

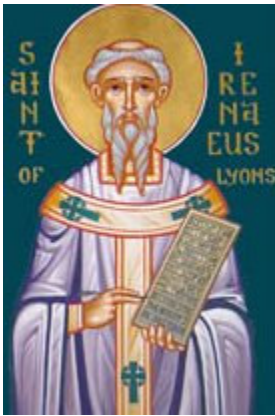


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Mary as the New Eve

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Early Church Father and Doctor of the Church



This excerpt from St. Irenaeus' classic second century work Against Heresies (Lib. 5, 19, 1; 20, 2; 21,1: SC 153, 248-250. 260-264) shows that the Blessed Virgin Mary is truly a new Eve. It is used in the Roman Office of Readings for Friday in the Second Week of Advent.

St. Irenaeus was one of the most important Church Fathers of the 2nd century AD. His life reveals the cosmopolitan nature of the Roman Empire at the height of its power. Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons, in Southern France, though he appears to have grown up in Smyrna, in Modern day Turkey. There he had personal contact with St. Polycarp, one of the Apostolic Fathers who in turn knew the Apostle John, son of Zebedee. Before becoming bishop, Irenaeus apparently studied in Rome where he was influenced by St. Justin Martyr. His major work, Against Heresies, which appeared around

the year 185 AD, exposed the absurdities of the Gnostic cults of the day and included a strong presentation and defense of Catholic Christianity.

The Lord, coming into his own creation in visible form, was sustained by his own creation which he himself sustains in being. His obedience on the tree of the cross reversed the disobedience at the tree in Eden; the good news of the truth announced by an angel to Mary, a virgin subject to a husband, undid the evil lie that seduced Eve, a virgin espoused to a husband.

As Eve was seduced by the word of an angel and so fled from God after disobeying his word, Mary in her turn was given the good news by the word of an angel, and bore God in obedience to his word. As Eve was seduced into disobedience to God, so Mary was persuaded into obedience to God; thus the Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve.

Christ gathered all things into one, by gathering them into himself. He declared war against our enemy, crushed him who at the beginning had taken us captive in Adam, and trampled on his head, in accordance with God's words to the serpent in Genesis: *I will put enmity between you and*



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the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall lie in wait for your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel.

The one lying in wait for the serpent's head is the one who was born in the likeness of Adam from the woman, the Virgin. This is the seed spoken of by Paul in the letter to the Galatians: *The law of works was in force until the seed should come to whom the- promise was made.*



He shows this even more clearly in the same letter when he says: *When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman.* The enemy would not have been defeated fairly if his vanquisher had not been born of a woman, because it was through a woman that he had gained mastery over man in the beginning, and set himself up as man's adversary.

That is why the Lord proclaims himself the Son of Man, the one who renews in himself that first man from whom the race born of woman was formed; as by a man's defeat our race fell into the bondage of death, so by a man's victory we were to rise again to life.

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by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio

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