



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

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

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We celebrate the awesome miracle that God the Father granted to one of his daughters so that she could become the mother of God the Son. We celebrate the all-knowing nature of God, who planned ahead for Mary's participation in salvation history, knowing — before her conception — that she would have 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 affects 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 live 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 Genesis 3:9-15 and 20, Eve becomes the mother of all the living, but she sins and she passes this sinfulness onto all generations. In Luke 1:26-38, Mary says yes to becoming the mother of the Savior who would redeem us from sin, and so she becomes the mother of all the living who are no longer dying from the effects of sin.

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 since

the early days. Pius IX only drew special attention to it because the world's influences were eroding belief in it, and something had to be done 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 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 by grace from the Holy Spirit.

Grace is a gift, pure gift. Grace is God's power received as a gift when we need it regardless of what we do or don't do. Availing ourselves of God's grace, however, does depend on us. We cannot sin and remain in the state of grace. We cannot sin and remain in God's good graces.

Through baptism, we all have been given grace from the Holy Spirit to resist sin. When we sin and sorrowfully repent, God's mercy restores us to his grace. When we rely on this grace, we avoid sin.

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