



December 8th

The Immaculate Conception of Mary

On December 8, the Church celebrates one of the most beautiful truths of our faith: the **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**. This solemnity honors the moment when Mary, from the first instant of her existence, was preserved free from all stain of original sin. Many people mistakenly think this feast refers to Jesus' conception in Mary's womb; it does not. Rather, it celebrates Mary's own conception in the womb of her mother, St. Anne.

In 1854, Pope Pius IX defined this teaching: "The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, **by a singular grace and privilege** granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin."

This proclamation confirmed a truth long held in the faith of the Church, celebrated in liturgy, and reflected upon by saints throughout the centuries. The Pope's definition made clear what the faithful had already intuited: that God prepared Mary in a unique way to be the Mother of His Son.

Mary's Immaculate Conception was not something she earned, but a pure gift of God. As Pope Pius IX explained, this grace was given "*in view of the merits of Jesus Christ*." In other words, the redemption won by Christ on the

Cross was applied to Mary in a special, anticipatory way. She was saved by Christ, just more perfectly and more completely than any other human being, because she was chosen to bear Him who is the Savior. God made her a fitting dwelling place for His Son.

Two passages help us understand Scripture's evidence regarding the Immaculate Conception. In Genesis 3:15, God is speaking to Satan following the sin of Adam and Eve. It contains the "Good News" of God's mercy by **promising to deliver** us from the enemy.

Genesis 3:15 reads: "**I will put enmity between you and the woman**, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel". The seed or "offspring" of the woman is Jesus Christ. Through His passion, death and resurrection, Jesus will strike at the head of the serpent (Satan) and ultimately defeat him. The words to Satan, "you shall bruise His heel," refers to Jesus' death, but the Lord rose from the dead, winning the victory over Satan, sin and death. The word "enmity" means total opposition that exists between the "woman" (Mary) and Satan, which foreshadows the gift of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

The second Scriptural reference is revealed in the words of the Angel Gabriel to Mary: "He came to her and said, Hail, **full of grace**, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). The title 'full

of grace' is used as a substitute for Mary's name by the angelic messenger of God because this *fullness of grace* is part of Mary's very nature. God chose to apply a "fullness of grace" to Mary so that Mary might give to Jesus a human nature free from the effect of sin.

What This Solemnity Teaches Us
The Immaculate Conception is not just about Mary; it is also about what God desires for all of us. In Mary, we see the fullness of what grace can do. She is the image of the Church in her perfection, the promise of what we hope to become through Christ. As the Pope wrote, Mary is "our most loving Mother, ever spotless and most fair, who shows forth the beauty of holiness."

This solemnity invites us to trust in God's plan for our lives, to open ourselves to His grace, and believe that holiness is possible for us, too. Mary's sinlessness reminds us that God's grace is stronger than sin, and that He is able to make us new.

You are invited to pray this prayer:
O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Loving Mother, you were prepared from the first moment of your existence to be the dwelling place of God's Son. Help us to say "yes" to God as you did, that His grace may transform our hearts and lead us closer to your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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