The Story

During the pontificate of Liberius (352-366), the Roman patrician John and his wife, who were without an heir, made a vow to donate their possessions to Our Lady. They prayed to her that she might make known to them in what manner they were to dispose of their property in her honour.

On 5th August, during the night, snow fell on the summit of the Esquiline Hill and, in obedience to a vision which they had the same night (the Pope had the same vision) they built a basilica, in honour of Our Lady, on the spot which was covered with snow.

The church was originally built by Pope Liberius and was called after him "Basilica Liberii" or "Liberiana".

It was restored by Pope Pope Sixtus III (432-440) and dedicated to Our Lady. From that time on it was known as "Basilica S. Mariae" or "Mariae Majoris"; since the seventh century it was known also as "Maria ad Præsepe" and then a few centuries later "Maria ad Nives" or "Our Lady of the Snows".

The Moral of the Story

Whatever we give to God, we received it first from Him through His mother’s hands (she is the Mediatrix of all Grace) and we return it back to Him through His mother’s hands (she is our perfect intercessor, our Mother by grace).
A Beautiful Prayer

There is a beautiful prayer in the breviary that expresses the two way mediation of Mary as Mother of God.

This prayer honours the greatest gift that came from the hands of Mary and the greatest gift we can make to God through her hands:

O Mary, Virgin and Most Holy Mother, behold I have received thy most beloved Son, whom thou conceived in thy womb, nourished and most tenderly embraced.

Behold, may thou be rejoiced and filled with every delight by this aspect:

Him, the same, I humbly and lovingly return and offer to thine outstretched arms, to thy loving heart, and to the Most Holy Trinity in a supreme act of adoration, for thine honour and glory, and for my necessities and those of the whole world.

I beseech thee, most sweet Mother, fill me with a sorrow for all my sins, and grant me the grace of serving thee more faithfully henceforth, and then finally the grace of final perseverance, so that I may praise Him with thee forever and ever. Amen!

Especially during this month of May, just as John the Patrician returned his wealth through Mary to God, let us return all that we have received from Mary’s hands back to her so that she can offer it to our loving God, Who livest and reignest, forever and ever. Amen!