



*Catechetical Series:*

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What Catholics Believe & Why

# THE TOMB OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**Behold The Truth**

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith  
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Based on the archeological findings of  
B. Bagatti, M. Piccirillo, and A. Prodomo, O.F.M.  
as presented in  
*New Discoveries at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane,*  
L. Sciberras, translator,  
Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975.



# The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

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- ❖ We believe the Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven at the end of her earthly life.
- ❖ Christians have always believed this to be true.
- ❖ In 1950, Pope Pius XII elevated the doctrine of Mary's Assumption to the level of a dogma, the highest level of Church teaching.





## The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

- ❖ Saint John, whom Jesus had asked to care for Mary for the remainder of her days on earth, records in the *Book of Revelation* a vision he received of her dwelling bodily in Heaven: “And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” 12:1



## The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

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- ❖ The Evangelist goes on to explain Mary's Assumption in conjunction with Christ's Ascension, writing: "Her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Rev. 12:5-6





# The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

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- ❖ The greatest proof of the Assumption outside of Scripture may be the simple fact that no city in history has ever claimed to have Mary's mortal remains.
- ❖ This is significant given the Church's penchant for venerating the relics of the saints.
- ❖ Certainly the relics of Mary, the most revered of all the saints, would be highly prized if they existed.
- ❖ But no one has ever made such a claim.



## Mary's Tomb

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- ❖ There are two different traditions concerning the place of Mary's passing: one involving Jerusalem and the other Ephesus.
- ❖ Of the two, the Jerusalem tradition is older and better substantiated.





## Mary's Tomb

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- ❖ An empty first-century tomb was discovered at the site of Mary's passing, near the Garden of Gethsemane in 1972 by renowned archeologist, Bellarmino Bagatti, and his associates.





## Controversies

- ❖ Some scholars have doubted the authenticity of this tomb since it is not mentioned in the writings of the early Church Fathers who lived in Palestine.
- ❖ As Bagatti points out, however, Mary's tomb was generally avoided by early Christians of Gentile origin because it stood on the property of the Judeo-Christians, who "were considered schismatics if not heretics." *New Discoveries*, p. 15
- ❖ For the same reason, other holy sites, such as the Upper Room, do not appear in the early writings either.





## Controversies

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- ❖ It is also true that Roman forces under General Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., concealing sacred sites beneath the rubble.
- ❖ Then in 135 A.D. the Emperor Hadrian leveled the city a second time with the express purpose of building pagan temples atop the ruins of holy sites.
- ❖ These sites were not recovered until the 4<sup>th</sup> century or later.





## Rediscovery of the Tomb

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- ❖ In time, a Christian church was erected at the site of Mary's passing.
- ❖ Over the centuries the view of her empty tomb was gradually obscured by subsequent layers of construction that included extensive work done by the Crusaders in the Middle Ages.
- ❖ Finally, a chance flooding of the church made the original rock-hewn walls of the tomb visible again. *New Discoveries*, p. 9





## *Transitus Mariae*

- ❖ The earliest extant writings on the Assumption are various apocryphal texts that come under the general heading of the *Transitus Mariae* or *Passing of Mary*.
- ❖ This literature existed virtually everywhere in the ancient world, appearing in multiple languages, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic.
- ❖ The early date and universality of the *Transitus Mariae* indicate the story is of apostolic origin.





## *Transitus Mariae*

- ❖ Although the *Transitus* story was once thought to have originated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century or later, certain theological terms used in a version attributed to Leucius, a disciple of Saint John, confirm an origin date either in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century. *New Discoveries*, p. 11





## *Transitus Mariae*

- ❖ “On summing up the different facts, deduced from the various editions of the *Transitus*,” writes Bagatti, “one can conclude that the tomb of Mary was at Gethsemane.”  
*New Discoveries*, p. 13





## Additional Findings

- ❖ Bagatti's research has verified, furthermore, that the tomb of Mary is located in an area used for burial in the first century. *New Discoveries*, pp. 57-58





## Additional Findings

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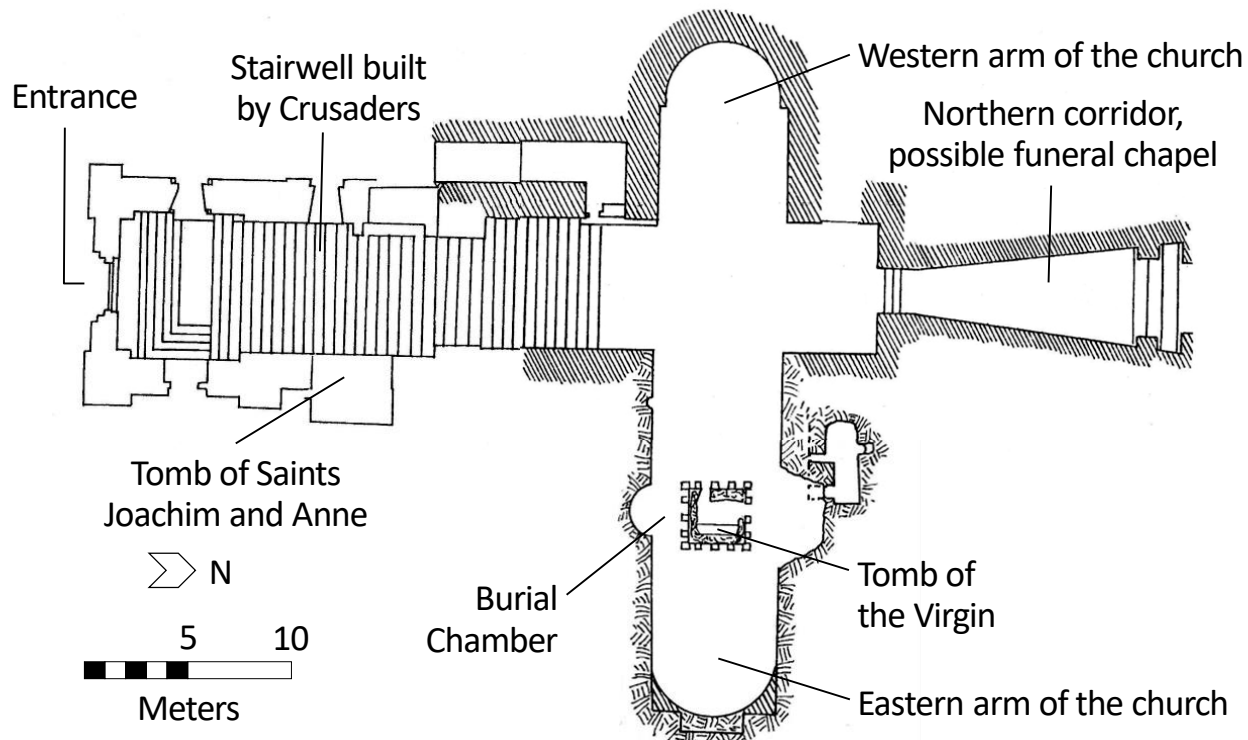
- ❖ The tomb was venerated by Christians of Jewish origin from the first century forward.  
*New Discoveries*, pp. 57-58



# Additional Findings

- ❖ Christians of Gentile origin isolated the tomb from other tombs in the area, enclosing it in a church; and the site of the tomb has been venerated with some interruption to the present day. *New Discoveries*, pp. 57-58

## PLAN OF THE TOMB OF THE VIRGIN AT GETHSEMANE



Adapted from B. Bagatti, M. Piccirillo, and A. Prodomo, O.F.M., *New Discoveries at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane*, L. Sciberras, trans. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975), p. 21.



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