

# Mary and the Bible – Part 1 of 4

## **Catholics do not worship Mary**

Perhaps the most common objection and misunderstanding when considering the Catholic faith is the charge that Catholics worship Mary. The Catholic Church condemns worship of anyone but God and God alone: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a foundational truth and has always been the teaching of the Catholic Church since Jesus established it.

Conversely, veneration or showing great respect to Mary is part of the Catholic tradition. St. Maximilian Kolbe said, “Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin Mary too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did, and if anyone does not wish to have Mary Immaculate for his mother, he will not have Christ for his brother.” Loving Mary and imitating her life will lead us closer to her son, Jesus Christ.

## **Mary, worthy of honor**

The angel Gabriel had no hesitation in greeting Mary with honor. The angel sent from God did not have any reservations about honoring Mary. We honor special people every day. We honor soldiers, great presidents, and legendary sports figures. We honor our mother and father, as this is a commandment from God. One would never claim that this honor takes away from honor that belongs to God alone.

Surely, Jesus honored his mother and father. How fitting it is to honor the Mother of God as Christ did. We give honor to saints in the family of God without worshiping them. God alone is to be worshiped. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church and has been for 2,000 years. Catholic and Orthodox Christians honor Mary because Jesus honored her, and we are simply disciples who follow Jesus and do as he did.

## **Mary, the model disciple**

In Luke 1:38, Mary humbly proclaims, “May it be done to me according to your word.” A few verses later, in what is referred to as the Magnificat, Mary’s heart for God is laid bare when she announces, “My soul proclaims the greatness of almighty God. My spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness. Behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:46-55). Every Christian should desire to be just like Mary and “proclaim the greatness of almighty God” while shouting from the rooftops how our “spirit rejoices in God [our] savior?” All authentic disciples of Jesus respond in complete obedience to God as Mary did. Mary is the perfect disciple for every Christian to imitate.

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# The Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help



The Our Lady of Perpetual Help icon shows the Theotokos (known as The Theotokos of the Passion in the Eastern tradition) holding the child Jesus, with both his hands in her own. Jesus looks towards Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel holds the cross and nails in the top right of the image. On the top left, Archangel Michael holds the spear, crown of thorns, and the wine-soaked sponge. These depictions represent Jesus meditating on his Passion. The way Jesus holds his mother's hand shows the distress he feels, and how Mary comforts him.

At the same time, the archangels hold the instruments of the Passion like they are presenting gifts or trophies. The gold background reminds us of the glory of the resurrection. In this way the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help also expresses Christ's triumph over death and sin.

Jesus' sandal falling from his foot shows the haste with which he has run to Mary in fear, gazing at the angels who hold the instruments of his Passion and death. The loose sandal also represents Christ's divine nature, untied from the bounds of earth. The sandal that remains secure is symbolic of His human nature. While the Theotokos is holding Jesus' hands to comfort him, she is also holding him out to us. She presents Jesus as he is, fully God but also fully man. In this way, Our Lady of Perpetual Help is also an icon expressing the truth of the incarnation.