

APPARITIONS

Elijah and Moses appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration and so 'Apparitions' have a Biblical basis.

This does not stop them being highly debatable even within the Church.

The Catholic Church takes a lot of time and investigation before accepting incidences of the supernatural.

It has taken note of Mary's 'appearances' by constructing basilicas, churches or chapels to honour Mary's special presence at these locations. Some of the more well-known of these are listed below:

The visitations recognised by the Catholic Church are:

Our Lady of the Snows Italy AD352.....of Walsingham England AD1061....of the Rosary Spain AD1208..... of Sorrows Italy AD1233of Mount Carmel England Alyesford AD1251....of Guadalupe Mexico Juan Diego AD1531of Mercy Italy AD1536of Czestochowa Poland AD1655of Lavang Vietnam AD1698of the Miraculous Medal France AD1830of La Salette France AD846of Lourdes France AD1858of Hope France AD1871of Knock Ireland AD1879of Fatima Portugal AD1917of Beauraing Belgium AD1932of Banneux Belgium AD1933.

Apparitions in Medjugorje (Yugoslavia) since early 1980s.

Verified by the Egyptian government, the Apparitions of Mary in 1987 over the Coptic Church of the Blessed Virgin in Zeitoun, in Cairo, are considered one of the greatest incidents of paranormal phenomenon of the 20th Century.

Many local Christians are travelling to Europe to the locations of present day apparitions.

Whatever one's understanding is of the 'visitations' what is certainly manifest is the wonderful faith of the pilgrims who travel on their own personal journey to a 'thin' place where the spiritual and the material world are at their closest and miracles have been known to occur in mind and body.

MARY THE DISCIPLE

Mary's last recorded words in the Bible are, "**Do whatever He tells you**" John 2:5. A message for us all today. Three years later she was at the foot of His cross. The woman to whom the angel Gabriel had said, "**...the Lord is with you**" Lk 1:28 . was to witness the merciless crucifixion of her own beloved son.

Even whilst bearing the sins of the world, Jesus acknowledged his mother.

Mary and the disciples were in Jerusalem during the growth of the early Christian Church, where they met for constant prayer. Acts 1:14.

The historian Eusebius tells us that after the apostles were expelled from Jerusalem around AD 37 to 42, St. John continued his work in Anatolia from Ephesus. Some Christians believe that Mary came to Ephesus with St. John from Jerusalem and lived here until she died in 64 AD. The house is located at the end of the road from the Magnesia Gate to Mt. Koressos. It was most likely built in the 1st century. It has become a site of pilgrimage.

The early Church fathers believed that Mary was assumed into heaven and they celebrate this each year on August 15th.

This belief existed before the feasts themselves were inaugurated.

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars..." Revelation 12:1

The reformer, Martin Luther said, "...she is rightly called not only the mother of the man, but also the Mother of God...it is certain that Mary is the Mother of the real and true God."

He said that the feasts should 'be observed among Evangelical Catholics as a sign of continuity and order'. This was declared a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church in 1950 by Pope Pius XII and four years later announced that Mary should be regarded as the Queen of Heaven.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches venerate Mary as Theotokos (the Mother of God).

MARY THE WOMAN

Why did Jesus refer to His mother as 'woman' during the wedding feast Jn 2:4 and from the cross (John 19:26).

In today's speak it would seem less than proper but 2000 years ago in Jerusalem it had a much more elevated meaning.

Modern translation such as the NIV now interpret the above references as 'dear woman' to indicate a more respectful tone.

The early Church also made the connection between:

The woman Eve - (Genesis 3:15) "**And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel**",

The woman in Revelation - 12:17 "**Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus**'

The further comparison was that if we have a New Adam in Jesus (Romans 5:19), we have a New Eve in Mary. John Henry Newman's 'Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine' explains it and St. Irenaeus, who lived between 130-200 AD, said that "**the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosened by Mary's obedience**"; that "**what the Virgin Eve bound by unbelief this the Virgin Mary unbound by faith**"; that "**as by a virgin that human race had been given over to death, by a virgin it is saved.**"

Many of the early Church theologians agreed with this view and they could refer to manuscripts long since lost.

There is no explicit statement in the Scriptures that proclaims Mary's 'Assumption'. Assumptions in the Bible include St. Paul informing us that "by faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death" (Heb 11:5) and "Elijah ascended into a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kgs 2:11).

Some Christians interpret an 'implication' in Scripture that Mary was assumed in portraying Mary as the ark of the covenant (Rev 11:19). "**And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the son, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars**" (Rev 12:1).

Scholars have interpreted the imagery of this vision in multiple layers referring to Mary, the Church and Israel. Mary may look the obvious choice "**she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron**". (Rev 12:5), however, some scholars of John's vision regard them as not being so obviously understood.

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The 'appearances' of Mary are a phenomena. There is no Biblical reference to her death and many Christians believe she is

alive with Jesus. Millions of pilgrims (and thousands from England) are travelling to Medjugorje in Bosnia, where Mary is believed to be appearing each month to six villagers.

They return home, lifted up by the power of God in the faith of the pilgrims, to better serve Jesus in their parishes.

Recent Medjugorje messages



"Dear children! God sent me among you out of love that I may lead you towards the way of salvation. Many of you opened your hearts and accepted my messages, but many have become lost on this way and have never come to know the God of love with the fullness of heart. Therefore, I call you to be love and light where there is darkness and sin. I am with you and bless you all. Thank you for having responded to my call." Oct 25th

Also today I call all of you for your hearts to blaze with more ardent love for the Crucified, and do not forget that, out of love for you, He gave His life so that you may be saved. Little children, meditate and pray that your heart may be open to God's love. Thank you for having responded to my call." September

Also today I call you to conversion. May your life, little children, be a reflection of God's goodness and not of hatred and unfaithfulness. Pray, little children, that prayer may become life for you. In this way, in your life you will discover the peace and joy which God gives to those who have an open heart to His love. And you who are far from God's mercy, convert so that God may not become deaf to your prayers and that it may not be too late for you. Therefore, in this time of grace, convert and put God in the first place in your life. Thank you for having responded to my call." August

MARY CHRISTMAS

Mary's importance in Christianity is epitomised in the Christmas story. The pictures of Mary cuddling the baby Jesus safely and tenderly and lovingly in her arms, is one of the world's most iconic images of love.

It is therefore curious that she is regarded rather dismissively by some Protestant Christians, and rarely will you ever hear a sermon in an 'evangelical' church that recognises her role in the evangelisation of the world, through her son. The messenger from God spoke, '**Blessed are you among women**' and all that followed and is to come, because of Jesus, is indissolubly also tied to Mary. Mary's very existence and life of service is central to the Christian message and the Christmas story.

MARY THE EARLY YEARS?

The Roman Catholic Church believes that Mary herself was conceived free from original sin. This is known as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This has been celebrated on December 8th since 1471.

It has, however, been a controversial issue in Christian theology, becoming a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church only in 1854.

As well as the Holy Bible we have references to Mary via writings of many scholars of the early Church and texts such as the Protoevangelion of James. The eastern churches believed that James, the cousin of Jesus was its author and there are frequent references to it in the writings of the early church fathers. The early theologians considered it trustworthy, reliable and credible.

Mary is described as a Jewess, the daughter of Joachim and Ann and was pledged to service in the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem in fulfilment of a pledge made by her parents to an angel who visited them prior to her conception. It tells of how Mary went into service at the Temple at the age of three and

served there for ten years. She took a vow of life-long chastity while in Temple service. At the age of thirteen, she was sent home by the Temple priests to be betrothed to Joseph, a Nazarene carpenter who already had children.

As a member of the Jewish community, she likely followed traditions which called for personal and dietary purity as well as familial religious practices that included temple worship, setting aside a portion of each meal for the poor and the lighting of the lamp to signify the start of Sabbath. She became married to Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth, and probably lived the humble life of a Jewish wife and peasant in Roman-occupied Palestine. She is likely to have been a young teenage mother. Custom would have demanded that she be veiled, and probably wore simple clothes, made of rough cloth in drab colours. However, European tradition romanticised Mary into a serene and beautiful young woman exquisitely dressed.

MARY THE MOTHER

The very blood that spilled from Jesus on the cross and that some Christians believe is also made manifest in the Eucharist, also flowed through the veins of Mary. The life force, the nutrients and the ingredients needed to sustain Jesus in his mother's womb flowed from Mary.

She was entrusted with the awesome responsibility to be the mother of 'God made flesh' and provide the love and tenderness and compassion and gentleness to the One who would show the world the meaning of love. The magnitude of the love that Jesus needed to die for the sins of the world must have some root in the love His mother had for Him and He for her.

Today's psychologists will say it is such a loving bond between mother and son that is instrumental in the development of the son's capacity to love and be loved.

From the moment of supernatural conception to the supernatural death and resurrection of Jesus, Mary's bond was a constant reality and at his most vulnerable - she was there.