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FEAST OF ASSUMPTION

The **Assumption of Mary** (name in full **Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**) is, according to the beliefs of the [Catholic Church](#), [Eastern Orthodox Churches](#), [Oriental Orthodoxy](#), [Church of the East](#), and some [Lutheran](#) and [Anglo-Catholic](#) Churches, among others, the [bodily taking up](#) of [Mary, the mother of Jesus](#), into [Heaven](#) at the end of her earthly life.^[3] The analogous feast in the [Eastern Churches](#) is known as the [Dormition of the Theotokos](#). In Lutheranism and Anglicanism, the feast is celebrated in honour of **St. Mary, Mother of our Lord**.^[3]

In the churches that observe it, the Assumption is a major [feast day](#), commonly celebrated on 15 August. In many countries, the feast is also marked as a [Holy Day of Obligation](#) in the Catholic Church. The [Assumption of the Virgin Mary in art](#) has been a popular subject, especially since the 12th century.

HISTORY

In the late 4th century, [Epiphanius of Salamis](#) wrote of his search for reliable traditions concerning the

The Catholic Church teaches as [dogma](#) that the Virgin Mary "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory".^[4] This doctrine was [dogmatically defined](#) by [Pope Pius XII](#) on 1 November 1950, in the apostolic constitution [Munificentissimus Deus](#) by exercising [papal infallibility](#).^[5] While the Catholic Church and [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) believe in the [Dormition of the Mother of God](#) (Dormition of the Theotokos or "the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God"),^[6] whether Mary as the [New Eve](#) had a physical death has not been dogmatically defined. In [Munificentissimus Deus](#) (item 39) Pope Pius XII pointed to the [Book of Genesis \(3:15\)](#) as scriptural support for the dogma in terms of Mary's victory over sin and death through her intimate association with "the new Adam" (Christ)^[7] as also reflected in [1 Corinthians 15:54](#): "then shall come to

fate of Mary and his inability to discover any.^[16] His inquiry suggests that discussion of Mary's immortality had already arisen in popular circles, and he identifies three beliefs concerning her end: that she died a normal

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pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory".^{[8][9][10]}

The [New Testament](#) contains no explicit narrative about the death or dormition, nor of the Assumption of Mary, but several scriptural passages have been theologically interpreted to describe the ultimate fate in this and the afterworld of the Mother of Jesus.^[11] Various [apocryphal](#) documents do contain narrations of the event.

and peaceful death; that she died a martyr; and that she did not die.^[17] He suggested tentatively that Chapter 12 of the [Book of Revelation](#), which speaks of a woman "clothed with the Sun" who escapes "the dragon" by

fleeing into the wilderness to be nourished "for a time, and times, and half a time," might possibly be a reference to her immortality. The early church usually identified the woman with the church.^[16] Ancient witnesses to the Marian interpretation include [St. Epiphanius](#),^[18] [Tychonius](#)^[19] (who heavily influenced St. Augustine), the unknown author of the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*,^[20] [Quodvultdeus](#) (a disciple of St. Augustine), [Cassiodorus](#) (Compl exiones in Apocalypsi, written c. 570 AD), and the Greek Fathers [Andreas of Caesarea](#) (late 6th c. / early 7th c.) and [Oikoumenios](#)^[21] (6th c.).

The Dormition/Assumption of Mary makes its first appearance in two apocryphal texts from the third and fourth centuries, the *Liber Requiei Mariae* ("Book of Mary's Repose"), and the "Six Books Dormition Apocryphon".^[22] Both come from heterodox (i.e., proto-heretical) circles, the first having strong [Gnostic](#) overtones and the second associated with a sect called the Kollyridians, whom Epiphanius condemned for their excessive devotion to Mary.^[22] Notable later apocrypha based on these include *De Obitu S. Dominae* and *De Transitu Virginis*, both probably from the 5th century, with further versions by [Dionysius the Areopagite](#), and [St Gregory of Tours](#), among others.^[23] The *Transitus Mariae* was among apocrypha condemned in a 6th-century work called *Decretum Gelasium* (the "Decree of [Gelasius](#)", although not in fact by Pope Gelasius I),^[24] but by the early 8th century it was so well established

that [John of Damascus](#) could set out what had become the standard Eastern tradition, that "Mary died in the presence of the Apostles, but that her tomb, when opened, upon the request of St Thomas, was found empty; wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven."

In some versions of the story, the event is said to have taken place in [Ephesus](#), in the [House of the Virgin Mary](#). This is a much more recent and localized tradition. The earliest traditions say that Mary's life ended in [Jerusalem](#) (see "[Mary's Tomb](#)"). By the 7th century, a variation emerged, according to which one of the apostles, often identified as [St Thomas](#), was not present at the death of Mary but his late arrival precipitates a reopening of Mary's tomb, which is found to be empty except for her grave clothes. In a later tradition, Mary drops [her girdle](#) down to the apostle from heaven as testament to the event.^[26] This incident is depicted in many later paintings of the Assumption.

Teaching of the Assumption of Mary became widespread across the Christian world, having been celebrated as early as the 5th century and having been established in the East by Emperor Maurice around AD 600.^[27] St. John Damascene records the following:

St. Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, at the Council of Chalcedon (451), made known to the Emperor Marcian and Pulcheria, who wished to possess the body of the Mother of God, that Mary died in the presence of all the Apostles, but that her tomb,

when opened upon the request of St. Thomas, was found empty; wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven.^[28]

The Assumption of Mary was celebrated in the West under [Pope Sergius I](#) in the 8th century and [Pope Leo IV](#) confirmed the feast as official.^[27] Theological debate about the Assumption continued, following the Reformation. But the people celebrated the Assumption as part of the cult of Mary that flourished from the Middle Ages.^[citation needed] In 1950 Pope [Pius XII](#) defined it as dogma for the [Catholic Church](#).^[29] Catholic theologian [Ludwig Ott](#) stated, "The idea of the bodily assumption of Mary is first expressed in certain transitus-narratives of the fifth and sixth centuries. ... The first Church author to speak of the bodily assumption of Mary, in association with an apocryphal transitus of the [B.M.V.](#), is St. Gregory of Tours."^[30] The [Catholic](#) writer [Eamon Duffy](#) states that "there is, clearly, no historical evidence whatever for it."^[31] However, the Catholic Church has never asserted nor denied that its teaching is based on the apocryphal accounts.^[citation needed] The Church documents are silent on this matter and instead rely upon other sources and arguments as the basis for the doctrine.

