

What's so special about Mary?

“What’s so special about Mary?”

I’m sure you’ve heard that question, sometimes asked quite sharply, from some of your non-Catholic friends.

One of the real tragedies of the Protestant Reformation is that it caused many Christians to give up the age-old practice of devotion to Christ’s mother, Mary.

After all, if you think about it, all Christians still admire the apostles for what they did, such as Paul for the letters which appear in our *Bible* – yes the Protestant *Bible*, too – and Peter, even if they don’t recognize him as the first head of the Church here on Earth.

But when it comes to Mary, many non-Catholics either scratch their heads or shake them angrily at what those crazy Catholics have gotten up to again.

But for me – even as a convert – I find that honoring Mary comes quite naturally.

Mary was the first to accept Jesus as God's son when she said "yes" to the angel. And she was the first to recognize that Jesus could perform miracles when she told the head waiter at the wedding at Cana to do whatever He told him to do ... and Jesus turned water into wine.

And she was still with Jesus at the end, when the Romans and the Jewish leadership of the day teamed up to crucify Him.

She was still with Him at the foot of the cross as Jesus died ... when everyone else had fled.

It's not dogma, but if believing in Jesus makes you a Christian, then I think all that makes Mary the very first Christian.

Today's Solemnity – the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – sort of adds fuel to the fire when it comes to explaining Marian Devotion to friends who don't share our Faith.

And for some Catholics, it may seem difficult to defend.

After all, the official doctrine of Mary's assumption into heaven is quite new ... as the Church reckons these types of things ... just 60 years old.

People may even question why Pope Pius XII declared that the Assumption was infallibly part of Catholic belief ... when it never had been before ...

Ah, but that's where they're wrong.

It wasn't invented in 1950.

It was just formalized ... and for a very good reason.

Want to know what it was?

It was in his declaration. Pius XII explicitly pointed out that the previous 50 years was full of slaughter and genocide, complete with the desecration of human bodies and the loss of reverence and respect for human beings, who were, after all, made in God's image.

The Pope said, "I intend that the celebration of the Assumption of Mary ... make clear the sacredness and the high destiny of every single human person."

Nor did he make this declaration out of the blue.

Pius XII asked the bishops ... that is, every single bishop in the world ... and all the major universities and schools of theology and their faculties ... "Is this what you and community believe as Catholic Christians?"

He asked the People. And the People said "YES!!!"

Top that with evidence that this is what the early Christians believed as well. Devotion and prayer and celebrations around the welcome of Mary into heaven go way back to the early centuries of the Church with enormous popularity among Christians, with sermons and hymns and decades of the rosary.

This is, of course, not without precedent.

Recall, first of all, that neither the Catholic Church nor the Orthodox Church accepts the protestant dogma of *sola scriptura* or “Scripture Alone,” wherein everything has to be overtly stated in the *Bible* in order for it to be held to be true.

Secondly, just because a belief is made dogma in 1950 doesn’t mean that it was not true before it was made dogma.

Many truths unfold ... or at least the implications and hows and whys of those truths unfold ... over years, decades and even centuries.

It was a hundred years before Jesus’ divinity was fully grasped and included in our scriptures. It was more than 300 years before the concept of the Trinity was clearly defined ... even though Christians baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit since Apostolic times.

This didn’t mean that God was not Three Persons until the year 325.

What it means is that ... over time ... with reflection and the help of the Holy Spirit, the Church was led to deeper understanding of these truths.

Therefore, just because the Assumption was not made dogma until 1950 doesn't lessen its importance or render it any less believable.

Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption to be dogma because so many people believed in it and cherished it ... not because it was newly made up.

But, again, let's ask ourselves "What's so special about Mary?"

Beyond the fact that she is the *theotokos* ... the "God Bearer" ... who conceived, bore and nursed our Lord Jesus ... who taught him how to walk, how to speak, how to hold a spoon, and even how to pray ... beyond the fact that she was with Jesus from the beginning to the very end of his life here on Earth ... she is the first New Testament person explicitly assumed into heaven body and soul ... that is her whole person ... and that she is now safe with God.

She is the pioneer of us "normal" human beings who can expect someday to be resurrected – body and soul – into heaven.

So ... what do you say when someone asks you “What’s so special about Mary?” ...

As for me, I simply refer to the Gospel of Luke ... which I can point out IS Holy Scripture, where Elizabeth says:

“Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And how does this happen to me,
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

Closing with:

“Blessed are you who believed
that what was spoken to you by the Lord
would be fulfilled.”

To which Mary replies in the Magnificat:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;

my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed” ...

Wait ... what was that?

“From this day all generations will call me blessed”!

Now, what part of that is so hard to understand?

Whatever else one may say ... the Gospel of Luke – that is, Holy Scripture –
TELLS us that Mary is to be called “blessed.”

To do otherwise is, well, just not Biblical!