

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Celebrating the Grace of God

Genesis 3:9-15 & 20
Luke 1:26-38

On December 8th, we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We celebrate the awesome miracle that God the Father granted to his specially prepared daughter so that she could become the mother of God the Son.

We also celebrate the all-knowing nature of God, who planned ahead for Mary's participation in salvation history, knowing – before her conception – that she would choose to say yes.

We celebrate the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, who prepared a holy womb for the conception of Jesus' human nature by first creating Mary without the effects of Original Sin. As a new Eve, her conception was "immaculate" (untainted by Original Sin), because Jesus, who is fully divine and perfectly holy, could not grow his human body in the womb of a sinner. Only later, when he had complete control over his decision as an adult, could he join himself to the sins of the human race.

We celebrate Mary's motherhood. In today's reading from Genesis, we see Eve become the mother of all the living, but she sins and she passes this sinfulness onto all generations. In the Gospel reading, Mary becomes the Second Eve, saying yes to the vocation of becoming the mother of the only one who could redeem us from sin. Thus, Mary becomes the new mother of all the living, and she passes her holiness onto all those who seek to become united to the Redeemer.



We also celebrate the Church's official pronouncement of Mary's immaculate conception, which Pope Pius IX made official in 1854. Because this occurred in recent history, it seems like an "invention" of Catholicism, but Christians have understood this dogma and taught it to each other since the early days of the Church. Pius IX merely drew special attention to it. Because the world's influences were eroding belief in this ancient dogma, he made an official proclamation in order to stop the spread of heresies.

The idea that Mary could be conceived without bondage to Original Sin, and the related idea that Mary could spend her entire life free of sin, is not a glorification of her. It's a glorification of God, who filled her with grace in order to protect her in a special way and to enable her to resist temptation throughout her life. "Let it be done to me according to your word" was not a sudden or temporary leap of faith for her; it was her life-long attitude. The power that enabled her to fulfill this desire came straight from the Holy Spirit as a gift of grace.

Through baptism, we all have been given grace from the Holy Spirit to resist sin. When fail to rely on that, in our weak state we succumb to sin. Then, when we repent, God's mercy restores us to his grace.

By relying on this grace at the moment of temptation, we overcome the sin and we are restored to the peace of Christ.