

Despite the varied methods of celebration, this feast is one that honors Mary's resurrection, her destiny, the glorification of her sinless soul and virginal body, and the consoling image for all of humankind of the ultimate and final hope of heaven. *(excerpted from: *The Essential Mary Handbook*)

Scripture does not give an account of Mary's Assumption into heaven. Nevertheless, Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as God's people. Since Mary best embodies the people of both Old and New Testament, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman's victory. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to belief in Mary's share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven.

COMMENT: In the light of the Assumption of Mary, it is easy to pray her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) with new meaning. In her glory she proclaims the greatness of the Lord and finds joy in God her savior. God has done marvels to her and she leads others to recognize God's holiness. She is the lowly handmaid who deeply revered her God and has been raised to the heights. From her position of strength she will help the lowly and the poor find justice on earth and she will challenge the rich and powerful to distrust wealth and power as a source of happiness.

QUOTE: "In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf. 2 Peter 3:10), as a sign of certain hope and comfort for the pilgrim People of God" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 68). ** (excerpted from: *Saint of the Day*)

DORMITION ABBEY— HOLY LAND

The cone-shaped gray roof and its nearby bell tower are distinctive identifiers of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, a church dedicated to the "falling asleep," or peaceful passing of Mary from this life to the next. Tradition asserts that the Virgin Mary spent the latter years of her life on Mount Zion.

This church was consecrated in 1910 and is in the care of a community of Benedictine monks. Inside this spacious church is a fine mosaic of the Virgin and Child Jesus along with the eight Old Testament prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. Also in this church is a statue of Our Lady "asleep", people are allowed to touch her and say a prayer. (Quite an experience)!

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Assumption of Our Lady

August 15



**Great Queen,
who was assumed to Heaven most gloriously,
in the company of souls drawn by your merits out of Purgatory,
free us from the slavery of sin,
and make us worthy to praise you for all eternity.**

Assumption of Our Lady

*The dogma of faith, infallibly defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950, that Mary, "Immaculate Mother of God ever Virgin, after finishing the course of her life on earth, was taken up in body and soul to heavenly glory." The Church's solemn definition of the Assumption required the belief of the faithful. In these words, Pius XII leaves open the question of whether Mary died before being taken up, though opinions favor her death and burial, as probably in Jerusalem. Many saints and scholars hold that, though buried, Mary's body did not decompose, but was assumed undecayed.

The dogma of the Assumption is distinct from that of Christ's Ascension: Christ rose into heaven through his own power; Mary is given the privilege of being taken up into heaven by means of God's divine power.

When the dogma was declared in 1950, there was no question of new Revelation. The church teaches that this truth is contained in tradition from the very beginning, its foundation being sacred Scripture and witness of the faithful, especially by means of their devotions and their celebration of the liturgy. The Christians of the East celebrated the Memorial of Mary on August 15 as early as the fifth century; and this feast became known as the Dormition, or falling asleep, of Mary. The Church of Rome established the feast of the Dormition of Mary on August 15 in the seventh century, though its title was changed to Assumption by Pope Saint Adrian soon after.

Vatican II calls Mary's Assumption "...a sign of certain hope and comfort to the Pilgrim People of God." Once Mary is taken up into heaven, she is still united with Christ who became incarnated in her and, through this union, she extends her maternal love to all creatures whom God loves. (CCC §966)

This solemnity is possibly the oldest exclusively Marian celebration and remains one of Mary's most important days in the liturgical year. Other than the event of Mary's falling asleep, there is another connected with this feast — her coronation in heaven—they are both included in the celebration but not expressly commemorated.

In the Eastern churches, this celebration is preceded by a period of fasting similar to that of Lent. Hungarians celebrate the Assumption with great solemnity and include pageants and parades in their observances. This custom arose out of a legend in which the first king of Hungary, Saint Stephen, offered the royal crown to Mary, and thereby chose her as the patroness of the whole country.

The custom of processions on the feast of the Assumption seems to have begun with Pope Sergius I (d. 701) who initiated the practice of having liturgical processions on the major feasts of Mary. In some places in Europe, a statue of Mary is carried through the town, symbolically representing her journey to heaven. A special procession called *Candelieri* is conducted in Sardinia where seven huge candlesticks are carried to the church of the Assumption where they are placed beside Mary's shrine. The origin of this custom goes back to the year 1580 when a deadly plague was miraculously stopped on August 15 after Sardinians had vowed to honor Mary every year by offering her these candles.

It was also a medieval practice to conduct a "Blessing of the Herbs" on the Assumption, and thus this feast was sometimes called "Our Lady's Herb Day" in honor of the custom of blessing the medicinal powers of herbs to make them effective against disease.

Other customs associated with the Assumption include these: Armenians bring the first grapes from their vineyards to church on Assumption day; Sicilians observe an abstinence from fruit during the first two weeks of August in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and on the feast day itself present one another with baskets of fruit; in Latin countries, especially Portugal, the boats of fishermen are blessed on the afternoon of the Assumption; and in England and Ireland it is an ancient, Assumption-day custom to bathe in oceans, rivers, or lakes to preserve good health through Mary's intercession. (In the North End of Boston, Mass., (Italian Section) there is also a blessing of the fleet and a four-day feast in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, during the week of August 15th.)