

## Understanding the Immaculate Conception

We live in a world abounding in sin and sinners. On this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception we celebrate one of us, a descendant of Adam and Eve, who neither was ever touched by sin, nor ever committed a sin, Mary of Nazareth, the Immaculate Mother of God.

The term, "Immaculate Conception" does not refer to the way in which Mary was conceived, for she was conceived in the normal way through her parents Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. However, unlike the rest of us, her soul was filled with sanctifying grace at the moment of her conception, untouched by Adam's sin. All other humans are conceived without sanctifying grace in the soul because of the first sin of Adam.

The Actual First Sin of Adam became known as the Original Sin, which wounded both Adam and Eve as well as their children and their descendants. This Original Sin caused all the descendants of Adam to be conceived without God's grace in our souls. However, the Good News is that since Jesus entered the world and accomplished His salvific work, we can all reacquire sanctifying grace through baptism.

If we understand this teaching of the Church we can understand why the name "Immaculate Conception" is unique to Mary alone. Yes, Saint John the Baptist was given sanctifying grace in the womb of Saint Elizabeth at the Visitation, but not at the moment of his conception.

One Scriptural proof of Mary's uniqueness is taken from the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary. Gabriel called Mary a very unique name at the Annunciation. He called her *Kecharitomene*. This name means one who is completely, perfectly and enduringly endowed with grace. In English we translate this name as "*Hail, Mary, full of grace...*" (Luke 1:28). By being full of grace in a most complete way, Mary was most pleasing to God in all she said and did.

The Church teaches that Mary was *preserved* from original sin by the foreseen merits of Jesus, her Son and her Redeemer. The Saints explained this unique way in which Mary was saved through the salvific work of Jesus, as similar to a person who receives a preventative medication before they get sick. Whereas, all other humans are saved through the salvific work of Jesus as medicine applied after getting sick.

Mary was redeemed as the first Christian, in a perfect way, in mind, body and soul, because she was entrusted with a special mission in union with the work of her Son. God created her as a "fitting dwelling place" for His son Jesus, who would crush the head of Satan, as Satan would never had any power over Him.

Jesus was to be born of a woman, who was also totally free from sin, likewise she too would never be under the power of the devil, not through her own merits, but through the merits of her Son. Just as God prepared a sinless paradise for Adam and Eve, so Mary became a "second" sinless paradise, where the Son of God chose to dwell for nine months before His birth in Bethlehem.

When St. Bernadette asked the beautiful lady at Lourdes her name - she said, "*I am the Immaculate Conception.*" Children naturally tend to imitate their parents. We should strive to imitate Mary, our spiritual mother. We should strive to imitate: her faith, her hope, her love for Jesus, and her willing cooperation in His work of redemption by the way we live our lives.

**"O Mary, conceived without sin,  
pray for us who have recourse to thee."**