

Module One

Mary

Abide

A standalone session. Run it any time.

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers, by laying two passages side by side, that St. Luke shapes the Visitation so that it reads as an Ark narrative, and learns what each Marian dogma actually claims and on what basis.

Catholic Touchstone. Everything the Church says about Mary is said because of what it means about her Son. Theotokos was defined to protect Christology, not to elevate a woman.

This is the module Catholics most often run badly, in both directions: either apologising for the doctrines or asserting them with proof texts that will not bear the weight. Do neither. Give the strongest evidence, say plainly where the evidence is typological rather than direct, and let the honesty carry it.

What You Need to Know

The four dogmas, and what each actually claims

- Mother of God, defined at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The claim is about Christ: the one she bore is a single divine person, so the mother of that person is the mother of God. In that era refusing the title was judged incompatible with confessing that the one born of Mary is the one divine Son made flesh. This dogma is Christological in its origin and purpose.
- Perpetual virginity. Held from antiquity and affirmed by figures who later became Reformers, including Luther and Calvin, which is worth knowing since it is often assumed to be a Catholic peculiarity.
- Immaculate Conception, defined in 1854. The claim is that Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her conception, by the merits of Christ applied in advance. Note that this makes her the first and greatest beneficiary of the redemption, not an exception to it.
- Assumption, defined in 1950. The claim is that at the end of her earthly life she was taken body and soul into heavenly glory. Note carefully what is left undefined: the definition speaks of her having completed the course of her earthly life and does not settle whether she died first. Catholics may hold either view.

What rests on what

Be honest about the evidence and your group will trust you. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption do not have direct proof texts, and pretending otherwise will get your people humiliated. They rest on the Church's judgment about what is contained in the deposit of faith, supported by typology, by the ancient liturgical tradition, and, in the case of the Assumption, by the striking absence of any claim to her bodily relics in a world that prized relics enormously and argued over them.

What does have strong textual support is the Ark typology, and that is where the session spends its time, because anyone can check it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The Ark of the Covenant carried the word of God in stone, the manna, and the rod of the priest. The correspondences are close enough, and ordered enough, that the natural conclusion is that Luke wrote his Visitation account with 2 Samuel 6 in view. Say it that way. This is an interpretive judgment about the text, held by many Catholic and other readers, not a defined teaching, and a scholar may resist it.

“And David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, ‘How can the ark of the Lord come to me?’” **2 Samuel 6:9**

“And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” **Luke 1:43**

That is one of five parallels the group will find for themselves. Do not give them the list.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

The Council of Ephesus

431

The council affirmed the title Theotokos, God-bearer, against those who wished to call Mary only the mother of the man Jesus.

The point at issue was not Mary’s status but the unity of Christ. The council’s judgment was that the title safeguards the confession that the one born of Mary is the one divine Son made flesh: if the one she bore is a single divine person, the title follows. Give it as the council’s judgment rather than as a reading of anyone’s mind. Nestorius did not say that Christ is two persons and rejected the charge, and the vocabulary of person and nature was still being settled on both sides. What the council held is that his way of speaking could not be squared with the one incarnate Son, and that refusing the title puts the unity of Christ at risk.

Historical; the council and the substance of its definition are securely attested.

Voice of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book III (summary)

Irenaeus develops the parallel between Eve and Mary: what the virgin Eve bound by unbelief, the virgin Mary loosed by faith and obedience.

The value here is the date. This is second-century material, which means the pattern of reading Mary as the new Eve is very early rather than a medieval accretion.

Summary of his argument in Book III; no chapter number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. John Damascene

On the Dormition (summary)

Preaching in the eighth century, he sets out the tradition that Mary was taken up, and appeals to what the Church had long held and celebrated rather than to a text.

Represent him as what he is: an early and important witness to a tradition, not a proof. Saying that plainly is stronger than pretending he settles the question.

Summary of the homilies; no section number printed.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 484-507 on the Marian doctrines in their Christological setting, with 495 on Theotokos.
- CCC 490-493 on the Immaculate Conception, including that she was redeemed from the moment of her conception in view of the merits of Christ.
- CCC 499-501 on perpetual virginity, and CCC 500 addressing the brethren of the Lord directly.
- CCC 966 on the Assumption, and CCC 971 stating that devotion to Mary is essentially different from the adoration given to God.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can find at least four Ark parallels in Luke 1 without help.
- 2. Every participant can state each of the four dogmas accurately.
- 3. Every participant can say honestly which doctrines have direct scriptural support and which rest on typology and Tradition.
- 4. Nobody leaves thinking Catholics worship Mary or believe she is a source of grace independent of her Son.

THE OBJECTION BENCH

Leader only. Deploy what the room needs, skip the rest. Do not hand this page out. The matching Take-Home carries a shorter version in the participant's own words.

"Jesus rebukes her. Who is my mother? And blessed rather are those who hear the word of God."

Read Luke 11:27-28 in full and notice the word rather. A woman blesses the womb that bore him; he redirects to the deeper ground of blessedness, hearing the word of God and keeping it.

Then ask who in Luke's Gospel is the model of exactly that. Luke 1:38, let it be to me according to your word. Luke 2:19 and 2:51, she kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke is not diminishing her; he is telling you why she is blessed.

"The Bible names his brothers."

The word covers a wider range of kinship in Semitic usage, and the New Testament was written by people thinking in those categories.

Then the textual point, which is stronger than the linguistic one: Mark 6:3 names James and Joses among the brothers, and Mark 15:40 lists among the women at the cross Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses. Mark does not tell us she is a different Mary; the inference is that an evangelist who has just called Jesus the son of Mary would not then identify his mother only as the mother of James and Joses. Compare Matthew 27:56, and John 19:25, which places Mary the wife of Clopas at the cross alongside the mother of Jesus. Present this as a strong inference that the objection has to answer, not as a proof. And in John 19:26-27 Jesus entrusts his mother to a disciple, which is difficult to explain if she had other sons standing by.

On Matthew 1:25 and the word until, note 2 Samuel 6:23, where Michal had no child to the day of her death. The Greek behind Matthew, *heos hou*, and the corresponding expression at 2 Samuel 6:23 mark a terminus without asserting anything about what came after it; nobody reads 2 Samuel 6:23 as implying Michal bore children once she was dead. Until in Scripture does not carry the change of state that an English reader hears in it. Note also that the verse itself reads to the day of her death, not until, so quote it as it stands.

"The Immaculate Conception was invented in 1854."

Distinguish definition from invention, and use an example they accept: the canon of Scripture was not dogmatically defined until 1546 and nobody thinks it was invented then.

Be honest that the doctrine was genuinely debated in the Middle Ages, including by St. Thomas Aquinas, and that the debate turned on how to affirm it without exempting her from needing redemption. The eventual

answer, preservative redemption applied in advance, resolved that. Telling the story with the debate in it is more persuasive than pretending there was none.

"Mary distracts from Christ."

Concede that devotional excess is real and that some popular piety has been unbalanced. The Church herself says so and Vatican II warned against it.

Then note the structure: every dogma is Christological in origin. Theotokos protects the unity of Christ's person, the Immaculate Conception makes her the first fruit of his redemption, and the Assumption shows what he does for those who are his.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you gave us your mother from the cross. Teach us to honour her the way you did, and never to let her stand between us and you. Amen.

Win

1. What did you learn about Mary growing up, and where did it come from?
2. Has anyone ever accused you of worshipping her? What did you say?

Build

Live discovery. Split the room. Give one half 2 Samuel 6:1-16 and the other half Luke 1:39-56, and tell neither what the other has. Ask each group to list what happens, in order, in plain language. Fifteen minutes. Then read the two lists aloud, side by side.

3. What do you notice?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Expect them to find most of these: David arises and goes to the hill country of Judah, and so does Mary. David asks how the ark of the Lord can come to him, and Elizabeth asks why the mother of her Lord should come to her. David leaps and dances before the ark, and the child leaps in Elizabeth's womb. There is a great shout, and Elizabeth exclaims with a loud cry. The ark remains three months in the house of Obed-edom, and Mary remains about three months.

Let them assemble it. Nobody has to take anyone's word for this; it is two passages and a list.

Then ask what the Ark contained: the tablets of the word, the manna, and the rod of the priest. And what Mary carried: the Word made flesh, the bread of life, the great high priest.

4. What does that establish, and what does it not?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It establishes a pattern of correspondence strong enough that the best explanation is that Luke is presenting Mary in Ark terms, which is a strong claim about how the New Testament itself regards her.

It does not by itself establish the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption, and you should say so before anyone asks. Typology sets a trajectory; it does not define a dogma. Being clear about that is what makes the rest of your case credible.

5. Read Luke 1:28. What does the angel call her?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The greeting uses a perfect passive participle, *kecharitomene*, meaning one who has been graced or favoured, and it functions almost as a name in place of hers. The perfect points to a completed action with an abiding result, which is why the tradition has found it suggestive. The familiar full of grace comes through the Latin *gratia plena* and is a theological rendering rather than the bare sense of the Greek form, so do not argue as though the grammar alone delivers it.

Handle this carefully. The grammar is suggestive, and it is not a proof. Some translations render it favoured one, and a fair-minded interlocutor can hold that reading. The Catholic case for the Immaculate Conception does not rest on this verse alone and you should not claim it does.

DIG DEEPER: The woman and the serpent

Genesis 3:15 sets enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his seed and hers. Revelation 12 shows a woman clothed with the sun, a male child who will rule the nations, and a dragon.

The Church reads these together. Note honestly that Revelation 12 has been read of Mary, of Israel, and of the Church, and that these readings are not exclusive.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full.

The strongest form of the objection.

Count the verses. Outside the infancy narratives, Mary is barely present in the New Testament. She is not mentioned in Romans, or Galatians, or Hebrews, or in any letter where the apostles set out what Christians must believe. Paul refers to her once, without naming her, as a woman.

Meanwhile two of the four things Catholics are required to believe about her were defined in the last two hundred years, from no scriptural text, on the authority of the Church alone. And the devotion that has grown up around her would be unrecognisable to the apostles: titles, apparitions, consecrations, and a level of attention the New Testament simply does not give her.

If this were essential, the apostles would have taught it. Their silence is the evidence.

6. What is fair in that? And what does it assume?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Fair, and concede it: she is not a subject of apostolic argument in the letters, and two dogmas were defined recently and do not rest on proof texts. Anyone who denies either fact is not arguing honestly.

What it assumes is that anything not argued in the epistles cannot be part of the deposit. Test that assumption on something else. The canon of Scripture is not listed in Scripture and was not defined until 1546. The doctrine of the Trinity in its settled vocabulary is fourth-century. Development is how doctrine works, and the objection would remove more than Mary.

On the silence: the Gospels are not silent. Luke gives her the longest speech by any woman in the New Testament, writes her Visitation as an Ark narrative, and twice notes that she kept and pondered these things. John places her at the first sign and at the cross, and records Christ giving her to a disciple as mother. That is not incidental placement.

On devotional excess, concede fully. The Church has warned against exaggeration herself. But a distortion of a practice is not an argument against the practice, and the fix is proportion rather than abolition.

Send

7. Which of the four dogmas do you find hardest? Say why, without defending it.
8. What would it look like to honour her the way Luke does?

Live It This Week

- Read Luke 1 and 2 in one sitting, watching for how Luke frames her.
- Read 2 Samuel 6 and Luke 1:39-56 back to back once more.
- Pray one decade of the rosary slowly, thinking about the mystery rather than counting.

Closing Prayer

Father, you asked a young woman for her consent and she gave it. Give us her willingness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”

Luke 1:38

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- 2 Samuel 6:1-16, the Ark comes to David (live discovery)
- Luke 1:39-56, the Visitation (live discovery, memory verse at v. 38)
- Luke 1:28, the greeting
- Luke 2:19 and 2:51, she kept these things
- Luke 11:27-28, blessed rather
- Mark 6:3 and Mark 15:40, the brothers and the other Mary
- Matthew 1:25 and 2 Samuel 6:23, the word until
- John 2:1-11 and 19:25-27, Cana and the cross
- Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12, the woman and the serpent

Catechism: CCC 484-507, 490-493, 495, 499-501, 966, 971.

Patristic and conciliar: Council of Ephesus, 431. St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies Book III. St. John Damascene, On the Dormition.