



Sunday, September 5, 2021

Three Famous *Ave Marias* for Our Lady's Birthday

Greetings!

My excellent Latin teacher in college caught me by surprise one day. I thought I'd impress him with my deep culture by telling him how much I liked listening to the *Ave Maria* in Latin.

He responded, "Oh really? Which one?"

(There I was – **busted** – I didn't know there **was** more than one!)

The one I was familiar with was the one that just about everyone identifies as THE *Ave Maria*, as I did – Franz Schubert's – but, despite bursting my bubble of pretense, my professor had opened up a whole new **horizon of beauty and truth for me**.

Our Lady's Birthday

Every year on September 8th the Church celebrates the birthday of the Mother of God. We know nothing of the actual birth of Mary. Our understanding of the Nativity of Mary comes mostly from a 1st century non-biblical writing called the *Gospel of James*, which also gives us the names of **Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne**.

This document was one of the numerous early Christian writings that did not get included in the Bible but whose contents still had some **spiritual or moral value for Christians**.

Despite the lack of historical information, the Church has always had a deep intuition about Our Lady's birth which holds within itself numerous theological truths. In short, this understanding is

1. That she was conceived and born in the natural course but was granted by God the privilege of being **free of Original Sin from the moment of her conception**;
2. That her parents dedicated her to God from an early age (one tradition says that she was given to be raised in the Jerusalem Temple from age three); and
3. That her birth occurred on September 8th.

The precise date of her birth developed in the Tradition over many centuries and was probably the result of **the teaching about Mary's Immaculate Conception**. Counting forward nine months from the feast day of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th), we arrive at Our Lady's birthday on September 8th: the Church is *biologically* correct, if nothing else.

The Hope of Our Hope

Christ our divine Savior is the eternal hope of every human being ever created. Mary does not stand in the exalted place that Christ alone occupies. Nor would she want to obscure His divine authority in any way. Yet, if Jesus' birth is our ultimate hope, *Mary's* birth is the hope of our hope.

She opened the door for the Redeemer – in fact, **she was the door**.

The great medieval theologian, **St. Anselm** (1033-1109 AD), celebrated the dynamic role of Mary in

salvation history with astounding eloquence:

God, then, is the Father of the created world and Mary the mother of the re-created world. God is the Father by whom all things were given life, and Mary the mother through whom all things were given new life. For God begot the Son, through whom all things were made, and Mary gave birth to him as the Savior of the world. Without God's Son, nothing could exist; without Mary's Son, nothing could be redeemed. (*Oratio* 52; PL 956)

When she was born, **the angels rejoiced** in anticipation of the coming Savior. For this reason, Our Lady herself even prophesied that all true believers would *call her blessed* ([Luke 1:48](#)) throughout history.

Generations of Praise

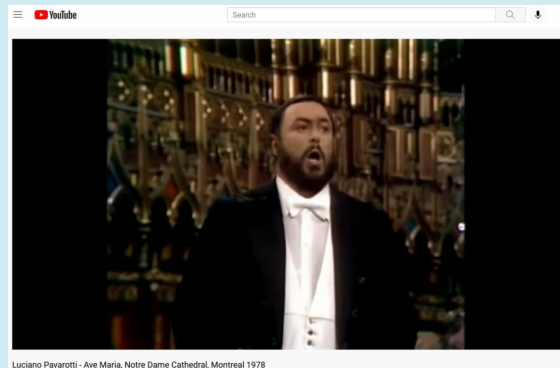
It's no wonder that all generations have sung Mary's praise in myriad ways, but most often with the words of **her own prayer, the Hail Mary**. Even those who don't know Latin may be aware that the title *Ave Maria* is the Latin term for "Hail Mary", the first two words of the prayer itself.

Let's not delay in listening to **the wonderful Ave Marias of our tradition** that have filled many with increased devotion to the woman who stands at the very center of the mysteries of our faith. As you listen, remember that these exquisite compositions are not just music – they are sublime prayers.

Each of the three links below will take you to a video performance of the specific piece, but remember to return to finish reading this newsletter! (Hint: there's **one more Ave Maria surprise** in the Feature Articles. My Latin teacher would be proud....)

Franz Schubert's *Ave Maria* (1825)

It is hard to believe that this Austrian genius of classical music lived such a short life (1797-1828, he was only 31 when he died). He composed over 1500 pieces of music in his brief career. Schubert's *Ave Maria* is easily the most famous of them all, and the one most likely to make tears flow at funerals and weddings! Some may remember that Schubert's *Ave Maria* was featured in the Disney animated film, *Fantasia*, back in 1940. Who better to offer this gift to Our Lady than **Luciano Pavarotti, the world's favorite Italian tenor?** (Note: he sings the first verse in Italian followed by Latin. Break out the tissue.)



Luciano Pavarotti - Ave Maria, Notre Dame Cathedral, Montreal 1978

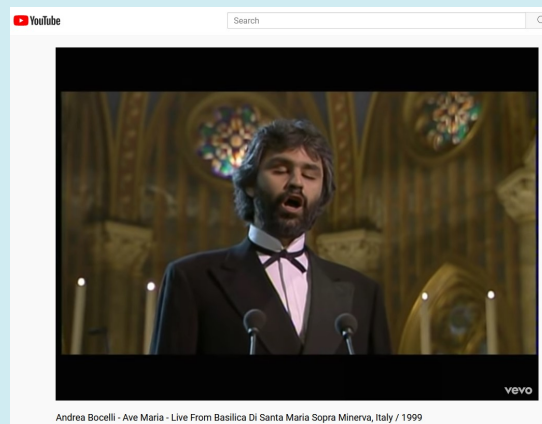
The Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria* (1859)

Charles Gounod (1818-93) was a 19th century French Romantic composer who superimposed a magnificently beautiful melody on the rhythmic *Prelude No. 1 in C Major* of Johann Sebastian Bach (1722). As soon as you hear the opening notes of the harp (which is Bach's intro) you will likely respond as I did, "Ah, I know this beauty!" After hearing it sung in the rich tones of the fabulous New Zealand soprano, **Dame Kiri Te Kánawa**, it will be hard to bring yourself back to earth.



The Caccini/Vavilov *Ave Maria* (1970)

A lesser known but incredibly beautiful *Ave Maria* has been attributed to Italian Renaissance musician, Giulio Caccini (1551-1680), who is probably not the actual composer. It is generally believed that Russian guitarist, Vladimir Vavilov (1925-1973), composed it and attributed it anonymously in order to avoid religious censorship in the Soviet Union. **Andrea Bocelli** sings this version in his clear and resonant voice – **it is truly breathtaking.**



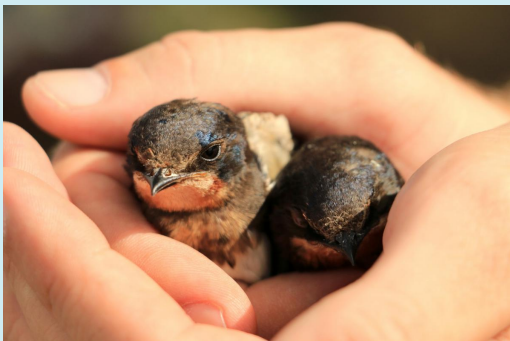
Feature Articles

Let these *Ave Marias* deepen your devotion to Our Lady. Come back to them often. She is the woman of grace whose trust in God gave us our divine Savior. Our first feature piece, "[Ultimate Trust in God](#)" is not about Mary as such but about that same virtue of hers: **trusting faith in a loving Father.**

The second feature is about a 20th century *Ave Maria* that deserves an article all its own. It is "[The Greatest But Least Known Ave Maria](#)" which, if you have a few moments to listen, will make you wonder why this magnificent work is not better known.

There is no better way to wish Our Lady a happy birthday than to call her "**blessed**" with the Church's **tradition.**

[Ultimate Trust in God](#)



[The Greatest But Least Known Ave Maria](#)



Many thanks and blessings!

Peter Darcy

PS - I always love hearing from readers. If you want to respond to the newsletter at any time, just **reply to the email itself and send me your feedback** - it goes directly to my email box. Also, each of the articles on Sacred Windows has a comment box at the end of the article, and you are free to comment there as well.

[Visit the Newsletter Archives](#)



CONTACT US:

Email: peterdarcy@sacredwindows.com

Author's Website: www.petedarcywriting.com