

The Assumption of the Immaculate Conception

Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 966.)



It was on November 1, 1950, that the Venerable Servant of God, Pope Pius XII, issued his Apostolic Constitution, *Munificentissimus Deus*, declaring the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven a dogma of Faith to be celebrated on August 15th. **Since he avoided using the word “death,” the question arose: Did Mary die or not?** It is commonly believed that Our Lady did experience physical death, but her death was unique, unlike any other, because she was unlike any other. Rev. M.J. Sheeben, *Mariology*, Vol. II, calls it a holocaust of love.

For Mary's death was to be neither an expiatory death [like that of Christ on Calvary] nor a death of punishment [like that of human beings born with original sin]. Moreover, under the cross she had been a sharer in the sufferings of Christ's death...Her death came in the form of a dissolution resulting from the supernatural power of divine love, as a consuming of the natural vital strength by the languishing of her love, or by the violence of an ecstasy of love which separated the soul from the body, or because by her love Mary prevailed upon God not to maintain her bodily life any longer. Hence, Mary's death appears as a holocaust of love. The sacrifice, made under the cross in the greatest spiritual sorrow, was thereby outwardly completed in a sweet and loving manner as in a slumber of love.



The Eastern Church refers to that “slumber of love” as “The Dormition or falling asleep” of Our Lady, indicating that it was a unique and singular event, peaceful and without pain, the fulfillment of her burning desire to be reunited with her Son. St. Francis de Sales wrote: **“Now, since it is certain that the Son died of love and that the Mother died of the death of the Son, we must not doubt that the Mother died of love.”**

Where was Our Lady's body entombed and where did the Assumption take place? There are two traditions, one is the Jerusalem Tradition. After the Ascension of Jesus, evidence speaks of Mary remaining in Jerusalem and Bethany for some time. Tradition says she often walked the Way of the Cross of her beloved Son. St. Alphonsus Ligouri (+1787) was aware of this tradition, and wrote in *The Glories of Mary*: How fitting that she would have walked His Way of the Cross one last time! **“She then once more visited the holy places of Jerusalem, tenderly taking leave of them, and especially of Mount Calvary, where her beloved Son died. She then retired into her poor cottage, there to prepare for death.”** The claim for Jerusalem comes from the *Transitus Mariae apocrypha*, a body of texts treating specifically of the Dormition and Assumption, believed to date back to the earliest centuries of the Catholic Faith. Not all apocryphal sources have been condemned by the Church; the Church has a great respect for ancient texts. An ancient Greek text, *Codex Vaticanus No. 1982*, tells of Jesus' instructions to St. Peter for the Virgin's interment. **“Go**

out of the city to the left, and you will find a new tomb. There you will place the body." The city is Jerusalem; the destination is Gethsemane. St. Germanus of Constantinople, (c. 733) in a homily on the Dormition stated that **"the disciples of the Lord gathered with the throng in your presence, O Gethsemane, for the funeral of the Ever-Virgin Mary."** St. John Damascene (+ c. 750) also described Our Lady's funeral procession: **"Then they reached the most sacred Gethsemane...and thus the immaculate body was laid in the tomb."**

The Book of the Most Holy Virgin, the Mother of God (c. 6th century), attributed to Pseudo-Melito, mentions the Virgin's burial: **"But the Apostles carrying Mary came into the place of the valley of Josaphat which the Lord had showed them, and laid her in a new tomb and shut the sepulcher.**



Church of the Assumption or Tomb of Mary
Icon in the Church of Assumption in Jerusalem

Since the apostles had been sent to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, the Archangel Gabriel summoned each of them back to Jerusalem to be with Mary during her final days. Some were supernaturally transported to be there on time. It is said that Thomas, being in India, did not arrive until the third day after Mary's funeral. The other apostles took him to Mary's tomb but when they opened it, there was no body. Thomas wept bitterly for not having been there to see Mary one last time, but as they gazed up toward the sky, they saw her glorified body being taken up to heaven. Tradition tells us Mary tossed the cord she wore around her waist to Thomas to console him. This relic, "the cord of Thomas," was taken with him to India but is now preserved in St. Mary Church of the Holy Belt in Syria.



The Church of the Assumption or Tomb of Mary is located in the Kidron Valley, also called the Valley of Josaphat, between the city of Jerusalem and Gethsemane as recorded in these ancient accounts. The Church of the Dormition was erected by the Eastern Church on Mount Zion in Jerusalem as well. The Eastern Church celebrates the feast of the Assumption on August 28.

The second Tradition, the Ephesus Tradition, claims Ephesus is the place of Our Lady's death and burial, based on the Gospel account of Jesus, who, from the cross, entrusted His Mother to the beloved disciple, John. He and Mary may have stayed in Jerusalem for some time, but with the persecution of Christians, John took Mary to safety in Ephesus where he built a home for her. This home, revered as a Shrine for millions of Christians and Muslims, was first found in 1881 by Abbe Gouyet, of Paris, who used Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich's descriptions of the

home to find it, but his accounts were ignored. In 1891, explorers found the site in Ephesus, a vital Graeco-Roman city where the first large Christian Church dedicated to the Virgin, the Church of St. Mary, was erected. The Council of Ephesus was held there in 431. At that time, no church could be built to honor a saint unless they had lived there or died there. At this Council Mary was declared the **Theotokos**, Mother of God, in refuting the Nestorian heresy which denied the two natures in the one divine person of Jesus, and that Mary was Mother of the Person, not the nature. Since the 8th century, the Syrian Jacobite Church upheld the Ephesus Tradition, which aligned with many historians and popes. The Ephesian Christians called the chapel at Mary's home Panaya Kapula, Gate or House of Our Lady, and they came there to celebrate the Assumption each year on August 15. Pope Leo XIII was a strong defender of the Ephesus Tradition. In 1902 there was an apparition of Our Lady and miraculous cures there. Pope St. Pius X, Pope St. Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II made special pilgrimages to the shrine of Mary's House. In 1914, Pope St. Pius X granted a Plenary Indulgence to those who visited the Shrine, and in 1950, Venerable Pope Pius XII reconfirmed that indulgence after the definition of the Dogma of the Assumption. He also elevated the Church of St. Mary, the tomb of St. John, and the house of Mary to the status of Holy Places. Pope St. John XXIII called Ephesus the new Holy City for the modern world.



Blessed Anne Catherine gives a magnificent account of the apostles gathered around Mary's bed, celebrating Mass, giving her Holy Communion, and praying with her, and how, when she died, the women embalmed her body and the apostles then processed and carried it to the tomb John had prepared behind her home. She describes Thomas coming late and giving witness to the empty tomb and the resurrected Virgin being assumed into heaven. Doubting Thomas gives us two great testimonies of Faith, first in the Resurrection of Jesus, and then in the Resurrection of Jesus' Mother and her glorious ascent into heaven. Our Lady's Assumption is a clear reminder to all of us that we must constantly remember that our destiny is not this earth but heaven, that we must fix our minds not on the perishable things of earth but on the everlasting things of the spiritual kingdom of her beloved Son, and that we are called to share in Christ's Resurrection as well.

References: <https://ssp.org/en/news-events/news/where-did-assumption-take-place-4650>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girdle_of_Thomas; info@monasteryicons.com; <https://www.seetheholylan.net/church-of-the-dormition/>

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