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## IN MEMORIAM

# Actor Wyman cherished role as faithful Catholic

She had a conversion experience while filming 'The Blue Veil'

By Mary Claire Kendall

Actress Jane Wyman, who died last month at her home in Rancho Mirage, Calif., reached the pinnacle of her 60-year acting career with 1948's "Johnny Belinda," receiving a Best Actress Oscar for transforming herself into a deaf-mute teen.

But longtime friend Virginia Zamboni told Our Sunday Visitor that Wyman's favorite film was "The Blue Veil," for which she received an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress.

Filmed in and around St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York

City, "The Blue Veil" "hit her in the face" regarding all she had learned about the Catholic faith from her good friend and fellow A-list actress Loretta Young, Zamboni said. Wyman had been attending Mass at Good Shepherd Church in Beverly Hills with Loretta in the wake of her 1948 divorce, as well as the death, the year before, of her second baby, Christina, with then husband and future president Ronald Reagan.

As son Michael Reagan wrote in his book, "Twice Adopted," "It probably was the most painful experience of her life, and I don't think she ever truly recovered from it."

However, as she soaked in the spiritual grandeur of St. Patrick's

while making this film, ironically premised on the protagonist's loss of her newborn son, she began to understand very clearly that her life's triumph and tragedy had a deeper purpose. A couple of years later — on Dec. 8, 1954 — she was received into the Catholic Church, along with her children, Maureen and Michael.

## Steely determination

Born Sarah Jane Mayfield on Jan. 5, 1917, in St. Joseph, Mo., Wyman experienced tragedy early in her life. Her parents were divorced by 1921; a year later, her

father died and she was left with middle-aged neighbors. Her "adoptive" parents proved dull and uncompassionate, impelling her to fix her sights with steely determination on glittering showbiz, where her talents flowed.



Wyman

After years of playing bit parts, starting with "The Kid from Spain" in 1932, she got her big break in "The Lost Weekend" in 1945 as the empathetic fiancée of an alcoholic writer, leading to greater dramatic roles and her stunning Oscar-winning performance in "Johnny Belinda."

She may have kept some of the quiet reserve from her childhood, but her actions spoke loudly. "She was certainly long on style," Father Howard Lincoln

of Sacred Heart in Palm Desert, Calif., told OSV, "but was much deeper and longer in substance."

Wyman kept her awards in her den and focused energetically on the present, which included two main charities — the Church and The Arthritis Foundation.

"I had never seen a \$100,000 check, until I saw one... signed by Jane Wyman," Father Lincoln told OSV. "Cushioned pews, state-of-the-art sound system and a chapel for seminarians were all made possible by her largess. She also supported Hollywood's Covenant House and Our Lady of Angels Monastery, run by the Dominican sisters. She was a Third Order Dominican, buried, wearing the habit, in a simple pine coffin."

Mary Claire Kendall writes from Maryland.