

The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary God's Preparation for the Birth of Jesus

Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee! (Canticle of Canticles 4:7)

This Scripture passage describes so beautifully God's masterpiece of creation, that chosen vessel, the Virgin Mary, destined from eternity to bear God into our world. Mary's vocation as Theotokos, God-bearer of the Redeemer, Mother of the Sacred Humanity, is a mission that by its very purpose necessitated her singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception. She who was to give her very flesh and blood to the Son of the living God, the All-Holy One in Whose presence not the slightest impurity can stand, must herself be untouched by any impurity in order to be a fitting dwelling place for Jesus. She is conceived in God's eternal mind, formed in the bosom of the Father's unfathomable love. She is the first fruits of her own divine Son's work of redemption. She is sanctified in the womb of her mother, Anna, by the power of God's Holy Spirit. She is the epitome of God's marvelous deeds and of the extravagance of His Love.

Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in his Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* on December 8, 1854 in these words:

The Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.

Being a descendant of Adam and Eve, Mary, like us, needed redemption. Unlike us who are **cleansed from** original sin in Baptism, Mary was redeemed in a more exalted fashion, **preserved from** original sin **in anticipation of Christ's saving death**. No sin, original or personal, ever touched her soul. Favored with the fullness of grace befitting her divine maternity, she who is most like her All-Holy Son exceeds all men and angels in purity. Although the angels are more exalted in the order of nature, Mary is far more exalted in the order of grace. She is the Queen-Mother whom the King never refuses. She is the woman expected since the Promise God gave in the Garden of Eden when He announced her victory and that of her offspring over Satan, as He cursed that ancient serpent. **I will put enmity between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.** (Gen 3:15)

Mary's role in God's plan for our salvation can only be understood in the light of the Sacred Humanity and in that awesome mystery that is the beginning and end of all things, the Most Holy Trinity, our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sanctifier. The mystery of the Trinity is the central doctrine of our Christian Faith.

The first Eve, mother of all the living, succumbed to the wiles of Satan and in pride and disobedience enticed the first Adam to likewise disobey God. Adam's

disobedience effected man's separation from God and passed on to all their posterity the effects of their sin—a darkening of the mind, a hardening of the heart, and a stubborn bending of the human will away from God and inward upon itself. This original sin brought us suffering and death and closed the gates of heaven to mankind.

Mary, the new Eve, reversed the effects of the first Eve's sin precisely by her humility and her obedience to the will of God. While God created us without our consent, He cannot save us without our consent. Why? Having made us in His image which is Love and by definition free, He made us free, knowing full well we might choose to reject Him. And so man, in Adam and Eve, did reject God, but God always takes the initiative. Although He will never force our free will, He will always woo us into the desert, that sacred space deep within us that is His alone, where everything else fails us and He alone remains, where He can speak to our hearts. He spoke to Mary's heart and she said "yes," "yes" on behalf of all the living, and God hastened to be born amongst us in Jesus who is like us in all things but sin. Mary gives us Jesus, and in His Sacred Humanity the divine and the human are intimately and irreversibly wed. While the Israelites believed that no one could see the face of God and live, in Jesus all humanity does see the Face of God and does live, ever more fully in His abundant life.

Mary is indeed the new Ark of the new Covenant, not made of wood or carved in stone, but made of grace and written in the hearts of men. She is the **Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God**, for in her the Son of God was made flesh and snuggled close to the human heart and commingled with our human affairs. She is the living temple of the Living God, and in her lowliness there is more splendor than in the temple Solomon built. She is the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. Sacred Scripture begins and ends boasting her immeasurable grace and God's fidelity to His promise throughout the ages, manifested and fulfilled in and through their Beloved Son.

This Immaculate Virgin, **Our Lady of America®**, appeared to Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil on November 22 and 23, 1957 under a magnificent image that combines the Mary of Genesis with the Mary of Revelation and identified herself as **"I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within."**

Our Lady was standing on a globe, her right foot resting on a crescent or quarter moon, the left on the snout of a rather small and very ugly looking dragon. I saw fire come out of his huge jaws, but not very much, as he could not open them wide enough because of Our Lady's foot. At times he seemed to be somewhat black, again of a shade of green. Our Lady was all in white. Her veil was so long that it seemed to envelop the globe halfway. Sometimes the veil appeared so transparent that Our Lady's hair could be seen through it, and the hair seemed to be sparkling with the light of many glittering stars. At times the edges of the veil, sleeves, and garments seemed to be outlined in light. The veil was held about her head by a wreath of white roses. Her feet were bare.

The previous day Our Lady had appeared with her hands outstretched. At this second visit she slowly raised them, then crossed them on her breast rather close to her waist. While doing so, she bent her head slightly forward, and it seemed that her eyes were closed, not just lowered. On her breast, as though through a veil, the Triangle and the eye, which is often depicted as the symbol of the Divine Indwelling, could be visibly seen. I said that Our Lady's feet were bare, that is, devoid of any kind of footwear, but on each foot was a large white rose. The roses, both on the feet and on the crown, were of such dazzling whiteness that the outlines of the petals could barely be seen, sometimes not at all. It seemed that a strong beam of light streamed from the Divine Presence within Our Lady onto the globe at her feet. Then half-way around the figure of Our Lady above her head appeared a scroll on which were written in letters of gold the words: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within."

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, Ohio, Pgs. 22-23.)

The mission of Mary is the mission of all of us, to be living tabernacles for the Indwelling God Who wishes to make His presence known in our world. As we learn to share in her grace, may we learn to share in her prayer of praise to the Almighty God who dwells within. **My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He Who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name! (Lk 1: 46-47.)**

There are those who say we give too much honor to Mary. The simple truth is, no one can give Mary as much honor as God Himself has, and we are right to imitate Him. So, on May 10, 1846, the 6th Provincial Council of Baltimore, the first Catholic diocese in the US, petitioned Rome to have Mary under the title of her Immaculate Conception declared our Patroness. In 1847 Pope Pius IX, the pope who defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, granted the bishops' request to declare the Immaculate Conception Patroness of the United States. On March 25, 1858, at Lourdes, France, Our Lady identified herself to Bernadette as "I am the Immaculate Conception," confirming her title. On September 25, 1956, Our Lady appeared to Sister Mildred Neuzil here in America, first as Our Lady of Lourdes, tying our history to her great privilege of the Immaculate Conception, before appearing the next day as Our Lady of America to show her gratitude for the honor we gave her as our Patroness. She made a request to her beloved sons, the bishops of the US, to place a statue of her under the title of our country in our National Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. and to honor her there as "Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin." It is now 2017 and this request has not yet been fulfilled.

We grieve with you, dear Mother, over the ingratitude of America!

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