Four Marian Dogmas

1. Immaculate Conception

Mary was conceived without original sin. God applied the salvific effects of the crucifixion to Mary before she was conceived rather than, like most of us, after.\(^1\)

St. Paul hints that no human is without sin (Romans 5:12). The Bible tells us of one, very distinctive post-Eden exception to this suggestion, Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). If there is one exception, are there others? The Catholic Church does claim one other, Mary.

And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women.

Luke 1:28 Douay-Rheims Version\(^2\)

2. Theotokos

Mary is the Mother of God (literally: God bearer). Since Jesus is God, and Mary is Jesus’ mother, Mary is the Mother of God. This is neither a denial of God’s eternal nature nor of Mary’s human nature as a created being. This is a statement of the integral reality of Jesus’ human and divine natures (fully God and fully man).\(^3\) Mary merely existed before God existed in human form.

3. Perpetual Virginity

Mary’s virginity before Jesus’ birth is evidence that Jesus was a conceived by the Holy Spirit.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:22-25 NAB\(^4\)

Though the Bible tells us Jesus had brothers and sisters (e.g. Matthew 13:55, 56), the Catholic Church understands that these are not Mary’s children because she continued in her virginal state.

A) Perhaps they were Joseph’s children from a former wife who had previously died. After the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52), the Gospels never directly speak of Joseph again; apparently Joseph died at some point before Jesus’ crucifixion. When he is near death, Jesus leaves Mary in the care of the beloved disciple (John 19:25-27) (i.e. the Apostle John). This would seem to indicate that Mary did not have a spouse or children to care for her.

B) Perhaps they were Jesus’ cousins. Brother is sometimes used loosely in the Bible to indicate relatives (see: Genesis 14:16; 29, 15; Leviticus 10:4).\(^5\)

C) Perhaps they were Jesus’ spiritual brothers and sisters.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Jesus’ death saved Mary before the crucifixion even happened. This is possible because God is not bound by time (2 Peter 3:8).
\(^2\) Compare John 1:14 NAB: “…the Word became flesh…full of grace and truth.”
\(^3\) See Hebrews 2:14, 17, and 4:15 for his humanity, and Colossians 1:15, 19, and Hebrews 1:1-4 for his divinity.
\(^4\) Compare to Isaiah 7:14
\(^5\) The word rendered in these passages as relative or cousin is, in the Septuagint, ἀδελφός, ἀδελφός, and ἀδελφού, respectively, each meaning brother.
\(^6\) This seems rather unlikely given his interactions with his mother and his brothers in Mark 3:31-35.
4. Assumption

Mary was taken into heaven body and soul, assumed into heaven.

While the Bible does not speak directly to this point, it does suggest a rational for God taking Mary. Holy people do not decay in the grave (Psalm 16:10). Mary was holy (Luke 1:28). Lest one think this logic is contrived, God has taken others to heaven body and soul; consider Enoch (Genesis 5:18-24, Sirach 44:16; 49:14; Hebrews 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1, 11).

Likewise, when Jesus died, God raised some who had previously died back to life (Matthew 27:51-53); they are never mentioned in the Bible again. What happened to them? Were they assumed as well?

The idea of Mary coronated as the Queen of Heaven (Revelation 12:1-2) bolsters this idea, for how is it that she can reign as Queen of Heaven unless she is in heaven?

Mary as Queen and Mediatrix

With God as the reigning King in heaven, his mother naturally takes on the role of Queen Mother (Revelation 12:1-2). (Compare to 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 10:13; Jeremiah 13:18; 29:2). Thus Mary usurps the title Queen of Heaven, taking it from the pagan god, Ishtar (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:15-19).7

The Bible also shows us a precedence where the queen will intercede with the king for the needs of God’s people (see Esther chapters 7 and 8). The role of intercessor is not foreign to Mary, for she acted in that capacity with her son in their earthly life as well (John 2:1-11, esp. vs. 2-5). Thus, Mary is also called Mediatrix.

Mary is a mediatrix, not the mediator, an honor reserved for Jesus alone (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Clearly others can also mediate as well (James 5:16-18; e.g. 1 Thessalonians 5:25). Jesus is the primary mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), necessarily placing Mary in a secondary position.

Apparitions

Apparitions of Mary are not mentioned in the Bible. Given Mary’s stature, however, it would make sense that Mary could, like others that are mentioned in the Bible, return to earth. Onias and Jeremiah returned to earth (2 Maccabees 15:12-16). And let us not forget Jesus’ return, as an apparition of voice and light, to St. Paul (Acts 9:1-6; 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

Moses and Elijah are probably the two individuals that draw the best comparison to how apparitions of Mary are understood. Elijah, having been assumed into heaven (2 Kings 2:1, 11), is able to return (Malachi 3:23 (4:5); compare Mark 15:34-36). There is also a Jewish legend of the Assumption of Moses (compare to Deuteronomy 34:6 and Jude 1:9). Thus, we should not be surprised to see Moses and Elijah appearing in the New Testament (Matthew 17:1-8).

Note: Catholics are not required to believe in post-Biblical apparitions or other private revelations.

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7 The foot note in the New American Bible says, “Queen of heaven: the Assyro-Babylonian Ishtar, goddess of fertility, whose worship was introduced under King Manasseh and was revived after Josiah’s death. Cakes shaped like stars (Ishtar was identified with the planet Venus) were offered in her honor.” New American Bible, p. 811.