

1 Mary and Original Sin

2 Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* First John 1:8 adds, *"If any man*
3 *says he has no sin he is a liar and the truth is not in him."* These texts could not be clearer for millions of
4 Protestants: *"How could anyone believe Mary was free from all sin in light of these Scripture passages?*
5 *What's more, Mary herself said, 'My soul rejoices in God my savior' in Luke 1:47. She clearly understood*
6 *herself to be a sinner if she admits to needing a savior."*

7 **Not a few Protestants are surprised to discover that the Catholic Church actually agrees that Mary was**
8 **"saved."** Indeed, Mary needed a savior! However, Mary was **"saved"** from sin in a most sublime manner.

9 **She was given the grace to be "saved" completely from sin so that she never committed even the**
10 **slightest transgression.** Protestants tend to emphasize God's "salvation" almost exclusively to the
11 forgiveness of sins actually committed. However, Sacred Scripture indicates that salvation can also refer
12 to man being protected from sinning before the fact: *"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling*
13 *and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our*
14 *Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now*
15 *and for ever,"* (Jude 24-25).

16 **EXPLANATION:** Six hundred years ago, the great Franciscan theologian **Duns Scotus** explained that falling
17 into sin could be likened to a man approaching unaware a deep ditch. If he falls into the ditch, he needs
18 someone to lower a rope and save him. But if someone were to warn him of the danger ahead,
19 preventing the man from falling into the ditch at all, he would be saved from falling in the first place.

20 Likewise, Mary was saved from sin by receiving the grace to be preserved from it. But she was still saved.
21 **But what about "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) and "if any man says he has no sin he is a liar and the**
22 **truth is not in him"** (1 John 1:8)? Wouldn't "all" and "any man" include Mary? On the surface, this
23 sounds reasonable. But this way of thinking carried to its **logical conclusion** would list Jesus Christ in the
24 company of sinners as well. No faithful Christian would dare say that. Yet no Christian can deny the plain
25 texts of Scripture declaring Christ's full humanity, either. Thus, to take 1 John 1:8 in a **strict, literal sense**
26 would apply "any man" to Jesus as well. The truth is, Jesus Christ was an exception to Romans 3:23 and 1
27 John 1:8. And the Bible tells us he was in Hebrews 4:15: *"Christ was tempted in all points even as we are*
28 *and yet he was without sin."* The question now is, *are there any other exceptions to this rule?* Yes—

29 millions of them. **Both Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:9 deal with personal rather than original sin.** (Romans
30 5 deals with original sin.) And there are **two exceptions** to that general biblical norm as well. But for now,
31 we will simply deal with **Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8.** First **John 1:8** obviously **refers to personal sin**
32 because in the very next verse, John tells us, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us*
33 *our sins."* **We do not confess original sin; we confess personal sins.** The context of Romans 3:23 makes
34 clear that it too refers to personal sin: *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks*
35 *for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one. Their*
36 *throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their*
37 *mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* (vv. 10-14).

38 **Original sin** is not something we do; it is something we've inherited. Romans 3 deals with personal sin
39 because it speaks of sins committed by the sinner. With this in mind, consider this: has a baby in the
40 womb or a child of two ever committed a personal sin? No. **To sin, a person has to know that the act he**
41 **is about to perform is sinful while freely engaging his will in carrying it out.** Without the proper
42 faculties to enable them to sin, children before the age of accountability and anyone who does not have
43 the use of his intellect and will cannot sin. So there are and have been millions of exceptions to Romans
44 3:23 and 1 John 1:8. Still, how do we know that Mary is an exception to the norm of *"all have sinned"*?
45 And more specifically, is there biblical support for this claim? Yes, there is much biblical support.
46 And [the angel Gabriel] came to [Mary] and said, **"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"** But she was
47 greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the
48 angel said to her, **"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God"** (Luke 1:28-30).

49 **Many Protestants will insist that this text is little more than** a common greeting of the archangel
50 Gabriel to Mary. *"What does this have to do with Mary being without sin?"* Yet, the truth is, according to

Mary herself, this was no common greeting. The text reveals Mary to have been **“greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be”** (Luke 1:29). What was it about this greeting that was so uncommon for Mary to react this way? We can consider at least two key aspects.

- 1) First, according to biblical scholars (as well as Pope John Paul II), the angel did more than simply greet Mary. The angel actually **communicated a new name or title to her** (see *Redemptoris Mater* 8,9). In Greek, the greeting was *kaire*, *kekaritomene*, or **“hail, full of grace.”** Generally speaking, when one greeted another with *kaire*, a name or title would be found in the immediate context. “*Hail, king of the Jews*” in John 19:3 and “*Claudias Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greeting*” (Acts 23:26) are two biblical examples of this.

The fact that the angel replaces Mary’s name in the greeting with “*full of grace*” was anything but common. This would be analogous to me speaking to one of our tech guys at Catholic Answers and saying, “*Hello, he who fixes computers.*”

In Hebrew culture, names and name changes tell us something permanent about the character and calling of the one named. Just recall the name changes of **Abram to Abraham** (from “*father*” to “*father of the multitudes*”) in Genesis 17:5, **Saray to Sarah** (“*my princess*” to “*princess*”) in Genesis 17:15, and **Jacob to Israel** (“*supplanter*” to “*he who prevails with God*”) in Genesis 32:28.

In each case, **the names reveal something permanent about the one named**. Abraham and Sarah transition from being a “*father*” and “*princess*” of one family to being “*father*” and “*princess*” or “*mother*” of the entire people of God (see Rom. 4:1-18; Isa. 51:1-2). They become patriarch and matriarch of God’s people forever. Jacob/Israel becomes the patriarch whose name, “*he who prevails with God*,” continues forever in the Church, which is called “*the Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16). The people of God will forever “*prevail with God*” in the image of the patriarch Jacob.

What’s in a name? According to Scripture, quite a lot.

St. Luke uses the perfect passive participle, *kekaritomene*, as his “*name*” for Mary. This word literally means “*she who has been graced*” in a completed sense. This verbal adjective, “*graced*,” is not just describing a simple past action. Greek has another tense for that. The perfect tense is used to indicate that an action has been completed in the past, resulting in a present state of being. **“Full of grace” is Mary’s name.** So what does it tell us about Mary? Well, the average Christian is not completed in grace and in a permanent sense (see Phil. 3:8-12). But according to the angel, Mary is. **You and I sin, not because of grace, but because of a lack of grace, or a lack of our cooperation with grace, in our lives.** This greeting of the angel is one clue into the unique character and calling of the Mother of God. **Only Mary is given the name “full of grace,”** and in the perfect tense, indicating that this permanent state of Mary was completed.

- 2) **The Old Testament Ark of the Covenant was a true icon of the sacred.** Because it contained the presence of God symbolized by **three types of the coming Messiah—the manna, the Ten Commandments, and Aaron’s rod—it had to be pure and untouched by sinful man** (see 2 Sam. 6:1-9 and Exod. 25:10ff; Num. 4:15).

In the New Testament, the new ark is not an inanimate object, but a person: the Blessed Mother. How much more pure would the new ark be when we consider the old ark was a mere “*shadow*” in relation to it (see Heb. 10:1)? This image of Mary as the Ark of the Covenant is an indicator that Mary would fittingly be free from all contagion of sin to be a worthy vessel to bear God in her womb. And most importantly, just as the Old Covenant ark was pristine from the moment it was constructed, with explicit divine instructions, in Exodus 25, so would Mary be pure from the moment of her conception. God, in a sense, prepared his own dwelling place in both the Old and New Testaments. The Ark of the Covenant contained three “**types**” of **Jesus inside**: manna, Aaron’s rod, and the Ten Commandments. In Hebrew, commandment (*dabar*) can be translated “**word**.” **Compare:** Mary carried the fulfillment of all these types in her body. Jesus is the “**true [manna] from heaven**” (John 6:32), the **true “High Priest”** (Heb. 3:1), and “**the word made flesh**” (John 1:14).

The **glory cloud** (Hebrew *Anan*) was representative of the Holy Spirit, and it “overshadowed” the Ark when Moses consecrated it in Exodus 40:32-33. The Greek word for “overshadow” found in the Septuagint is a form of *episkiasei*. Compare: “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35). The Greek word for “overshadow” is *episkiasei*. David “leapt and danced” before the Ark when it was being carried into Jerusalem in procession in 2 Samuel 6:14-16. Compare: As soon as Elizabeth heard the sound of Mary’s salutation, John the Baptist “leaped for joy” in her womb (see Luke 1:41-44). After a manifestation of the power of God working through the ark, David exclaims, “*How can the ark of the Lord come unto me?*” Compare: After the revelation to Elizabeth about the true calling of Mary, who was carrying God in her womb, Elizabeth exclaims, “*Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*” (Luke 1:43).

The Ark of the Lord “*remained in the house of Obededom . . . three months*” in 2 Samuel 6:11. Compare: “*Mary remained with [Elizabeth] for about three months*” (Luke 1:56).

It is important for us to recall that New Covenant fulfillments are always more glorious and more perfect than their Old Testament types, which are “*but a shadow of the good things to come*” in the New Covenant (Heb. 10:1). With this in mind, let us consider the revelation of Mary as the “*New Eve*.” After the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, God promised the advent of another “**woman**” in Genesis 3:15, or a “**New Eve**” who would oppose Lucifer, and whose “seed” would crush his head. This “**woman**” and “**her seed**” would reverse the curse, so to speak, that the original “**man**” and “**woman**” had brought upon humanity through their disobedience. It is most significant here to note that “Adam” and “Eve” are revealed simply as “the man” and “the woman” before the woman’s name was changed to “Eve” (Hebrew, “mother of the living”) after the Fall (see Gen. 2:21ff). When we then look at the New Covenant, Jesus is explicitly referred to as the “**last Adam**,” or the “**New Adam**” in 1 Cor. 15:45. And **Jesus himself indicates that Mary is the prophetic “woman” or “New Eve”** of Genesis 3:15 when he refers to his mother as “**woman**” in John 2:4 and 19:26. Moreover, St. John refers to Mary as “**woman**” eight times in Revelation 12.

As the first Eve brought death to all of her children through disobedience and heeding the words of the ancient serpent, the devil, the “*New Eve*” of Revelation 12 brings life and salvation to all of her children through her obedience.

The same “**serpent**” who deceived the original woman of Genesis is revealed, in Revelation 12, to fail in his attempt to overcome this new woman. The New Eve overcomes the serpent, and as a result, **“the serpent is angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God, and bear testimony to Jesus”** (Rev. 12:17).

If Mary is the New Eve and New Testament fulfillments are always more glorious than their Old Testament antecedents, it would be unthinkable for Mary to be conceived in sin. If she were, she would be inferior to Eve, who was created in a perfect state, free from all sin.