

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS 101

## The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**“Why do Catholics believe that Mary was assumed into heaven, soul and body, when the Bible does not say anything about it?”**

One of the most important things for Christians to remember is that the Church existed before the New Testament was written. In fact, it was early Christians who began writing down the stories about Jesus that had previously been shared only through oral tradition. In addition to the four Gospels, the early Church collected letters that were written to various newly formed Christian communities. In the fourth century, the Church compiled all of these letters and Gospels and put together into what is known today as the New Testament.

Many of the questions non-Catholics have about Catholicism come from the false assumption that the Bible established the Church. The Bible should not be thought of as some kind of “charter” that established Christianity, but rather, God’s Word in the Bible was “spoken” in and through the context of the Church. Therefore, the source of revelation is not only Scripture, but Tradition, also. Jesus Himself attests to this in Sacred Scripture when He tells the Apostles that the Holy Spirit will remind them of the things He had spoken to them *and* teach them new things.<sup>1</sup>

The belief that God assumed Mary, body and soul, into heaven after she died has been part of the Church’s tradition for centuries. Written records of the doctrine of the assumption date back to the third and fourth centuries. Even earlier than that, the Bible itself testifies to the possibility of Mary being assumed into heaven by God. The Gospel of Matthew reports that, “the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (27:52–53). Also, several Old Testament figures were assumed into heaven by God, most notably Enoch and Elijah.

Theologically, the assumption of Mary makes sense since she is the new Ark of the Covenant. In the Old Testament, we read that the Ark of the old Covenant was made of incorruptible wood (acacia wood covered in gold) because it housed the most important reminder of God’s love for the Israelites—the Ten Commandments. However, God eventually spoke a more intimate Word than the Commandments when His Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> God has led us into a New Covenant in, with, and through His Son, as the first letter to the Corinthians and the Gospel of Luke attest to—“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus Christ is the New Covenant, which makes Mary the new Ark of the Covenant, who “housed” the Word of God in her very own womb.<sup>3</sup> If the old Ark was important enough to be made incorruptible, is not the Ark of the final and perfect Covenant important enough, also? By celebrating the assumption of Mary, the Church answers, “Yes!”

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:25-26 “These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

<sup>2</sup> John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 11:19-12:2 “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple... and a woman appeared in heaven clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child.”