

Immaculate Conception 2007

A Mother for Christ, a Mother for Us

Some **non-Catholic** Christians **criticize** Catholics for our **devotion** to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



- ? They are afraid that **celebrations** like today's **take away** glory from Jesus Christ, the one Lord of life and history, the one Savior.
- ? They are afraid that because we give so much veneration and respect to Jesus' **Mother**, we will **fail** to give enough respect to **Jesus himself**.

But those are **foolish fears**. Have you ever known anyone who **resented** compliments being given to their mother?

Jesus himself, in fact, **started** devotion to Mary, by choosing her to bring him into the world.

- ? After all, he could have become incarnate just by forming himself from the **clay of the earth**, as he had done with Adam.
- ? But instead, he chose to give himself a **human mother**, to whom he was devoted, following his own commandment to "honor your father and mother."

And he **passed that devotion onto his Church**, by entrusting his disciples to her care while he hung on the cross.

True devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, then, does not **distance** us from Christ; it brings us **closer** to him.

Today's celebration is a perfect example of **how** that happens.

Today we **commemorate** and **celebrate** two things:

- ? first, the **conception** of Mary in her mother's womb;
- ? and second, the dogma (officially defined in 1854 by Pope Pius IX, after being believed and celebrated by the whole Church for centuries) explaining that that conception was "**immaculate**", that Mary was **protected from the stain and effects of original sin** from the very first moment of her existence.

Why did God give Mary such a unique privilege? Because of **Christ**, and because of **us**.

ILLUSTRATION: A Mother Worthy of Christ

First, because of Christ.

In the Old Testament, God commanded Moses to take great pains in the **proper construction** of the **Ark of Covenant**, the sacred container in which the people of Israel preserved three things:



- ? the **stone slabs** with the **Ten Commandments** chiseled on them;
- ? some of the **manna** that God had miraculously sent from heaven to feed the Israelites during their forty-year sojourn in the desert;
- ? and the **staff of Aaron**, Moses' brother, the high priest of Israel.



The **Old Covenant** was a preparation for the **New Covenant**.

And so, these items, Israel's most **precious** possessions, all symbolized **Christ**.

- ? **Jesus himself is God's Word**, more truly and fully than the cold stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.
- ? His **real presence** in the **Eucharist** makes him the **real bread from heaven**.
- ? His **perfect sacrifice on the cross** made him the **definitive high priest of human history**.

Now if the items **inside** the Ark of the Covenant **foreshadowed Christ**, **what** was foreshadowed by the **Ark itself**, the **container** of those items?

It foreshadowed **Mary**, whose **womb** became the **Ark**, the container, of the **New Covenant**.

And God had commanded the Israelites to give **special construction** to the Ark of the Old Covenant.

- ? They had to make it out of **acacia** [uh-KAY-shuh] **wood**, which, like cedar wood, doesn't **corrupt** with age.
- ? And they also had to **cover** the entire Ark, **inside and out**, with **gold** - the most **valuable** and **stainless** metal known to the ancient world.
- ? These special requirements for the Ark **reflected** the **unique importance** of what the Ark contained: the Ark was the sign of God's presence among his people.



When the Old Covenant **symbols** gave way to the New Covenant **reality**, God **himself** prepared the Ark of the New Covenant, **Mary**, Jesus' Mother, just as **carefully** as he had commanded the old one to be prepared.

- ? He allowed her to be conceived in the normal way, but **without inheriting the stain or the effects of original sin** - pure and sinless, immaculate, like acacia wood and gold.
- ? This privilege stemmed not from **her** greatness, but because of the **incomparable greatness** of what she would **contain**: Jesus Christ, God himself, our Savior.

ILLUSTRATION: A Mother Worthy of Christians

That's the **first** reason for the Immaculate Conception - because of **Christ**, to give him a fitting mother.

The second reason is because of **us**.

One of the **effects** of original sin is to give us a **strong tendency to self-centeredness**.

We spend our lifetimes **battling against** this tendency by growing more and more like Christ.

Since Mary was **preserved** from original sin, she was also preserved from this deep-seated **tendency**.

- ? This meant that **her heart was completely free** from any innate selfishness.
- ? She, unlike anyone since Adam and Eve, was **completely free to love God** with an undivided love, to respond to him with her **whole heart**, mind, soul and strength.
 - ? No **internal divisions or weakness** inhibited her total self-giving to the Lord.



And because Christ also made her the mother of the **Church** and all **Christians**, she has borne that same **untrammelled love** for each one of Jesus' brothers and sisters - for **us**.

- ? She loves each of us with the tenderness and attention of the most devoted mother, but without any of the **insecurity** or **possessiveness** that original sin tends to inject into **most** motherly love.
- ? Therefore, all her **prayers and hopes** for us have to do with **bringing us into closer communion with her Son**, the one Savior, who **alone** can give happiness and meaning to our lives.
- ? She doesn't want to bring us closer to **herself** - she is not egocentric - rather, she wants and works to bring us **closer and closer to Christ**.

APPLICATION: Conclusion: Echoing Mary's Yes

The Immaculate Conception was God's way of giving **Jesus** a worthy mother on **earth**, and of giving **us** a worthy mother in **heaven**.

We should **thank** him for this great gift, and the best way to do that is to **follow in our mother's footsteps**, answering every call that God sends to our **hearts** and **consciences** in the same way that Mary answered **her** call, by saying: "**May it be done to me according to your word.**"

