



## Who was Mary?

St. Mary is known in the Armenian Church as *Asdvadzamayr-Asdvadzadzin*, the "Mother of God" and the "Bearer of God"-a position doctrinally established at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in the 5th century.

Her life of holiness and purity, and her graceful acceptance of the role to which God called her, as the mother of Jesus Christ, all make Mary one of the pre-eminent exemplars of the Christian faith, whose birth and very conception are occasions for celebration in the church.

Only those aspects of St. Mary's life which are directly related to Christ are recorded in the Gospel. The remainder of her biography is attributed to tradition, which is found in ancient ecclesiastical literature.

In all likelihood, Mary was born in Bethlehem or Nazareth, some 20 years before Christ's nativity. Her parents, Joachim and Anna, were a devout couple whose earnest prayers for a child were answered with the birth of a daughter.

Although Mary was born naturally, she is considered morally pure and immaculate. It is for this reason that the church celebrates not only her birth, but also her conception, which the Armenian and the Greek Orthodox churches observe on December 9, and the Roman Catholic Church celebrates on December 8.

The concept of Mary's moral purity later developed into the question of her Immaculate Conception (from Anna), a doctrine adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in 1854. The Armenian Church, however, does not accept this, as only Christ was immaculately conceived.

However, Mary's purity is unquestioned. According to the teachings of the Armenian Church, at the time of the Annunciation, when the Holy Spirit entered Mary, she was cleansed of all original sin, as she was to be the vessel in which God manifest was to be incarnated.

According to tradition, following the Ascension of Christ, Mary lived out the rest of her days in Jerusalem, cared for by St. John the Evangelist. She died in Jerusalem some 15 years after Christ's Ascension and was buried in her family tomb in Gethsemane.

After she passed away, all the apostles—save Bartholomew who was absent at that time—conducted her funeral with great ceremony at a cave-like tomb in the Garden of Gethsemane. Later, St. Bartholomew returned and wished to see Mary one last time.

He convinced the apostles to open the tomb, but they could not find her body inside. Angels' voices were heard for three days and nights. The apostles interpreted the angels' singing as a sign that our Lord had assumed, or taken up, his mother into heaven as he had promised her.

They found the empty tomb a confirmation of that promise for she had not been dead, but had fallen asleep. For this reason, the church refers to the end of Mary's earthly life as "the dormition" rather than "death."

## **Feasts Related to Mary**

### **Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother-of-God**

The Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother-of-God is a non-variable commemoration and the oldest of all those dedicated to St. Mary. The Armenian Church celebrates this feast day on the nearest Sunday to August 15, a practice adopted at the time of St. Nersess the Graceful.

Assumption comprises a week of fasting, *Navagadik*, and a Memorial Day. In the early centuries, the observance took place over the course of three days; but as arranged by Shnorhali, it was extended to nine days.

The tradition concerning the dormition of the Holy Mother did not become a basic teaching (doctrine) of the church until the 9th century; and it wasn't until the 12th century that the feast was titled "the Assumption."

On the Feast of the Assumption, the [blessing of grapes](#) takes place immediately after the Divine Liturgy.

### **Feast of the Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary**

Although Mary was born naturally to Joachim and Anna, she is considered morally pure and