The Order of the Servants of Mary, also called the Servizae Virgo Mariae, is a mendicant order (abbreviated O.S.B.M.). It was founded, probably in 1203, by a group of seven people, later known as the Seven Holy Founders: Bernardino of Siena, Brother Filippo of Assisi, Brother Gino of Lucca, Brother Girolamo of Siena, Brother John of Assisi, Brother Mary of Siena, and Brother Thomas of Siena. They were part of the Confraternity of Lourdes, Priests of Mary, typical pastors and actors of the Umbrian-Tuscan Region in the late Middle Ages. They were habitual, namely, in gathering themselves in front of the painted image on the wall along the road in order to express in verse, that is to say, in “praise” — their love to Our Lady, in the same way the troubadours of the day would express their astounding admiration to a beloved woman.

On the 15th of August 1233 an image of Mary came to life, appearing to them clothed in mourning and sorrowful because of the fratricidal hate that divided Florence: from 1215 the Florentines were split in two opposing factions, Guelf and Ghibelline, that never lost an opportunity to clash with each other, even in bloody and vicious behavior. The Virgin said to them: “Take this habit of remorse and wear it in memory of my doloras. Receive the Rule of Saint Augustine. Continue to be faithful servants to me with the exercise of the virtues; propagate everywhere the devotion to my doloras and one day you will obtain this reward of eternal life.”

The seven young men decided to do something to bring about a bit of peace: for this reason they established the “Congregazione of the Servants of Mary” and they returned to the solitude of Mount Senario, not far from the City, to dedicate themselves to prayer and penance. One day, while they were descending into town for a peace-making intervention, a young man turned to his mother exclaiming: “Lo and behold, the Servants of Mary are arriving!” And this was the name they decided to take.

Furthermore, their choice of Mary had become by now definitive; in fact, having abandoned fancy clothes, abandoned and thrown away the short dagger that they used to commit in them, the men took their solemn vows to dedicate their whole life in honor of Our Blessed Virgin. Frequently, before crossing through the doors of the city, while descending from the mountain that they had chosen as their dwelling, they would pass in front of a little Chapel dedicated to the Annunciation, in the town of Contrada Calzigno. In 1293 the monks had a new chapel built, consecrated to the Annunciation. The painter who was depicting the portrait of the Virgin had difficulty completing it: he did not know how to portray the face, but one night, awakened from sleep, he found it miraculously painted.