
Chapter 9BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY*Mary, dwelling of God among men*

The Creed is fundamentally a confession of faith in the triune God. It is a confession that does not stem from a reasoning of our minds; it is not an abstract belief that God exists, or an idea invented by human beings, because God has shown Himself as a living being that has established a relationship with us. The article of our faith “*was born of the Virgin Mary*” tears open the veil of the hidden God. God becomes present in our history in the person of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

This entrance of God into our history did not happen without human consent; God asked for the *yes* from man, He needed the freedom of the creature. In this context, Mary, when faced with God’s calling, represents all of creation, called to give an answer on behalf of humanity. The Virgin Mary freely places her body, her entire self, at God’s disposal, as a place for His presence. Mary’s answer “let it be done to me according to your will” allows for the body for the Son to be formed out of her own body. Mary surrenders completely to the Father’s will, and so offers her body so that the Holy Spirit can make His tabernacle in it.¹

If we want to go deeper into the fact of God’s presence in Mary, in reference to the text of Hebrews – that interprets the process of the incarnation as a dialog in which Jesus says to the Father: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me... “Behold, I have come to do your will” (Heb 10:5-7; Ps 40:6-8).² A body has been prepared for the Son in Mary’s body.

In other words, Mary, who called herself the “handmaid of the Lord”, is standing at the center of the confession of our faith in the living God. Said confession of faith cannot exist without her. She is undeniably a part of our faith in the living God³.

The Basis of Scripture

The narratives of the “annunciation”, that Matthew (1:18-23) and Luke (1:26-38) give us, allow us to soar far beyond the Creed, since they reveal to us the profound meaning of the formula “was born of the Virgin Mary”.

¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Mary, the Church at the source*, 49

² J. Ratzinger, *God is near us – The Eucharist, the heart of life*, 14; cf. *Mary, the Church at the source*

³ J. Ratzinger, *Eucharist*, 23 Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Mary the Church at the source*

Matthew in 1:23 uses a text of the prophet Isaiah: behold the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (Is. 7:14). Historically the text refers to the Messianic sign that God sent to king Ahaz as a proof of the permanence of the Davidic lineage, which had already been promised before to King David. By taking up this text again, Matthew tries to convey that behind those words lies the reality, albeit hard to comprehend back then, of a decisive intervention of God in the definitive establishment of the Messianic kingdom. For Matthew this promise is fulfilled at Jesus birth.

Benedict XVI explains the fulfillment of this messianic prophesy this way: “if the child mentioned in the promise of Isaiah is called Emmanuel, then immediately the framework of the Davidic promise is expanded. The kingdom of this child stretches beyond anything that the Davidic promise might lead us to expect: the kingdom is the Kingdom of God Himself; it shares in the universality of God’s rule, sin in His person God Himself has stepped into the history of the world”⁴. Mary’s role has a central importance for the fulfillment of this promise; the fact that God becomes, actually, one with us depends on her.

The text of Luke is still more explicit; in the narration he makes of the annunciation of the angel to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38) a valuable contribution is found for the article of faith expressed in the Creed. Let us notice, in the first place, that the angel’s greeting to Mary reproduces, as it were, the cry that the prophet Zephaniah used to greet the Jerusalem freed in the end of times: Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! (cf. Zep 3:14).

This text incorporates the blessings Israel used to celebrate its noble women. Such was the story of Judith, who was acclaimed with these words: “*Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all the women on earth*” (Jd 13:18). Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, is *Blessed among tent-dwelling women*, because God used her to free his people (Jud 5:24). By the same token, the angel’s greeting *Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you*. (Lk 1:28) declares that in Mary a new Israel begins; and not only does it begin with her, but she is the rest of Israel, the holy “daughter of Zion” where the will of God begins a new creation.⁵ (cf. Lk 1:35)

The second image of Luke’s text – *the power of the Most High will overshadow you* – makes reference to the temple of Israel; and to the holy Tent in the desert⁶, which showed the actual presence of God in the cloud, that both revealed and concealed the glory of God (Ex 40:34; 1 Kg 8:11).

⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Eucharist*, 16.

⁵ Cf. R. Laurentin, *Structure and Theology of Luke 1-2*, (in French in the original), Paris, 1957

⁶ The prolog of John’s Gospel speaks of the dwelling of God as a consequence and goal of the incarnation. He uses for her the word tent and he refers to the Tent of Meeting

In the Hebrew word *skene*, tent, we hear overtones of the Hebrew word *skekhina*, which early Judaism used to refer to the sacred cloud, and proclaimed the presence of God at the prayer and the study of the law whenever Jews were gathered together. Jesus is the true sacred cloud through whom God is present among us whenever we are gathered together in His name. The Yes of Mary opens for Him the place where He can pitch His tent. She herself becomes a tent for Him, the temple of God, and thus she is the beginning of the Holy Church, which in turn points forward to the new Jerusalem, in which there is no temple any more, because God Himself dwells in her midst.⁷

In the first image, Mary is presented as the new Israel, true *daughter of Zion*; in the second, Mary is the *temple*, where the cloud that brings God into history descends. When Mary surrendered her life to God, she disappears with Him into the cloud that conceals the glory of God, and in this way God makes her partake of His own Divine glory.

All in all, the text of the Annunciation in the gospel of Saint Luke makes the mystery of the Trinity evident through the words of the Angel. The child who will be born will be called Son of the Most High, Son of God; the Holy Spirit will mysteriously be the origin of His conception with the power of the Most High; in this way he speaks about the Son, and indirectly, about the father and the Holy Spirit.

The expression “was born of the Virgin Mary” belongs to this confession of faith in the Trinity, because without Mary, the entrance of God in history would not have happened, it wouldn’t have fulfilled, likewise, the confession of faith: that God is God with us and not just a God in Himself and for Himself.

Mary in the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate

In one of the passages that Concepcion Cabrera wrote we read: “Mary has been a precious and necessary instrument, because God so willed it, for the creation, regeneration and glorification of humanity. Incarnation and redemption would not have happened without her [...]. And so, why do we doubt her prerogatives, deny her singular excellence, having been destined, as she was, when the time came, to be the Mother of the eternal Word made man...?”⁸

This passage, where we can find a mixture of spiritual and theological experience, is in agreement with the reflections contained in the Vatican II documents which call Mary the Mother of the Church. Mariology intertwines the different mysteries of our faith, Christ to His Church. The virginal birth indicates the proper theological place for a devotion to Mary which stems from the New Testament. Mary, as the true “daughter of Zion”, is the image of the Church, the image of

⁷ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Eucharist*, 22 and 24.

⁸ C. Cabrera, *Be perfect*, (136-137 in the Spanish edition *Sed perfectos*)

believing man, who can come to salvation only through the gift of love, through grace⁹. At the time of her Yes, Mary embodies Israel itself, that is to say, the Church in person and as person. She is the personal concretion of the Church, because by virtue of her Yes she becomes the physical Mother of the Lord¹⁰.

How great Mary is! - Concepcion Cabrera exclaimed – especially at the virginal incarnation of the Word, Who from all eternity prepared her to be His throne! This creature without comparison, created by His hands, awakened love in the Most Holy Trinity Who had bathed her with all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, with all the greatness of God, so she could be His living temple”¹¹.

Mary is certainly not visible in the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate, but neither is the Father in heaven. Both hide themselves behind the clouds, in such a way that in order to “see” the Father, we have to go beyond the visible cloud, in order to find the hidden face of the Father. In the same way, if we bear in mind that Mary is the temple of God, where the cloud comes down, we must penetrate into the cloud where the “Tabernacle” of God is hidden. Mary, because she surrenders herself completely to God, disappears with Him inside the cloud, in order to participate in His glory.

In other words, the splendors of the Trinity, represented on the Cross through the immense picture of light, hide the figure of Mary. She is present in this Trinitarian symbol as she was historically at the foot of the cross of Jesus, because wherever the Trinity is symbolized, there Mary is symbolized:

Mary is the closest creature to the Trinity by virtue of her affinity with the divine Persons who possessed her. She became one with the will of the Father, created expressly to carry in her womb the divine Word; she unified herself with the Trinity more than any other creature, and more than anybody else she comes close and burns within Their splendors. (AC 38, 152; April 22, 1913).

Mary is the one who has drawn the closest to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity by virtue of affinity and kinship that binds her with the three Divine Persons. She rejoices and delights in this unity of essence and simplicity of substance, because she, more than any other created creature, receives those divine clarities so luminous and profound that she is penetrated and enveloped by them. No one has entered the divine sanctuary the way she has,

⁹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 280

¹⁰ This topic is extensively developed in the book quoted earlier: *Mary, the Church at the source*, by J. Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, pg 13-26.

¹¹ Concepcion Cabrera de Armida, *Be Perfect*, (Sed perfectos, 136)

contemplating the divine ideals of the Trinity in her Church (AC 51,313-314: April 8, 1928).

This is how we can see the dynamic evolution of the Cross of the Apostolate, the different successive moments when the human being – represented by the wood of the cross – moves from darkness to the splendor of humanity, expressed in Mary, the one full of grace. From the moment that the cross is inhabited by the Divinity, the cross becomes translucent. Mary, *live cross*, is the dwelling of the Trinity. The cross, with Mary, has arrived to a new dimension.

In conclusion, out of the reflections we presented about the article of faith, “*born of the virgin Mary*”, we can infer the power of the symbolism of the Cross in the transmission of the message of the incarnation, an event where the whole Trinity takes part. God the Father is the source of all: of being, of life, of light, of love. And any and all concrete participation of the human being in these riches, is given to man through the incarnation of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. Whoever receives the grace, receives at the same time a resemblance with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, a resemblance that brings him to the divine persons, making him part of the communication of the Trinitarian life.

This doctrine about the assimilation with the Trinitarian life is explained by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*:

The soul is made like to God by grace. Hence for a divine person to be sent to anyone by grace, there must needs be a likening of the soul to the divine person Who is sent, by some gift of grace. Because the Holy Ghost is Love, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Ghost by the gift of charity¹².

We could finish this reflection on the incarnation of the Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of Mary, by seeing in her the “Woman”, new Eve “mother of the living”, Mother of “the whole Christ”, mother of the Church (cf. Jn. 19: 25-27). She is present in the new community, from its foundation, with the twelve who “devoted themselves with one accord to prayer”, at the dawn of the “end of times” that the Spirit inaugurates on the morning of Pentecost. (cf. Ac 1:14).

¹² S. Th. I, q 43, a5, re2.