesus' mother is our mother too.

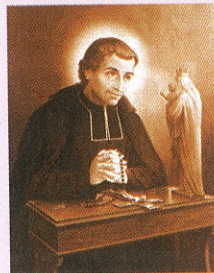
Therefore...

- The Catholic Church loves and venerates the Blessed Mother the most.
- Holy Mary, who embodies the fullness of Christian discipleship, is both our role model and intercessor.

Holy Virgin Mary in Church Dogmas

The Church's teachings on Holy Virgin Mary are based on sacred Scripture, sacred tradition, and the teachings of the Church Fathers. These teachings were later clarified through Dogmas by Councils and Popes.

There are four major dogmas on Holy Virgin Mary that the Church officially teaches and that are binding on all the faithful.



"The more we honor Mary, the more we honor Jesus Christ. We venerate Mary not for her own sake but because she is the most perfect way to honor Jesus and to draw closer to Him."

St. Louis de Montfort



Identify and present in the class the different titles/qualities of our mother, the Holy Mother of God, found in the Litany of the Rosary.

The Immaculate Conception

The Mother
of God



The Perpetual
Virginity

The Assumption

1. The Immaculate Conception

? How was it possible for Mary, born as a human, to be immaculate?

"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, saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin" (Dogma of 1854, Youcat 83).

The angel Gabriel came to Mary and greeted her, saying, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28).

This greeting of the angel Gabriel points to the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

It is for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was to be born in the womb of Mary, that God the Father preserved Holy Virgin Mary from the original sin (*Lumen Gentium* 53). St. Pope Pius IX solemnly declared this as a dogma on December 8, 1854, through the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus*. For this reason, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Immaculate.

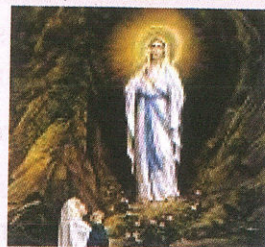
2. Mother of God

? Why is Mary called the Mother of God?

Holy Virgin Mary is called the Mother of God because she is the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God the Father found Mary as the dwelling place for His Son and the Holy Spirit (CCC 721).



What are the important dogmas on Holy Virgin Mary?



On Thursday, February 11, 1856, Mother Mary appeared to a 14-year-old girl, Bernadette, in Lourdes, France, holding a rosary and revealed, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, full of grace through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception (CCC 491).



What do we mean by "the Immaculate Conception of Mary?"

We are bound to confess that Immanuel is the true God, and therefore, the Holy Virgin is the God-bearer.
The Council of the Ephesus AD 431

The Council of Ephesus in AD 431 declared that Mary is rightly called the Mother of God. The Council used the Greek word 'Theotokos' (God-bearer), meaning Mother of God.

"Mary is truly the Mother of God" (CCC 495).

? Who first addressed Mary as the Mother of God? And when?

In order to serve her pregnant cousin Elizabeth, Holy Mary went to the hill country of Judah in the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and addressed Holy Mary as the Mother of God.

"Why has this happened to me that the Mother of my Lord comes to me" (Lk 1:43).

The title Mother of God should not be understood that Mary is the mother of, God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. We should understand that she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, who took on human nature. In order to bring clarity to this, in the Eastern Syriac tradition, Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, is referred to as the "Mother of the Messiah."

3. Perpetual Virgin

? Is the Blessed Mother an ever-virgin?

Mary is an ever-virgin, as the virginity of Mary was preserved by the divine grace before, during, and after the birth of Christ. It is through divine intervention beyond human understanding and human possibilities that Jesus was formed in the womb of Mary (CCC 497).

"Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I am a virgin? The angel said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; He will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:34-35).

The Holy Scripture teaches us that Jesus was born not through the union of man and woman but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your

"When faith in the Mother of God declines, faith in the Son of God and God the Father declines also."

Ludwig Feuerbach,
YOUCAT 83.

Let us pray

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



Mary's response to the angel became a historically important statement.

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; Let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

wife, **for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**" (Mt 1:20).

Here we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Mt 1:22, Isa 7:14). **Even in the early Church, the perpetual virginity of Mary was acknowledged.**

? Did Mary have other children besides Jesus?

There are some who argue that Mary had other children besides Jesus, and for that sake, show inferences citing Jesus' brothers in the Gospel as proof (Mt 13:55-56). However, the Catholic Church rejects this claim for the following reasons:

- In Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus, a single word is used to refer to both the children of the same father and the children of his brothers and sisters.
- The so-called "brothers" of Jesus namely James, Simon, Judas, and Joseph are, in fact, the sons of another Mary [1], a disciple of Jesus (Mt 13:55). Mt the evangelist significantly attributes this Mary as the other Mary (Mt 27:56). According to the Old Testament expression, they are close relations (CCC 500). In the Old Testament, the term "brother" was not limited to children of the same parents. The members of the same caste, tribe, and kinship group were also referred to as brothers.
- From the earliest times, the Church believed that Mary is ever virgin because of the fact that the Holy Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and that she has no children besides Jesus.
- If Holy Mary had other children, then the conversation among Jesus, Mother Mary and the disciple Jn at the foot of the cross would have no relevance. Because, from a historical perspective, the other children were expected to have come forward and taken care of Mary.
- If Holy Mary had other children, that would have naturally been the subject matter of the narrative describing the loss of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple.

The perpetual virginity of Mary, repeatedly taught by the early Church Fathers, **was declared as a doctrine of faith by the Fifth Council of Constantinople in AD 553.**

"For our sake and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, and was born of the Virgin Mary."

Nicene-
Constantinopolitan
Creed (CCC 506)



Why is Mary ever-virgin?



Discuss the answers to the questions of YOUCAT 80, 81, 82, and 83 in your group.



What reply would you give to those who say that Mary had other children also, quoting St. Mathew's Gospel 13:55-56 as proof.

4. The Assumption



Is the assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary true?

Mary, the Immaculate, the mother of God, and the Ever-Virgin, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven when the course of her earthly life was completed.

Pope Pius XII (*Lumen Gentium* 59; CCC 974).

The above mentioned belief had existed in the Church since very ancient times. The following are the main reasons for it.

- The belief of the Church is that the Most Holy Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven. Holy Mary was chosen as the Mother of Christ, the Son of God from eternity. Therefore, she was conceived without original sin and remained in perfect holiness till the end of her life. Because of this, God willed that she be assumed into heaven, body and soul (CCC 974).
- There have never been any relics in the name of Mary.
- Since ancient times, a vacant tomb attributed to Mary had existed in Zion.

From the very beginning, the Church held the belief in her **Assumption, which was proclaimed as dogma by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950, through the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus***. The universal Church celebrates the Feast of the Assumption of Mother Mary on August 15.

The Feast of the Assumption: The "Shunaaya" Feast

In the Eastern Syriac tradition, the Assumption of Mary is known as the "Shunaaya" feast. The word Shunaaya means "translocation" or "passing over." This signifies that the Blessed Virgin Mary was transferred from this world to heaven. In the Syro-Malabar Church, the Assumption feast was traditionally called the 'karetta thirunaal'.

Mary our Mother too

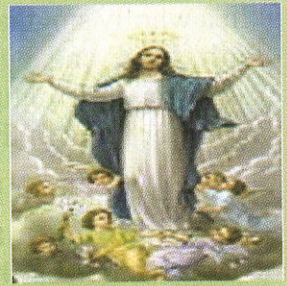
Since Mary is the Mother of Jesus, she is also our mother.

Because the Lord Jesus gave her to us as our mother.

"Woman, here is your son... Here is your mother"

(Jn 19:26-27).

Jesus' command to Jn while on the cross was an act of entrusting the whole Church to Mary. Thus, Mary is our mother too (Youcat 85).



Ad Se Summere

The English word Assumption originates from the Latin term *Ad Se Summere*. Meaning "to take up for oneself", "was taken up" The theological meaning of Assumption is that the Blessed Mother was assumed into heaven, body and soul, by the power of God.



What is meant by the term "The Assumption of Mary"?

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's

Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians (CCC 966).



August 15 was first declared as the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God in the 5th century by

St. Cyril of Alexandria.

"In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her 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" (CCC 968).

Holy Mary the Protector of the Church and the Whole of Humanity

- During her earthly life, she interceded with Jesus on behalf of others. She interceded and prayed for those around her throughout her life as seen at the wedding at Cana and in the prayer gathering of Pentecost.
- Even when she was taken up into heaven she didn't sideline this salvific mission.
- She still continues to give us her children the gifts of eternal salvation through her various ways of intercession. Holy Mary keeps on giving messages for our salvation through her apparitions in various places even to this day.

Therefore the Holy Church honors Holy Mary with attributes such as **Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, Mediatrix, and Co-Redemptrix.**

Special Veneration towards the Holy Virgin Mary

The Church's veneration of Mary is a natural element of Christian liturgy. Through special acts of devotion, the Church rightfully honors the Holy Virgin. The liturgical feast days dedicated to the Mother of God and the Marian prayers such as the Holy Rosary, which encapsulate the entire Gospel, are expressions of this reverence to the Virgin Mary.

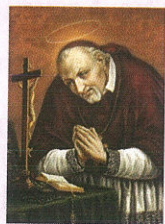
The Church venerates, but does not worship, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints

There is a difference between the veneration given to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints and the worship that is reserved for God alone. We never worship the Blessed Virgin Mary or the saints of the Church. Instead, we venerate them and seek their intercession.

Among all the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary holds a unique position. This is called Hyperdulia, which means "above the angels and saints."

Our Heavenly Mother is the Queen of Angels and Saints

All the saints practiced and promoted Marian devotion in an extraordinary way throughout their lives. As the Mother of



Mary is the most affectionate mother among the human race. She is the refuge of sinners.

St. Alphonsus Liguori

"We can be sure that she will plead for us in the two most important moments of our life: now and at the hour of our death" (Youcat 148).



Why is Mary Our Mother?



Find out the Marian apparitions recognized by the Church and prepare their digital presentation and present them in the class.



the Church, the Mediatrix, and the perfect model of Christian life, the Blessed Virgin Mary is venerated in a special way, and her intercession is sought.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in our Church

Recognizing the unique role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in God's salvific plan, Mar Thoma Christians have always shown a special devotion to her.

We, the Christians express our devotion to Holy Mother through:

- The dedication of churches in the name of Holy Virgin Mary
- Receiving the name of the Holy Mother at Baptism
- Commemoration in the Divine Office
- Rosary and other Marian intercessory prayers
- Observation of fasts
- Celebration of feasts

In the Eastern tradition, Wednesdays are specifically dedicated to the remembrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Divine Office, Holy Mother is commemorated on this day. Among the Church's fasts, the Eight-Day Fast in preparation for the Nativity of the Holy Mother and the Fifteen-Day Fast in preparation for the Feast of the Assumption are observed as acts of special Marian devotion. Even today, the daily recitation of the Rosary during evening prayers remains a strong tradition in Christian families.

After the feasts of the Lord, the Marian feasts hold the highest place in our liturgical celebrations.

In the Eastern tradition, the Holy Mother is commonly depicted as holding the infant Jesus.



The Virgin and the Child, Syriac Rabbula Gospels (AD 586), written in Beth Zagba monastery, N.Syria. Now in Laurentian library, Florence.



"Even if one searches the entire Vatican palace, nothing more valuable deposit or treasure than the Rosary can be found."

Pope Leo XIII
(1810–1903)



Read CCC 494 and organize a discussion on the topic: Our faith and obedience today and the faith-filled obedience of the Holy Mary.



What ways do we celebrate our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in our Church?



Write a personal reflection on the various virtues of Holy Mary our Mother, that you wish to imitate in your life and submit it for discussion.

Reason:

- We need to understand the importance of the Blessed Mother in connection with Jesus.
- Devotion to the Blessed Mother must be leading to Jesus.

Feasts of the Holy Virgin Mary in our Church

The important ones

Feast of the Immaculate Conception	– December 8
Feast of the Divine Motherhood	– Last Friday of the Season of the Nativity
Feast of the Annunciation	– March 25
Feast of the Assumption	– August 15
Feast of the Nativity of Mary	– September 8

Other Feasts

Feast of the Purification	– February 2
Mother of the Harvest	– May 15
Feast of the Visitation of Blessed Mother	– May 31
Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary	– Third Saturday of the <i>Sleeha kalam</i>
Lady of the Mount Carmel	– July 16
Queen of the Rosary	– October 7

(Syro-Malabar Calendar)

Apart from Mary, no one else has ever participated in the mysteries of the incarnation like Joseph.

As a righteous man, Joseph was prepared to fulfill his responsibilities with devotion, by the light of faith in God and on the basis of divine inspiration, even in the midst of challenges.

A few titles of St. Joseph

- Husband of Mary, the Mother of Jesus
- Foster Father of Jesus
- Protector of the Holy Church
- Guardian of the Holy Family
- Example of a Holy Death
- Heavenly Patron of Workers

The universal Church commemorates the feast of St. Joseph on March 19, honoring his passing into eternal glory. On May 1, we celebrate his feast as the Patron of workers.



In the Eastern tradition, why is the Blessed Mother commonly depicted as holding the infant Jesus?

Marian Ejaculation (sukruthajapam)

- My Mother, my refuge.
- Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, be with us.
- Holy Virgin Mother, intercede for me before Jesus.
- Holy Mother, our Mother, lead us to Jesus.
- Mother of Jesus, make us holy.



What is your Baptismal name? Find the feast day of your patron saint and study their life identifying the virtues you have already embraced and share your insights in the class.

“There are no better examples than the Saints and no better helpers. If my namesake is a saint, I have a friend with God.”

(Youcat 202)

Special Devotion to Mar Thoma Sleeha

It is our speciality to hold a unique devotion to Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, the disciple of Jesus and the Apostle and Father of the Church in India.

We have the tradition to celebrate the feast commemorating his martyrdom, known as 'Dukhrana feast', on July 3rd by the entire Church. **In the Syro-Malabar Church, it is a day of obligation.**

Pilgrimages to sacred sites associated with Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, such as his tomb in Mylapore and the Seven and a Half Churches he founded, continue to be a longstanding tradition. As a mark of respect to our spiritual father, the headquarters of our Church is named 'Mount St. Thomas'.

Saints of India

Saints	Feast Day
St. Alphonsa	July 28
St. Euphrasia	August 29
St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara	January 3
St. Mariam Thresia	June 8
St. Devasahayam	January 14
St. Teresa of Calcutta	September 5

The Communion of Saints

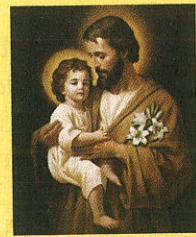
One of the articles of faith we profess in the Creed of the Church is the Communion of Saints.

"The Communion of Saints is made up of all men who have placed their hope in Christ and belong to Him through Baptism, whether they have already died or are still alive" (Youcat 146).

Our relationship continues with all, except for those who are eternally condemned to hell. Those who are still living on this earth and those who have died and gone from here are members of the Church too. Those who have passed away are still members of the Church, either undergoing purification in purgatory or already enjoying heavenly glory by the fruit of their holy lives.

Those enjoying heavenly glory could pray for us by interceding before God. Likewise we the people on this earth could help the souls in purgatory through prayers, fasting, penance, and charitable works (Youcat 146).

We, the Mar Thoma Christians maintain a special devotion



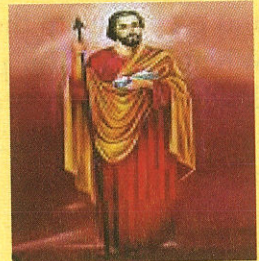
A person close to the heart of the Heavenly Father "That is Joseph of Nazareth."

— St. Bernard



St. Joseph, the mirror of silent virtue, was proclaimed the Guardian of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1870.

"Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (Jn 11:16). This statement of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* finds its fulfillment in the scripture: "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him" (Rom 6:8).



Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:5-6).

and closeness to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and Mar Thoma *Sleeha*. At the same time, we venerate all saints who have lived exemplary lives rooted in Gospel values. All these are an integral part of the spiritual life of the Catholic Church.

Veneration of Saints

"Saints are people who are aflame with the Holy Spirit; they keep God's fire burning in the Church" (Youcat 497).



- Are we all called to be saints?
- Is it permissible to venerate relics?
- Is the veneration of saints idol worship?
- In what all ways do saints help us?

Lord God manifests His holiness and continues His plan of salvation through the Church. Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness.

Through Jesus Christ, the sole mediator between God and humanity, the saints, as they proffer the merits which they have acquired, intercede for us before the Father (CCC 956).

We Are All Called to Holiness

"You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Mother Teresa said, "We should allow God to live his life in us." That is what it means to be holy (Youcat 342). The goal of our lives in our call to holiness, is to be united with God in love and to align completely with His desires.

The veneration of statues of saints is a way to show respect and reverence to those persons.

When the faithful praise God's work in people who have devoted themselves completely to God, their relics are rightly venerated (Youcat 275). When we venerate relics, we are, in essence, praising God. Therefore, the veneration of saints is not idol worship.

Since saints have a unique power of intercession, they can assist us in our lives. Because they are more closely united with Christ in heaven, they continuously intercede for us before God our Father, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth (*Lumen Gentium* 49, CCC 956). Invoking the intercession of those who have followed Christ before us and walked the path of holiness can help us lead virtuous lives.



"My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28)

Mar Walsh



Identify the characteristic traits of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* through a group discussion based on the aforementioned Scripture passages and explain how these values can be applied to our lives.



Conduct a quiz competition in the class based on the lives of saints.



What does it mean to be holy?



Is veneration of saints an idol worship?

Not all saints possess the same level of holiness, nor do they follow the same path. However, all of them ultimately reach God.

St. John Vianney
(1786-1859)

The Canonization Process in the Church

Saints are those who have attained glory by living exemplary lives of virtue. The Church has a meticulous process for elevating a person to canonization.

- The community witness of a person's virtues.
- A thorough investigation of the testimonies at the eparchial level.
- Verification of the evidence pertaining to the holiness and miracles happened through their intercession.
- Verification by the theology experts of the Vatican office.
- Decision of the Pope.

The various stages of Canonization

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. Servant of God | 2. Venerable |
| 3. Blessed | 4. Saint |

In our earthly pilgrimage toward heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, and other saints shine as guiding lights. With a deep longing to be numbered among them, let us strive to conform our lives more closely to Christ.



- The Blessed Virgin Mary is Ever-virgin, the Mother of God, the Immaculate conception, and the Assumed.
- Saints are always our role models and intercessors.
- We do not worship saints, on the contrary we only venerate them.



Let Us Read the Word of God

The Gospel of John, Chapters 9-12



Let us illuminate our hearts

"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1:45).



My Resolution

Following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints,
I too will become a saint.



What are the different ways the saints help us?

"Do not weep, my children; I shall be more useful to you where I am now going, than I have ever been in this life."

(St. Dominic, 1170-1221, Founder of the Dominican Order)



"Holiness is not the luxury of a few people, but a simple duty for you and me."

(St. Teresa of Calcutta, 1910-1997, Youcat 342)



What is meant by the Communion of Saints?



The saints were led to holiness because they counted the suffering as gain. Prepare a report based on the theme "Suffering as Gain", incorporating personal experiences and present it in the class.