

# THE STORY OF MARY



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FROM THE DAWN OF TIME  
TO TODAY

Phillip Campbell

TAN

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## Foreword

Yet another book about Mary? Yes—for as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux once said, “Of Mary, there is never enough!” How much more is it the case that of books about Mary for the young, there is not enough, not nearly enough.

*The Story of Mary* makes an important contribution toward remedying that lack. Like the best of historians, Phillip Campbell is a fine storyteller. He brings young minds vividly into scenes of Our Lady’s earthly life that will help them delve deeper into the mystery and the wonder of the Mother of God.

Yet the author makes sure that readers will also discover the much grander scope of Mary’s story. He begins with her ultimate origins in the mind of God, who before all time predestined her to be the Mother of His Son. And it concludes with her eternal reign in heaven at the right hand of Jesus Christ, the Queen Mother of the King of the Universe.

In between that hidden beginning and that glorious consummation, Campbell offers glimpses of Mary’s story from a multitude of sources: her foreshadowing in the Old

Testament; her holy life alongside her Son in the Gospels; her motherly care in the early Church; her loving presence in the life and thought of the saints; her impact on world cultures; and her powerful interventions in the last two millennia of world history. In this way, he offers compelling evidence that the story of Mary is a magnificent story indeed!

But Campbell does much more than display the transcendent beauty and power of the Mother of God. He also brings young hearts close to the heart of Our Lady, showing her to be their loving Blessed Mother, given to them by her Son as an incomparable gift in some of His last words from the cross. In a final appendix, he focuses on developing a relationship with Mary, seeking to cultivate in them a filial devotion that will last a lifetime.

It is this very devotion, Saint Louis de Montfort reminds us, that provides us a path to the supreme goal of the Christian life: “reaching Jesus perfectly, loving Him tenderly, and serving Him faithfully.”

*Paul Thigpen PhD*  
*Author of A Year with Mary*



## INTRODUCTION

Rome – AD 286

Mathias followed his father down the dark corridor, hollowed from the rocky cave below the earth. His father held his hand, and in the other, a torch to light their way, the orange flames dancing on the jagged walls that dripped with moisture. A cold dampness filled the air, chilling the skin on his arms with bumps. He pulled his tunic closer to his body.

The man his father had called their presbyter led the procession, holding his own torch, while several of Mathias's family members followed behind them, including his uncles, carrying the body of his mother, wrapped in a white, linen cloth.

This was his first time navigating the dark chambers of the catacombs. He had heard tales of the mazelike labyrinth of tombs where the dead were buried. Some stories told of danger, that the walls and ceilings would collapse on those moving through them, or that the Roman soldiers

would perform raids to capture and kill every Christian they could find hiding below the ground; some told of frightening occurrences, claiming the dead rose back to life at night and walked the pathways; some had even become mythical in nature, speaking of secret doors that led to the underworld. He did not know if any of these stories the other children told were true, nor did he care at present. Now, he was only sad about his mother's death.

Father had called her a martyr. Mathias did not know this word, but he was pleased to hear this meant his mother was in paradise now, walking in "green pastures," as his father had put it, with the Jesus he had begun to learn about, the King who had been put to death on the cross just over two hundred years ago. He enjoyed picturing his mother walking in hilly, green fields with this King.

Upon reaching a dead end, the presbyter turned the funeral procession to the right and eventually into a cavern about twenty feet wide. Other bodies wrapped in linen cloths were laid inside rectangular hollows in the walls that appeared as though they had been chiseled by the hands of men. Though these members of the dead—these sleepers—were fully intact, others were not; skulls and bones were scattered on the floor and piled in corners, surrounding small, wooden crosses stuck upright in the ground.

When the entire procession had entered the room, the presbyter began the funeral rites, reading from a scroll and chanting hymns. But Mathias's attention was drawn to a painting that curved down from the ceiling and onto the arched wall above him. Though the painting was faded by time and broken by cracks in the stone, he could see two soft eyes staring back at him, eyes of a woman clothed in a blue gown with thin, golden seams. He did not know who she was, but her gaze awoke something in his heart, a feeling of comfort, of peace. One of her hands



was stretched out, as if she were waiting to take his hand, and the other was turned in the other direction, behind her, with a pointed finger. It was as if she were offering to lead him somewhere new, somewhere better, somewhere not so dark and cold.

When the rites were finished, they laid his mother's body inside one of the hollows. Mathias watched as his father kissed her forehead, his tears dampening the white veil layering her face. Mathias came forward and hugged her as his aunts wailed in agony behind him.

Everyone eventually left except for Mathias and his father. The presbyter led the others out, but advised the two of them to stay behind to spend a moment in recollection and prayer. And there they sat together on the cold

ground in the center of the cavern as Mathias listened to the muted sobs and whispered prayers of his father.

A feeling of helplessness washed over him. He wished there was a way he could take away his father's pain. He wished there was a way he could bring his mother back. Tears welled in his eyes as he considered that he would never be able to hug her again, to taste her famous potato soup, to watch her and his father dance in their home, to pick flowers with her in the fields beyond the city.

He knew not what to do in that moment except stare up at the painting of the woman in blue. He tugged on his father's sleeve. "Papa, who is that woman? She is so beautiful."

His father looked up and smiled through his tears. He put his arm around his son and rubbed his shaggy hair. "That is your Queen, my son. Shall I tell you about her?"

Mathias turned back to the painting. "Yes, Papa, I should like to learn about her."

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This story is one that may not have occurred exactly like this, but is almost assuredly something that took place. And while the details of this story may seem foreign to you, the question Mathias asked his father is one that should take primacy in your life even as a child of these modern times, perhaps *especially* as a child of these times.

"Who is that woman?"

It is likely that you have a painting or statue in your house similar to the one looking over Mathias in that cavern. At the least, this "lady in blue" has looked down on you while you sat in the pews of your church.

You probably know the name of this lady. Does your heart flutter when you hear it?

*Mary.*

It should, for it makes the heart of God flutter.

There are other words you probably associate with her: Our Lady, assumption, immaculate, rosary, miraculous medal, apparition, . . . mother.

We will soon learn about all the mysteries and stories that surround this woman, the most famous woman ever to enter the pages of history. We will embark on a chronicle of her life, beginning in the dawn of time and extending into the very life you lead today, for her life does not consist solely in the moments when her feet tread the Earth; no, her life reaches to the bookends of time itself.

But before we dive into this wondrous tale, let us focus on one detail in particular in the image of which we just read in the story of Mathias and the burial of his martyred mother, for it is a very important point indeed. It is hidden in the meaning behind her posture in the cavern painting.

Do you remember what it was?

She extended her hand to Mathias, as if waiting to take his hand, and with her other hand, she pointed behind and above her.

Where do you think she was pointing to?

Better yet, *who* do you think she was pointing to?

Let us see if her story yields an answer to this most important question.



## CHAPTER 1

# God Dreams of a Woman

### **The Predestined Mother**

Have you ever wondered if God dreams?

We cannot know the answer to that because so much about God is a mystery to us. But it's not likely he "dreams" the way we do. Nonetheless, we sometimes apply familiar and human language to the actions of God to help us to better understand him. This is what Archbishop Fulton Sheen was doing when he said that Mary was "the Woman whom even God dreamed of before the world was made."

Now sometimes you might hear that a newly married couple "dreams" of their future children, meaning they look lovingly towards a future when those children might exist. But none of us dream about our parents, since, of course, they came before us. Why would we dream about them when they've always been with us?

God is different, however, because, unlike us, He is all powerful and can do anything He wishes. When He decided to be born into the world as a man, He was able to select His own mother, even to create her to His liking. And it is a wonderful thought to picture God picturing Mary, dreaming up her immaculate beauty, both physical and spiritual. Who could blame Him for making His mother perfect? Wouldn't you, if you could?

Perhaps Fulton Sheen simply wanted to give us a poetic image of God pondering the wonders of His mother. But is there more to this? Did God really think of her *before the world was made*?

We know that Mary was born just over two thousand years ago, probably in or near the city of Galilee, where Sacred Scripture tells us she lived when the angel Gabriel visited her (see Lk 1:26). But this story of Mary we are about to tell goes back far beyond that, indeed into the distant reaches of time before time.

It turns out Bishop Sheen wasn't just being poetic. Church teaching actually says that Mary was the "predestined" mother; *predestined* is a word that means something is determined ahead of time. This teaching can be found in the Second Vatican Council document, *Lumen Gentium* (56). Still more, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "from all eternity," God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son (CCC 488).

This means that to tell the story of Mary, we have to go back before the world was made.

### **The Trial of the Angels and a Heavenly War**

Let us begin with the creation of the angels, the purely spiritual creatures God created before us. We all know the unfortunate story of what happened with Lucifer, the wisest and most beautiful of the angels. His rebellion



against God set off a terrible chain of events that still reverberates to this day.

Usually, when you ask someone why Lucifer rebelled, they will say because of his pride, that he wanted to be like God or take the place of God. But remember Lucifer was a very intelligent creature, so would he have believed he could become like God, or take the Creator's place? Would he not have been smart enough to know this was a pointless ambition? It would be like you believing you could become president of the United States . . . *tomorrow*; you are smart enough to know that could never happen.

Some Church Fathers, theologians, and saints have speculated that, while yes, it was Lucifer's pride that led to his downfall, something had to stoke his pride and get him angry, some *event*. This event brings us back to Mary.

Now what you are about to learn is not explicit Church teaching or dogma. There are certain matters concerning the spiritual realm that will always remain a mystery to us. But we do have the writings of wise Church figures, as well as visions of the mystics, to paint us a picture of what took place before time itself. One mystic in particular we will look at is the seventeenth-century Spanish nun, Maria of Agreda, who received spiritual revelations about Mary and Jesus, which she recorded in her work *The Mystical City of God*.

Before we describe one such vision in particular, we should discuss the difference between public and private revelation. While Maria's work was approved by many bishops and popes, and she was declared venerable by the Church shortly after her death (meaning she is on the path to sainthood), her visions are considered *private revelation*. Public revelation concerns matters that *must* be believed if we are to be Catholic, such as anything the Bible reveals. Private revelations, meanwhile, are visions

or messages given to an individual or a group of individuals. We are not required to believe in their authenticity, and we must use great discernment in determining their validity. But they can greatly help our faith, and many have been deemed worthy of belief by the Church (such as Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Fatima, which we will eventually discuss).

With this understanding in mind, let us chronicle a vision Maria had that tells of the test, or the trial, of the angels.

As the story goes, there were three distinct tests given to the angels. In the first, the Triune God revealed Himself in all His glory—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and all the angels, including Lucifer, adored Him, though Lucifer did so more out of duty than love.

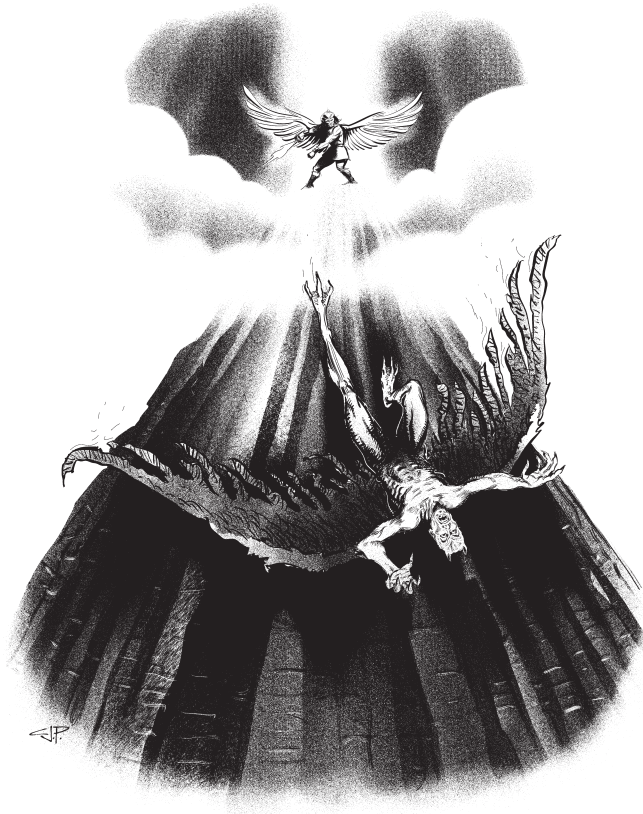
But then came the second test: God revealed that He would create creatures inferior to the angels who bore a human nature, and He would take on this nature in order to raise up these creatures into the divine life. This, of course, was the human race. At hearing that the Second Person of the Trinity was to become one of these *lowly* humans, and that the angels would have to worship this God-man, Lucifer boiled with rage.

Let us listen to the words of Maria:

To this command all the obedient and holy Angels submitted themselves and they gave their full assent and acknowledgment with a humble and loving subjection of the will. But Lucifer, full of envy and pride, resisted and induced his followers to resist likewise, as they in reality did, preferring to follow him and disobey the divine command. This wicked prince persuaded them, that he would be their chief and that he would set up a government independent and separate from Christ. So great was the

blindness which envy and pride could cause in an angel, and so pernicious was the infection that the contagion of sin spread among innumerable other angels.

Lucifer's rebellion had begun. Legions of prideful and disobedient angels, under his charge, plotted to oppose the Trinity. A war broke out in heaven, and Saint Michael and the good angels battled to defend God's holy honor. Saint John describes this angelic battle in the book of Revelation, something we will return to soon enough.



But God had one more test—a third—for the angels, one that would enrage Lucifer all the more. Not only would he have to worship the God-Man, but the Incarnation of this God-Man would take place through *a woman*, a perfect and beautiful creature who would give Him flesh. This woman was to be “the Queen and Mistress of all the creatures.”

The good angels vowed to honor this beautiful lady, but the pitch of Lucifer’s pride only increased. Serving the God-Man was bad enough, but to serve this woman who bore no divinity? Thus followed his famous declaration of “*Non serviam!*”—“I will not serve!”

He opposed violently the decree that he would be inferior to the Mother of the Incarnate Word, screaming out, “Unjust are these commands and injury is done to my greatness; this human nature which Thou, Lord, lookest upon with so much love and which Thou favor-est so highly, I will persecute and destroy. To this end I will direct all my power and all my aspirations. And this Woman, Mother of the Word, I will hurl from the position in which Thou hast proposed to place her, and at my hands, the plan, which Thou settest up, shall come to naught.”

Thus, according to Maria’s private revelation, Lucifer rebelled because his pride was wounded both by the revelation of the Incarnation and by the woman who would bring about the God-Man. One of his last cries before being hurled from heaven was a vow that he would battle the woman and persecute and destroy the human race.

Again, this is only private revelation, and as Catholics we are not required to believe the details of this story. But, remember, the Church teaches that Mary was the “predestined” mother, and that God “from all eternity” chose Mary to be the mother of His Son. It seems, then,

that this story Maria tells us could be true, that God did have Mary in mind even before the creation of the world. And as we will see in the next chapter, the first book of the Bible gives us more details about this battle that Maria tells us would come to pass between Lucifer and “the woman.”

But before turning to that next chapter, a final point must be made.

### **The Purposes of the Incarnation**

When we say that Mary was the “predestined” mother and that “from all eternity” God chose her to be His mother, and we hear this story from a mystic about God revealing His plans for the Incarnation before the creation of the world, we may wonder: Does this mean Jesus would have come even if Adam and Eve had not fallen into sin? Isn’t this why Jesus came, to save us from our sins?

Church theologians have different answers. Some think God planned the Incarnation because He could see the future fall of humanity, and He knew He would rescue us from it. The *Catechism* gives several reasons for the Incarnation, and yes, one of them is for humanity’s redemption through Christ’s death on the cross. But this is not the *only* reason the *Catechism* gives. It also says:

- The Word became flesh so that thus we might know God’s love (458).
- The Word became flesh to be our model for holiness (459).
- The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature” (460).

All three of these reasons for the Incarnation would still be valid even if Adam and Eve had never sinned. He came

to introduce us to God's love, to show us how to be holy, and to allow us to share in the life of God. We would need these aids even if we were not sinful creatures.

Some theologians, including Pope Benedict XVI, believe that the reason for the Incarnation was God's desire to unite Himself to us, to lift us up into His life. Saint Athanasius, a Doctor of the Church, wrote that, "The Son of God became man so that we might become God." And the means by which He chose to do this, the way in which He would introduce us to His love, teach us how to be holy, and share in His very life, was Mary. This is why some call Mary "the ladder of heaven," or "the heavenly ladder," because Jesus descended from His heavenly throne through her (and as we will see when we discuss Mary's intercessory role, we also can climb to Christ through her).

Now, let us move forward with our story. As we said, the battle lines were drawn after Lucifer's rebellion. Christ tells us Lucifer fell "like lightning" from heaven (Lk 10:18), falling to Earth, where he took dominion as the prince of this world. There he took the form of a serpent, slithering into a garden. And this is where we will journey next.