

# Our Lady, Star of the Sea

**Our Lady, Star of the Sea** is an ancient title for the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. The words *Star of the Sea* are a translation of the Latin title ***Stella Maris***, first reliably used with relation to the Virgin Mary in the ninth century. The title was used to emphasize Mary's role as a sign of hope and as a guiding star for Christians. Under this title, the Virgin Mary is believed to intercede as a guide and protector of those who travel or seek their livelihoods on the sea. This aspect of the Virgin has led to Our Lady, Star of the Sea, being named as patroness of the Catholic missions to seafarers, the Apostleship of the Sea, and to many coastal churches being named *Stella Maris* or Mary, Star of the Sea.

The title most probably has its origin in the Biblical passage 1 Kings 18:41-45, which speaks of a cloud above the sea, no bigger than a man's hand, which is seen from Mount Carmel. The tiny cloud's scriptural significance is as the sign of hope that heralds the end of a long drought.

A similar message is reflected in another title of Mary, which appears in the official Litany of the Virgin, *Morning Star*. Both titles refer to Mary as a symbol of hope and as a foreshadowing of the imminent coming of Jesus. A combination of the two themes produces *Star of the Sea*.

Around the year 400 Saint Jerome wrote of Mary as "*stilla maris*," or a drop of the sea. It has been suggested as an alternative origin for the term that this may have been miscopied as *stella maris*. The first reliable use of the term *stella maris* that is still extant is in the writings of Paschasius Radbertus in the ninth century, who wrote of Mary, Star of the Sea, as a guide to be followed on the way to Christ "lest we capsize amid the storm-tossed waves of the sea." At this time too the plainsong hymn Ave Maris Stella (Hail, Star of the Sea), became increasingly popular.

In the twelfth-century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: "*If the winds of temptation arise; If you are driven upon the rocks of tribulation look to the star, call on Mary; If you are tossed upon the waves of pride, of ambition, of envy, of rivalry, look to the star, call on Mary. Should anger, or avarice, or fleshly desire violently assail the frail vessel of your soul, look at the star, call upon Mary.*"

Pope Pius XII *Mary ... is interpreted to mean 'Star of the Sea.' This admirably befits the Virgin Mother.. (for) as the ray does not diminish the brightness of the star, so neither did the Child born of her tarnish the beauty of Mary's virginity.*