

The many names of Mary

Shakespeare said, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Perhaps that’s true, but when it comes to Jesus’ mother, Catholics have many ways of addressing her.

Names connect us to one another and to God. In the Book of Exodus, when Abraham first encounters God, he asks the Lord his name. The Lord responds, “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that God revealed himself to us by making his name known (see No. 203). Likewise, the many names of Mary reveal her many aptitudes such as saint, helpmate and mother of us all.

Formal Titles for Mary

Mary’s formal titles derive from the Church’s teachings and dogmas about Mary and her role in salvation.

- **Blessed Virgin Mary:** This refers to the fact that Mary is ever-virgin – before, during and after the birth of Jesus.
- **Mother of God:** Officially given to Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 431 under the Greek term of Theotokos (one who bears the One who is God), this title recognizes that her son Jesus is both fully God and fully man.
- **Our Lady:** A title deriving from courtly honors, often used for noble women and queens, it appears in many languages – for example, Madonna, Notre Dame, Nuestra Señora
- **Queen of Heaven:** As the mother of Jesus, Mary takes her place by his side as queen and is addressed as such.
- **Immaculate Conception:** This title recognizes that Mary was conceived without original sin.
- **The Assumption:** Refers to the fact that Mary was bodily taken up (assumed) into heaven after her death.

Epitaphs

An epitaph is a short text giving praise and honor to a person. Mary's epitaphs give insight into her character and position in the church.

- Full of Grace: The Angel Gabriel called Mary this in Luke 1:28.
- Star of the Sea: First used by St. Jerome, this reference signifies Mary's role as a sign of hope and as a guiding star, leading to her Son.
- Morning/Evening Star: The first star to be seen in the sky in both the morning and the evening, this points to Mary as the first Christian.
- Cause of Our Joy: Her "yes" to God is the reason we can rejoice in our salvation.
- Throne of Wisdom: Jesus, along with the Holy Spirit, is considered the source of wisdom. Because Jesus as a child sat on Mary's lap, she is the "throne" of that wisdom.
- Mother of the Church: Mary is our mother and the mother of all believers.

Family activity

At family mealtimes, go around the table and ask each person to say their favorite name for Mary. Then pray a Hail Mary together to honor Mary in this month of the Holy Rosary.

Mary is our exemplar of holiness, hope and witness of faith. Therefore, we honor her with these and many more titles. For more background on these titles, see the Catechism (especially Nos. 487-501).