

- Today, of course, we celebrate Mary’s Immaculate Conception—the conception of Mary in HER mother’s womb, St. Anne...not the Incarnation, which is the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb.
- The teaching of the Immaculate Conception is the Catholic dogmatic teaching that Mary was conceived by the normal relations of husband and wife, but, by a unique and special act of God, preserved free from any stain of Original Sin—in complete purity—from the her conception...in anticipation and preparation of her role as the future mother of God.
- Yet Mary is still dependent upon Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross, but rather by anticipation of that sacrifice...by “*prevenient*” grace, as we’ll hear in the offertory prayer.
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- We just heard in our first reading of Eve’s disobedience to God... and, as a counter of that, in the Gospel Mary’s total acquiescence to God’s will...prompting the bishops at Vatican II to write: “...[Mary] *‘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...’*” (Lumen Gentium, 56)
- And so...by her courage, faith and obedience—by her total acquiescence to God’s will—through Mary came the salvation of the world by her becoming mother of its Savior...stating simply to the Archangel: “*I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to thy word.*”

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- Many non-Catholic Christians protest: “The Immaculate Conception is not in the Bible!”...and they’re right. But Mary’s Immaculate Conception has been the tradition of Christianity since very early times, and is a logical deduction from the precedents God set in the past.
  - “What precedents?!” , they might ask.
  - All throughout the Bible God specially prepared those He had chosen for special tasks.

- David he gave a faithful heart to be God's beloved, and yet even he failed--in adultery. Solomon He gave unmatched wisdom...and yet, he failed--in idolatry.
- Most explicit is God's preparation of Jeremiah, who writes: "... *the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'*" (Jeremiah1:4-5)
- So the Church concludes that God would have prepared Mary most of all...for she would bear His Son—else sinless divinity would come forth from the sinful—the pure from the polluted.
- In analogy, both the Ark of the Covenant and the Jewish temple's Holy of Holies were lined with purest gold...to contain a covenant written in mere stone...
- ...but Jesus is not just a promised covenant, but rather the everlasting Covenant and divinity itself...and thus Mary becomes the Ark of the true and everlasting covenant, and would necessarily be made in absolutely purity...to contain God in her womb for 9 months.

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- After all...what other mere human person can be greater than the Mother of God?...just as the Queen Mother is second only to a king? The prophets...mere messengers? No. David, Solomon, Moses...who were God's servants? No. The fickle-in-faith apostles? No.
  - We see in Acts 1 that Mary was a central figure among believers... and on the cross one of Jesus' last acts was to entrust the care of Mary to St. John and, in turn, entrusting all believers—represented by John—to Mary.
  - Not just "Take care of mom", but rather "Behold, your mother."
  - So...after centuries of consideration, the Immaculate Conception was declared an dogma of our faith by Pope Pius 9<sup>th</sup> in 1854 (*Ineffabilis Deus*)...soon verified by Mary herself in her apparitions at to St. Bernadette in 1858 when Mary refers to herself as "the Immaculate Conception".

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- Why do we honor Mary? We honor her whom God Himself honored with this great role in salvation history...and whom He honors, therefore, for all time.
- Yet she is, of course, still only human...a creature like ourselves... infinitely less than God...to be venerated as Mother of God, but never worshiped. Worship is for God alone.
- Her “power” is her relationship with her Son and the Holy Trinity...for Jesus as her son obeyed and honored her...and she is still, and for all eternity, His beloved Mother.
- Thus, Mary is not only a child of the Father, as we all are, but also— absolutely uniquely—Mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit.
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- So stay close to Mary; she is our Mother as well...and let us heed her in the only command she gives in the scripture: “*Do whatever He tells you.*”

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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.