

**Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and  
“On the Eucharist”  
On the “Hail Mary”**

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Prologue

There are three things contained in this (angelic) salutation. The first part comes from the Angel, Gabriel, namely, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.” The second part comes from Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, namely, “Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” The Church adds the third part, to wit, “Mary,” for the Angel did not say, “Hail, Mary,” but rather, “Hail, full of grace.” Still, this name ‘Mary,’ according to its meaning, befits the Angel’s words, as we shall see.

**“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee”**

With respect to the first part, consider that in ancient times it was exceedingly great for an Angel to appear to men, or, that men might offer them reverence was held to be a great honor. Hence, to the honor of Abraham it is written that he received angelic guests and showed them reverence. That an Angel reverence a man, however, was never heard of until the Angel reverently greeted the Blessed Virgin, saying, “Hail.”

That in ancient times the Angel did not reverence man, but rather man revered the Angel comes from the fact that the Angel is greater, and greater with respect to three things. First, with respect to dignity, since the Angel is a spiritual nature:

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

20 “You make your Angels to be spirits, etc.” (Ps. 103,4). Man, indeed, is corruptible  
21 by nature, for which reason Abraham said: “I am speaking to the Lord, I, who am  
22 but dust and ashes” (Gen 18,27). Second, with respect to their familiarity with  
23 GOD, for the Angel belongs to the household of GOD (‘familiaris’) inasmuch as  
24 he assists Him. “A thousand times a thousand minister to Him, and ten thousand  
25 myriads assist Him.” (Dan 7,10). Man, though, is like a stranger, set off from GOD  
26 by sin: “I withdrew in flight” (Ps 54,8). Therefore, it was fitting that man should  
27 reverence the Angel as one on close and familiar terms with the king (‘propinquum  
28 and familiarem regis’!). Third, the Angel took preeminence on account of the  
29 plenitude of the splendor of divine grace. The Angels, namely, participate in the  
30 light of divine grace itself in the very highest degree. “Is there any number to His  
31 armies upon whom His light does not arise?” (Job 25,3). And this is why they  
32 always appear with light. But men, even though they participate somewhat in the  
33 light of grace, do so only slightly and in obscurity.

34 Consequently, it was unfitting that men be shown reverence until someone should  
35 be found in this (human) nature who exceeds the angels in these three points. And  
36 this was the Blessed Virgin. In order to indicate that she exceeded them in these  
37 three points the Angel wished to offer her reverence, saying “Hail.”

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

38 Thus the Blessed Virgin exceeds the Angels in these three points. And first of all in  
39 the plenitude of grace, which is greater in the Blessed Virgin than in any Angel. To  
40 indicate this, the Angel offered her reverence, calling her full of grace, as if to say:  
41 “This is why I offer you reverence, because you excel me in the fullness of grace.”

42 The Blessed Virgin is said to be full of grace in three regards. First, with respect to  
43 her soul, in which she had every plenitude of grace. The grace of GOD is given,  
44 namely, for two purposes: to do good and to avoid evil. With respect to these two  
45 ends the Blessed Virgin had the most perfect grace. For she avoided sin more  
46 perfectly than any other saint outside of Christ. Sin is either Original Sin (and of  
47 this she was cleansed in the womb) or it is mortal or venial sin (and of these she  
48 was free). Hence, in the Canticle of Canticles (4,7) we read: “You are all fair, my  
49 friend, there is no flaw in you!” In his work “On Nature and Grace” St. Augustine  
50 writes: “With the exception of the Virgin Mary, if all the saints together had been  
51 asked if they were without sin while living here on earth, all would have  
52 unanimously exclaimed: ‘If we were to say that we have no sin, we would be  
53 deceiving ourselves, and the truth would not be in us.’ With the exception of this  
54 holy Virgin, as I say, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches  
55 the question of sin, out of respect for the Lord, we know what abundance of grace  
56 for overcoming sin in every regard was conferred upon her, who had the merit to  
57 conceive and bear Him Who undoubtedly had no sin.”

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

58 Christ exceeded the Blessed Virgin in this, since He was both conceived and born  
59 without Original Sin, whereas the Blessed Virgin was conceived but not born with  
60 Original sin.<sup>1</sup> She exercised the works of every virtue, whereas other saints  
61 excelled in some special virtue, one in humility, another in chastity, another in  
62 mercy. Accordingly, they are given as an example of some special virtue, as St.  
63 Nicholas is an example of mercy. But the Blessed Virgin is the example of every  
64 virtue, for in her you perceive the model of humility: “Behold, the handmaid of the  
65 Lord,” and “He has beheld the humility of His handmaid” (Lk 1,38. 48). She is the  
66 model of virginity: “for I know not man,” and of every other virtue too, as is  
67 sufficiently evident. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin has full grace with respect to  
68 purity (good works) and with respect to virtue (for overcoming evil).

69 Secondly, she was filled with grace with respect to its overflow from the soul to  
70 the flesh or to the body. It is already something great in the saints that they have so  
71 much grace that it sanctifies the soul, but the soul of the Blessed Virgin was so  
72 filled with grace that from her soul grace overflowed into the flesh, such that from  
73 it she conceived the Son of God. That is why Hugh of St. Victor says, “Since the  
74 love of the Holy Spirit was singularly aflame in her heart, the marvel was  
75 accomplished in her flesh, inasmuch as that which was born of her was GOD and  
76 man. ‘For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’” (Mt 1,20).

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

77 Thirdly, inasmuch as her plenitude of grace overflowed unto all men. It is  
78 something great in any saint that they have so much grace that it suffices for their  
79 own salvation, but much greater it is when they have so much that it suffices for  
80 the salvation of many. But when anyone should have so much that it suffices for  
81 the salvation of everybody in the world, this is the maximum. And this it is in  
82 Christ and in the Blessed Virgin. For in every danger you can obtain salvation from  
83 the glorious Virgin herself. Hence, the Canticle of Canticles (4,4) has it: “Upon  
84 your neck hang a thousand bucklers,” that is, in remedy against danger. Similarly,  
85 in every work of virtue you can have her as your help, wherefore she herself says  
86 in Ecclesiastes: “In me is every hope of life and virtue, etc.”

87 Thus she is grace-filled, and exceeds the Angels in the plenitude of grace. And for  
88 this reason she is fittingly called ‘Maria,’ which interprets ‘enlightened in herself,’  
89 whence Isaiah (58,11) declares, “then shall your light rise.” And again, it means,  
90 ‘the enlightener of others’ (cf. Is.60,3: “And the nations shall come to your light”).  
91 This is to be understood of the whole world, and therefore she is likened to the sun  
92 and to the moon.

93 In the second place, the Blessed Virgin excels the Angels in divine familiarity. The  
94 Angels designated this, saying “the Lord is with you,” as if to say, “I proffer you  
95 reverence, because you are on more intimate terms with GOD than I am, for “the

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

96 Lord is with you.” The Lord, I say, the Father is in the very Son, Whom no Angel  
97 nor any other creature has. But “that which is to be born of you shall be called  
98 Holy, the Son of GOD” (Lk 1,35). The Lord, the Son, is present in her womb.  
99 “Shout and sing for joy, O dwelling, Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One  
100 of Israel” (Is 12,6). The Lord is with the Blessed Virgin in one way, and in another  
101 with the Angel. He is with her as a Son, but with the Angel as the latter’s Lord.  
102 The Lord, the Holy Spirit, is with her as in His temple, when it is said: “the temple  
103 of GOD, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit,” since she conceived by the Holy Spirit:  
104 “the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee” (Lk 1,35).

105 Thus, the Blessed Virgin is more familiar with GOD than is the Angel, for with her  
106 is the Lord Father, the Lord Son and the Lord Holy Spirit, the entire Trinity.  
107 Concerning her is sung the verse: “noble repose of the entire Trinity.”

108 This expression “the Lord is with you” is the most noble that can be addressed to  
109 anyone. Deservedly, therefore, does the Angel revere the Blessed Virgin, because  
110 she is the mother of the Lord, and hence, (our) Lady. Here again the fittingness of  
111 the name ‘Mary’ which in Syrian means ‘Lady.’

112 In the third place she exceeds the Angels with respect to purity, since the Blessed  
113 Virgin was not only pure in herself, but procured purity for others. She was herself

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

114 most pure both with respect to guilt, for she incurred neither Original, nor mortal  
115 nor venial sin, nor did she incur any penalty.

116 Three maledictions were given to mankind on account of sin. The first befell  
117 woman, that she would conceive in corruption, carry in discomfort, and bear in  
118 labor. But from this the Blessed Virgin was immune, since she conceived without  
119 corruption, carried with solace, and bore the Saviour in joy. Isaiah declares (35,2):  
120 “Let it flower and flourish , and rejoice with joy and singing.” The second was  
121 given to man, namely, that in the sweat of his brow he shall eat his bread. From  
122 this the Blessed Virgin was exempt, as the Apostle states in 1 Cor 7,34: virgins are  
123 free of the cares of this world and solicitous solely for GOD. The third malediction  
124 was common to both men and women, namely, that unto dust they should return.  
125 And from this the Blessed Virgin was immune, since she was assumed into heaven  
126 with her body. We believe namely that after her death she was raised up and  
127 carried into heaven. “Arise, O Lord, and go to Thy resting place, Thou and the ark  
128 of Thy might.” (Ps 131,8).

### **129 “Blessed art thou amongst Women”**

130 So she was therefore immune from every malediction, and consequently “blessed  
131 among women,” since she alone took away the malediction and brought the  
132 blessing, and opened the gate of paradise. And again the name, ‘Mary’ befits her,

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

133 which is (also) interpreted as ‘Star of the Sea,’ for as by this star seafarers are  
134 directed to port, so are Christians guided to glory by Mary.

### **“Blessed is the Fruit of thy Womb”**

136 A sinner sometimes seeks something which he cannot attain, whereas the just soul  
137 attains it. “The sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous!” (Prov. 13,22). Thus  
138 Eve sought the fruit, but did not find in it what she sought. The Blessed Virgin  
139 truly found in her fruit everything that Eve had desired. Now Eve desired three  
140 things in the fruit.

141 First, that which the devil had falsely promised her, namely that they become like  
142 gods, knowing good and evil. “You will be (said that liar) like gods” as is recorded  
143 in Gen 3,5. And he lied because he is a liar, and the father of the same. Now, Eve  
144 did not become like GOD through the eating of her fruit, but rather became even  
145 less like Him, since by sinning she withdrew from GOD her salvation, for which  
146 reason she was expelled from paradise. But the Blessed Virgin and all Christians  
147 have found this in the fruit of her womb, for through Christ we are conjoined and  
148 made like unto GOD. “When He appears, we shall be like Him” (1 Jn 3,2).

149 Secondly, Eve desired delectation in her fruit, for it was good to eat. But she did  
150 not find this delectation, because she immediately discovered that she was naked



**Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and  
“On the Eucharist”**

151 and had pain. But in the fruit of the Virgin we find sweetness and salvation. “He  
152 who eats My Flesh has eternal life” (Jn 6,55).

153 Thirdly, Eve’s fruit was delightful to the eye; but even more so was the fruit of the  
154 Virgin, on whom the Angels long to gaze. “You are the fairest of the sons of  
155 men” (Ps 44,2), and this is because He is the splendor of the Father’s glory.

156 So Eve was not able to find in her fruit, nor can any sinner find in sin, the things  
157 they truly desire. That which we desire, therefore, let us seek in the fruit of the  
158 Virgin.

159 This fruit, Jesus, moreover, is blessed by GOD, since He filled Him with every  
160 grace that comes to us. “Blessed be God the Father who has blessed us in every  
161 spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph 1,3). It is blessed by the Angel, who offers Him  
162 reverence in Apoc 7,12: “Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and  
163 honor and power and might be to our God,..” And it is blessed by men, “Let every  
164 tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord in the glory of God the Father” (2,2).  
165 “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord” (Ps 117,26).

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167 *Blessed, therefore, is the Virgin, Mary, but yet more blessed is the fruit of her*  
168 *womb, Jesus. Amen. \**

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

169 (Translated by WW)

170 1 St. Thomas did not discern the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that Mary was not only born free of  
171 Original Sin, but also in anticipation of the merits of her Son, Jesus Christ, was also conceived without Original Sin. This Dogma  
172 was solemnly declared some six centuries after the death of St. Thomas.

173 \* In his sermon St. Thomas only commented on the biblical, or first half of the “Hail Mary”.

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**Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and  
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The immense blessings bestowed by the divine mercy upon the Christian people give it an inestimable dignity. There is not, nor ever was, a nation so great that has gods so nigh as our God is present to us. And this body that he took from us he gave wholly for our salvation. For he offered his own body to God the Father upon the altar of the cross as a victim for our reconciliation, and he shed his own blood both to redeem and cleanse us, that we, being bought back from a wretched slavery, might be washed from all our sins. And then, that the memory of such a great benefit might abide in us, he left his body to be our food and his blood to be our drink, that the faithful might receive them under the species of bread and wine.

O precious and wonderful banquet, health-giving and full of all sweetness! What could be more precious than this banquet, in which no longer as under the law the flesh of calves and goats is eaten, but Christ the true God is set before us that we may receive Him? What could be more wonderful than this sacrament, in which bread and wine are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ? And therefore Christ, perfect God and man is contained under the appearance of a little bread and wine. He is eaten by the faithful but not torn asunder; indeed when the Sacrament is divided he remains entire in each particle. The accidents subsist without a subject, that there may be room for faith, when we receive visibly that

## **Two Sermons by St. Thomas Aquinas, “On the “Hail Mary”” and “On the Eucharist”**

194 which is invisible and hidden under an appearance not its own. Thus the senses are  
195 kept free from deception, for they judge of accidents known to them.

196 Of all the sacraments none is more health-giving, for by it sins are washed away,  
197 virtues are increased, and the soul is fed with an abundance of all spiritual gifts. It  
198 is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, that all may profit by that  
199 which was instituted for the salvation of all. Finally, no words suffice to describe  
200 the sweetness of this sacrament, in which spiritual delights are tasted at their very  
201 source and the exceeding charity of Christ in his passion is called to mind. It was in  
202 order to impress more deeply upon the minds of the faithful the boundless extent of  
203 his charity that, when he had kept the Pasch with his disciples and was about to  
204 depart out of this world to his Father, Christ instituted this sacrament as a perpetual  
205 memorial of his passion, the fulfillment of the ancient figures, the greatest of all his  
206 miracles. To those who grieved at his absence it was to be a special consolation.