

**The Feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin** - The tradition of the early Church is that after the Resurrection Mary followed her newly adopted son John (John 19:26) to Asia Minor, and there lived out her life, dying probably in Ephesus (some accounts say Jerusalem). The teaching that Mary was “assumed” bodily into heaven was unknown to the Apostolic Church (and hence is not included in the Doctrine of the Apostles, the Holy Scriptures), and was unknown to the early Church. The Sacramentary of Gelasius (d. 496 A.✠ D.), an early liturgical document, like several other important early Church writers, never mentions the corporal assumption of Mary or a commemorative liturgical celebration of it.

It is apparently in Apocryphal writings of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, some Gnostic, that the doctrine of the “assumption” of Mary is introduced. It seems it was Gregory of Tours (d. 594 A.✠ D.) who first accepted some of the Apocryphal writings as genuine, and so the “Assumption of Mary.” By the 7<sup>th</sup> century the doctrine of the “Assumption of Mary” was more widely taught, the Eastern church adding that three days before her death an angel appeared to Mary to warn her, and that at her death Christ and the Archangel Michael were present, the latter ushering her soul into heaven.

At the Council of Chalcedon in the 8<sup>th</sup> century Juvenal, the Bishop of Jerusalem, reportedly stated that the death of Mary had been witnessed by all the Apostles, but when her tomb was later opened it was empty. His presentation of this doctrine as having been held by the early church seems to have convinced later Roman Catholic theologians. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Roman Catholic church fully embraced the teaching of the “Assumption of Mary” and celebrated it every year. The church of the East also teaches that Mary was raised bodily on the third day from her grave and was taken up into heaven.

**Cover Art** – *The Death of the Virgin*, tempera on wood  
Bartolomeo Vivarini 1484 A.✠ D.

Vivarini’s colorful rendering of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin was painted as part of the altarpiece of a chapel in Padua, Italy. It is currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Christ is seen in a mandorla, or aureola, carrying his mother's soul on her shroud

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