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Doctrines describe Mary's special role

*Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.
Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.
Blessed be her glorious Assumption.
Blessed be the name of Mary, virgin and mother.*

The bishops of the United States cited this portion of the "Divine Praises" in their 1973 pastoral letter, "Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith." The prayer repeats key doctrines about Mary: that she was the mother of God, a perpetual virgin, conceived without sin (Immaculate Conception) and assumed into heaven.



Monthly focus on catechetics

These teachings are the fruit of centuries of doctrinal development — evidenced most recently in the papal pronouncements concerning the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950).

The teachings have been restated in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ("*Lumen Gentium*"). And they were reflected upon once again by Pope John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical, "The Mother of the Redeemer" ("*Redemptoris Mater*").

"The Gospels summon us all to recognize the special place the Mother of Jesus has in God's plan for the salvation of mankind," the bishops declared in their 1973 pastoral, which remains a key Marian document for U.S. Catholics. "The teachings of Popes and Councils lead us to an ever clearer understanding of Mary's privileged position in the church."

The bishops went on not only to explore the essential teachings concerning Mary, but also to lament the decrease in the years immediately following the Vatican Council of the "joyful duty" of devotion to Mary, which they said, "has a special function in exalting the dignity of woman and fostering respect for her person."

Mary has held a respected position among Christians since the early days of the church, but not to the same level of doctrinal development, acknowledged Father Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., professor emeritus at Loyola University of Chicago, and a faculty member of the International Marian Research Institute at the Marian Library at the University of Dayton, Ohio.

While the doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus is contained in Scriptures and was understood early on, for example, the doctrine of the

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