

ATRIUM TOUR

(17) Statue of the Immaculate Conception

The statue of the Immaculate Conception was obtained from the St. Francis Friary attached to St. Francis Seraph Church. Its depiction of Mary is notable for its striking simplicity.

Statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary are often marked by distinctive physical features, symbolic objects, and characteristic postures that reflect her theological titles and the traditions surrounding her apparitions. Blue is the color most commonly associated with her mantle, symbolizing purity and heavenly grace. White garments signify innocence and virginity, while red can represent compassion and suffering. She is typically portrayed with a serene, humble, and compassionate expression. Many Marian images also include a halo or a crown of twelve stars, recalling Revelation 12 and emphasizing her role as Queen of Heaven.

Franciscans have long held a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary, especially under the title of the Immaculate Conception, a doctrine they strongly defended through theologians such as Blessed John Duns Scotus and St. Bonaventure. They have also honored her as Our Lady of the Angels, a title closely connected to the Porziuncola, the spiritual heart of the Franciscan movement, and have looked to her as a model of poverty, humility, and grace.

The statue of Mary displayed above the tomb of Blessed John Duns Scotus bears a striking resemblance to the statue in our chapel. In both images, Mary appears with her head bowed, unveiled, and clothed in a simple, humble manner. This is quite different from more familiar depictions of the Immaculate Conception, which often emphasize her sinless nature through richly symbolic elements such as white garments, stars, or other traditional signs of purity. Here, instead, her beauty is expressed through humility, quiet dignity, and contemplative simplicity.



Blessed John Duns Scotus: Defender of the Immaculate Conception

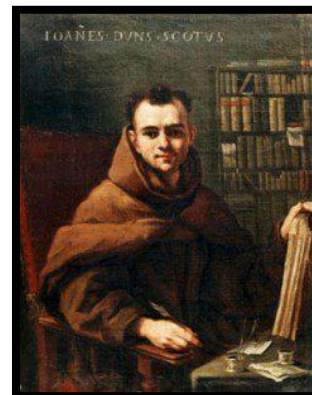
A humble man, Blessed John Duns Scotus remains one of the most influential Franciscans in history. He was born around 1265 in Duns, in the county of Berwick, Scotland, into a prosperous farming family. In later years, he came to be known as *John Duns Scotus*, a name that reflects his place of origin—*Scotia* being the Latin term for Scotland.

At the age of fifteen, he entered the novitiate of the Order of Friars Minor and was ordained a priest in 1291. After his ordination, he pursued advanced studies in philosophy and theology, traveling between England and France. In 1301, he earned his

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bachelor's degree in theology, and in 1305, he received his doctorate—both from the University of Paris.

While teaching at the university, Blessed John quickly gained widespread recognition for his brilliance. Students flocked to hear his lectures, drawn by his remarkable ability to make precise and nuanced distinctions in theological arguments. Because of this intellectual style, he earned the title “*Subtle Doctor*.”



In 1307, while at the University of Paris, Blessed John famously defended the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. At the time, this teaching was still widely debated. Because he proposed a position different from that held by many at the university, he was required to defend it publicly before the entire academic body, risking expulsion if he failed. According to longstanding tradition, as he made his way to the disputation, he paused before a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and prayed: “*Allow me to praise you, O Most Holy Virgin; give me strength against your enemies.*” The statue is said to have responded with a visible sign—its head bowed slightly—assuring him of her help. Strengthened by this moment, Blessed John presented his argument with clarity and depth, successfully responding to all objections. From that time forward, the University of Paris came to support the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Later, the Franciscan Minister General sent Blessed John to Cologne, Germany, where he continued teaching at the Franciscan house of studies. He died there in 1308 at the age of 43 and was buried in the Franciscan church near the great cathedral of Cologne. Centuries later, drawing upon Blessed John’s theological insights, Pope Pius IX solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. The doctrine proclaims that *from the first moment of her conception, Mary was preserved free from original sin by the merits of Jesus Christ*—a formulation that closely reflects Blessed John’s defense.

On March 20, 1992, Blessed John Duns Scotus was beatified by Pope John Paul II at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed John Duns Scotus

O Most High, Almighty and gracious Lord, Who exalts the humble and confounds the proud of heart, grant us the great joy of seeing Blessed John Duns Scotus canonized. He honored Your Son with the most sublime praises; he was the first to successfully defend the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary; he lived in heroic obedience to the Holy Father, to the Church and to the Seraphic Order. O most Holy Father, God of infinite love, hear, we beseech You, our humble prayer, through the merits of Your Only-Begotten Son and His Mother, the Gate of Heaven and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.