

2015

- Today, of course, we celebrated the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which is always a good day to go over this often-misunderstood feast of Mary.
- Why do we honor Mary this day? Because it is only fitting that WE should honor she whom God honored with this great role in salvation history...and whom He honors, therefore, for all time...she through whom came our Savior and our salvation.
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- The Immaculate Conception of Mary is, of course, NOT about the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb, but rather about the conception of Mary in HER mother's womb—her mother traditionally known as St. Anne.
- Mary was conceived in the normal manner of her mother and father—Joachim and Anne—coming together...but what we celebrate, and what is unique about Mary's conception, is that she—by a unique and special act of God—was preserved free from any stain of Original Sin and in complete purity from the moment of her conception...in *anticipation* of her role as the future mother of God. In the offertory prayer in a few moments you'll hear it referred to as “prevenient” grace.
- And though the Immaculate Conception is unique, it is a simple thing for God.
- And by it Mary still only human...still saved through the grace of Christ's sacrifice, but in *anticipation* of that sacrifice.
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- Mary's purity is why she is called the “new Eve” or the “true” Eve—because Mary was what Eve was meant to be.
- As the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* says: “...she ‘being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race,’ ... ‘The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.’”

- By her courage and obedience, Mary has done more for humanity than any other solely human person...for through her “yes” and acquiescence to God’s will came the salvation of the world by her becoming mother of its Savior.
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- Our first reading from Genesis begins whispers of Mary’s special place...of “the woman” whose child would strike at the head of the serpent.
- In the lesser sense Eve is “the woman”...but in the fullest sense, the true “woman” is Mary, and her child is, of course, Jesus.
- When the test of faithfulness comes, Eve failed...but Mary, in her readiness to do God’s will, simply replies: *I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*
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- As the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant was constructed with purest gold, to make it most worthy to contain the 10 commandments—the Word of God—Mary was conceived in absolute purity...to contain God Himself, incarnate in her womb for 9 months...He who is the perfect and everlasting Covenant, and thus Mary became the true Ark of the Covenant...
- ...reminding us of the book of Revelation where it says: *“God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars...”* (Rev 11:19-12:1 RSV)...because the first Ark of the Covenant is simply a weak imitation of the true Ark of the Covenant—who is Mary.
- And so...after centuries of consideration, the Immaculate Conception became an official tenet of our faith... declared as infallible doctrine by Pope Pius 9th in 1854 in the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*...soon verified by Mary herself in her apparitions at to St. Bernadette in 1858.

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- And yet, Mary...so uniquely blessed by God... is still human only. A creature...to be venerated as Mother of God, but never worshiped. Worship is for God alone.
 - Mary's "power" is her prayers to God...the relationship with her Son. And yet...how powerful her prayers are!
 - Pope Pius IX wrote: *"...she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of her only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord...[and] she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard."*
 - Jesus obeyed the Father...AND His mother. And she is still, and will be for all eternity...His beloved Mother.
 - She who is not only a child of the Father as we all are, but also Mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit. How can one be closer to God than that—with such intimate relationships with each of the persons of the Holy Trinity?
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 - So stay close to her...for she is our Mother as well...given to us by Jesus Himself at the foot of the cross...when He looks at Mary and says to his beloved disciple: *"Behold, your mother."*
 - Let us obey her in the only command she gives in the scripture: *"Do whatever He tells you."*
 - ...and we, too, may come to praise her with the words of Pope Pius: *"[She is] more beautiful than beauty, more lovely than loveliness; more holy than holiness, singularly holy and most pure in soul and body...the only one who has become the dwelling place of all the graces of the most Holy Spirit. God alone excepted, Mary is more excellent than all, and by nature fair and beautiful, and more holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim. To praise her all the tongues of heaven and earth do not suffice."* (Ineffabilis Deus)

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Reading 1

[Gn 3:9-15, 20](#)

After the man, Adam, had eaten of the tree,
the LORD God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?"
He answered, "I heard you in the garden;
but I was afraid, because I was naked,
so I hid myself."
Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked?
You have eaten, then,
from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!"
The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me
she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it."
The LORD God then asked the woman,
"Why did you do such a thing?"
The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it."

Then the LORD God said to the serpent:
"Because you have done this, you shall be banned
from all the animals
and from all the wild creatures;
on your belly shall you crawl,
and dirt shall you eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike at your head,
while you strike at his heel."

The man called his wife Eve,
because she became the mother of all the living.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4](#)

R. (1) Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
His right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

R. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

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All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

R. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

Reading II

[Eph 1:3-6, 11-12](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ
with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,
as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,
to be holy and without blemish before him.
In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,
in accord with the favor of his will,
for the praise of the glory of his grace
that he granted us in the beloved.

In him we were also chosen,
destined in accord with the purpose of the One
who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will,
so that we might exist for the praise of his glory,
we who first hoped in Christ.

Gospel

[Lk 1:26-38](#)

The angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,
of the house of David,
and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said,

“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.”

But she was greatly troubled at what was said
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her,

“Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,

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and of his Kingdom there will be no end.”

But Mary said to the angel,

“How can this be,

since I have no relations with a man?”

And the angel said to her in reply,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born

will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,

has also conceived a son in her old age,

and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;

for nothing will be impossible for God.”

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.”

Then the angel departed from her.