

UNDERSTANDING

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION



In Mary, the ordinary life of a human being was transformed by grace from the first moments of her existence. Mary played a crucial role in salvation history, and sometimes the various aspects of that role seem to overlap. For example, many people notice that the Mass readings for the feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) include Luke's Gospel of the Annunciation. This reading tells of Jesus' conception through the power of the Holy Spirit, but is also seen as evidence of the purity of Mary's soul and the unity of her will with the will of God. The Virgin Birth of Jesus and the Immaculate Conception are clearly related, but they are not the same event.

The Immaculate Conception is the doctrine that Mary, conceived in the normal way through an act of love by her mother and father, was preserved from original sin and its effects from the first moment of her existence. This special grace was conferred on her through the grace of God in anticipation of the Redemption. This doctrine is celebrated on December 8.

Virgin Birth came about because Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Annunciation of the Lord is celebrated on March 25.

Mother of God is Mary's title because Jesus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became fully human when, as we say in the Creed, "he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary." We celebrate the Incarnation on Christmas and Mary's motherhood eight days later on January 1, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God.

Mary, Mother of the Church

There When We Need Her

Jesus gave Mary to the Church from the cross when he told John the disciple, "Behold your mother" (John 19:26-27). Mary was present in the upper room with the other disciples on Pentecost, when the Church was born (Acts 1:13-14). Over the centuries of Christianity, Mary has been sought out by the faithful who find in her support for their own lives of discipleship. As one whose own life of faith was not easy or simple, Mary is a companion who can show us a path in our suffering.

Mary is a wonderful example of what happens when one opens oneself to the life and power of God. In her last spoken words in the Gospels, Mary directs our attention to Jesus, saying "Do whatever he tells you." Mary is not a goddess wielding power. Neither is she controlling and domineering nor cold and aloof. Mary is there for us whenever we need her.

The Magnificat

MY SOUL MAGNIFIES the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor
on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those
who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts
of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful
from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1:46-55