

December 8, 2016 Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception
Gospel: Luke 1: 26-38 "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.
Full of grace!"

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, 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.

After the Gospel:

Lourdes, France has roughly the same population as Bardstown KY – 15,000.
Lourdes is a city that bulges with pilgrims in good weather, but basically shuts down early November,
when winter hits the mountains.
The one big exception is December 8, when they re-live the day in 1858 that the beautiful young lady
appeared to 14-year old Bernadette Soubirous high on a rock over the River Gave, asking if Bernadette
would do her the favor of returning every day for a fortnight, then instructing Bernadette to go – tell the
priest to build a chapel on the spot. When the skeptical priest, Dean Peyramale, told Bernadette to ask
the name of the Lady, the visitor from heaven replied,
"I am the Immaculate Conception."

All around the grotto at Lourdes today, candles will be burning, crowds in procession will be singing
"Ave, Ave, Ave Maria!" in honor
of the Lady who could say, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Even though the Church sings every day that God has done great things for His people, today, we sing specifically of Mary, full of grace, we sing of her Immaculate Conception, that from the first moment of her presence in the womb of her mother, Ann, Mary was preserved from Original Sin, free from all stain of stain, by a most singular privilege and grace granted by God on account of the merits of Jesus Christ.

Non-Catholics sometimes don't like "all this fuss about a woman." They object that the words "Immaculate Conception" aren't in the Bible, that it's something added on by the Catholic Church. However, the word "Trinity" isn't in the Bible either, and you can't be Christian and not believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Truth is, "Immaculate Conception" didn't begin at Lourdes, it didn't come from Rome, – it's because our God has so much love for us that He had to redeem us.

And to redeem us, He did not send an angel or a messenger, but He sent His Son.

And for that, He needed cooperation. And in a mystery of love which defies explanation – we don't know why He chose the way He did – God chose an unknown virgin, and it's as though He asked her to do Him the

favor of being the Mother of His Son. And the virgin said, "Yes!"

And we praise Mary for believing in the plan, for her obedience to the plan. And, in our feast today, we praise God for preparing the Virgin Mother to be a dwelling worthy of His Son.

Our reading from the Book of Genesis told of the creation of the first man and the first woman --she was called Eve, because she became the mother of all the living – and how the first Adam and the first Eve were not obedient.

But that's not the end of the story. God did not abandon us. He so loved the world that He gave us His only Son, the Second Adam, who was obedient even to death. It's through the obedience of Christ that we're all made holy and blameless.

And for Christ to enter the world, God ever so carefully prepared a dwelling place.

The gospel account of the Annunciation shows just how carefully God prepared Mary as the dwelling place for His Son. Mary – full of grace! The power of the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and the Child born of her was the Son of God!

In the first centuries, the Fathers of the Church preached that Mary was the "new Eve," the obedient Eve, the sinless one! and they marveled how God made Mary a worthy dwelling place. Why shouldn't God prepare her to be a worthy dwelling?

After all, Mary was not merely the Mother of our Lord's body, but she is the Mother of God. The Second Person of the Trinity took His human

flesh from her, and clothed in that flesh,

He lay within her womb for nine months. He was nursed by her, cared for by her, He obeyed her. He

lived with her for thirty years, she witnessed His growth, His joys, His sorrows, His prayers. She was blest with His smile, with the touch of His hand, with the whisper of His affection, with the expression of His thoughts and his feelings.

The Fathers of the Church consistently taught that nothing is too high for her to whom God owes His human life: no richness of grace, no glory is too much, because God Himself lodged in her, God issued from

her. They called her: the sinless tabernacle, free from all taint of sin, as sinless and pure as the Holy of Holies, the sinless Ark of the Covenant in which would repose the Son of God.

It was Mary's privilege to receive this gift in advance, in expectation of the redeeming Blood of her Son, in order to prepare a fitting place for Him.

Today at Lourdes, they'll be singing in hope, praying for healing, recalling those first miracles: Croisine Bouhorts and her 18-month old child Justin who was convulsive, with rickets, never able to stand, walk or sit up, sickly all his life, the doctors finally gave him a few hours to live – it's a matter of hours they said – until his mother ran down, bathed him in the icy waters of the miraculous spring, and Justin lived on to witness the canonization ceremony of St. Bernadette Soubirous.

Or the quarry worker, Louis Bouriette – blinded years before in a mine explosion – blind until he washed in the heaven-sent spring, then he could see!

But mostly they'll be singing of God's love for us ...

How Creation is God's achievement, not ours.

How redemption is God's achievement, not ours.

How that first paradise is now opened to us through the Virgin Mother and her Son!

"Hail Mary, Full of grace!" Ave Ave Ave Maria! For our Redeemer is Christ, your Son!

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