

The Immaculate Conception

Overview

The feast day for the Virgin Mary's conception is celebrated on December 8th each year. Nine months later on September 8th is the feast day for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary – that is, the day she was born. Is there something special about this conception? Read on...

The Early Church

While not understanding the theology, the early church from the very first few centuries believed that Mary's conception was from God. We find this reference in Luke 1:28 where Mary is referred to by the angel Gabriel as being *full of grace*. This is a term that signifies (but does not prove conclusively) that Mary was free from sin and immaculately conceived. God created both Adam and Eve in an immaculate state and certainly could do no less for the person to bear the son of God.



Grace is the presence of God. For Mary to be full of grace – she had to be completely pure. When the Angel Gabriel referred to her as being full of grace – he was declaring that she was born without the stain of Original Sin – the only way she could be “full of grace”.

The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

This dogma was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854 and states that from conception, Mary was without sin and filled with grace. It made official what the faithful already believed from the 1st century. See **paragraph 491 of the Catholic Catechism** – for the full text of what the church teaches.

Not long after – in 1858 - a simple French peasant by the Name of Bernadette Soubirous had visions of Mary – who she did know who she was. When she was asked by the local priest what her name was – Bernadette responded: “The woman told her she was The Immaculate Conception.” Bernadette did not know what this meant and it added credibility to her visions and the recent Dogma.

Mary is Special

Mary – like most of the women of the time – prayed for the arrival of the Messiah. As a member of the Jewish faith Mary was steeped in scriptures and they prophesized that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. The women of Israel – including Mary – prayed for the arrival of the Messiah and that they might be the privileged virgin. Mary was that special person.

Scriptures tells us that the Jews carried the *Arc of the Covenant* which had the presence of God within it. One of Mary's titles is known as the “*Arc of the Covenant*” in that she carried Jesus – the Second Person of the Trinity – in her womb. For God to enter mankind as Jesus did – that Arc or Vessel had to be pure. It only makes theological sense that God – who is Holy – could only become Incarnate in a Holy and pure vessel. Mary had that required purity in her Immaculate Conception – as the Mother of God.