

The last five decades of the rosary are called the glorious mysteries. As you pray each of the ten Hail Marys, you meditate on some aspect of our faith. The first three of the glorious mysteries are events we celebrate each year during the Easter season: the Resurrection of Christ, his Ascension into heaven, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost. The final two mysteries of the rosary are dedicated to Mary: Today's feast, her Assumption into heaven, and a belief we celebrate a week later, the Crowning of Mary as our Queen and Mother.

Today we affirm our belief that, at the end of her life, God took Mary, body and soul, into heaven. We call this "taking up" her "assumption". The Book of Genesis teaches that death entered the world because of sin; Saint Paul also says that we die because of sin. However, in Mary's case, we believe that God prepared her to be the mother of Jesus by preserving her from sin from the first moment of her conception. We celebrate our belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception each year on December 8. Logically, then, since Mary had no sin from the beginning of her life, she did not experience the end of life in the same way that other humans do. Instead, she was taken up into heaven in an act we call her assumption.

The assumption of Mary is not found in the bible. Rather, we deduce it from various scriptural passages. For example, in the First Book of Chronicles, we read about a procession of the ark of the covenant to the place David had prepared for it. This was not Noah's ark, but a portable box containing the two tablets of the law, the rod of Aaron and some of the manna from the desert. The ark brought the presence of God into the community, and that is why the tabernacle in many Catholic Churches such as ours resembles descriptions of the ark: It is decorated with angels, and it contains the holy bread come down from heaven. Mary is like the ark of the covenant because she carried Christ, the bread of life, in her womb. She became a living tabernacle for the living God. Because the First Book of Chronicles speaks of a procession of the ark to its special place, it foreshadows the Assumption of Mary, who processed at the end of her life to a place God had prepared for her.

That image also appears in the Book of Revelation, where we hear of a woman and child who are in danger, but the son becomes the ruler of all the nations, and the mother goes into the desert to a place God had prepared for her.

We celebrate the Assumption of Mary as a holyday of obligation each year; this year it falls on a Sunday. It appears on the calendar in order to give us hope. Mary, who was fully human, has already received the reward promised to those who are faithful to Christ. She had a good head start, of course, because of her Immaculate Conception, but now she has become our head start. In spite of our daily sin, she pleads for us before the throne of God. We remember Mary's assumption today and each time we pray the glorious mysteries of the rosary, trusting that she will intercede before God on our behalf, so that Christ may seat us with her at the end of our days.