

***The Feast of the Immaculate Conception  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Homily ~ December 8, 2011***

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One of the dominant persons of Advent is Mary, the young woman from Nazareth. It is especially fitting that right now, in the midst of Advent, we should celebrate Mary's feast, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. For God prepared Mary for the Savior's coming from the very first moment of her conception. He made her sinless in every way—no original sin, no actual sin.

*"Mary, full of grace,"* the angel exclaims, and that is exactly what he meant. Mary is literally full of God's grace. So full, there is no room for any sin within her. And how could it be otherwise? For God Incarnate must enter the world via a spotless vessel, born of a woman but a woman without sin.

Mary teaches us how to celebrate Advent. Mary is the perfect Advent figure because the Mother of Jesus is history's most remarkable model of a world waiting for its Redeemer. More than anyone else, she reveals how the Christian should wait for Christ. She shows us how to wait for Christ in all his comings.

First, she waits for Christ's first coming. Like every other pious Jew, she hoped against hope, wondering, questioning, *"Are you he who is to come, or should we look for another?"* But Mary did more than that. She waited for the Christ as no one else ever waited. What did the angel tell her? *"You shall conceive and bear a son... the son of the Most High."* Mary agrees, *"Let it be done to me according to your word."*

And with this, Jesus is not simply in her thoughts and hopes, in her prayers, and in her yearnings, he is in her flesh. His flesh is her flesh. Hers is his. She waits only to see his face and offer him to the world. Oh, yes, it was a very special sort of waiting—her Savior within her; her Savior growing from her; her Savior born into the poverty of the stable through her.

Mary also shows us how to wait for Christ's second coming for she was the first of Jesus' disciples. She wasn't one of the twelve, but she lived discipleship to the fullest. Jesus told us clearly what it means to be a disciple. *"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother"...* the ones who listen to the word of God and act on it."

What does Mary do after the Annunciation? She visits her cousin, Elizabeth, who is with child. Elizabeth is old and needs the help of her young relative. Mary's first act as Jesus' mother is to carry him, not for herself, but for someone in need. No wonder then that when Mary greeted Elizabeth, John the Baptist leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb.

Once again, Mary sings that God has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

God feeds the hungry, not with miraculous manna from heaven, but through us. The hungers of the human race call out to us: hunger for bread, hunger for justice, hunger for love, hunger for truth, hunger for God.

I cannot tell you what God is calling you as an individual to do, for God works differently through each of us. I can tell you that he is not telling you to do nothing.

He speaks to each of us constantly, but we are Jesus' disciples, in imitation of Mary, only if we listen to his word and act on it.

This is what Advent is about—not just waiting for Christ but also recognizing his coming and doing something about it.

Christ with us. Christ all around us. Christ leading us. We need only murmur with Mary, “Whatever you say, Lord” and then do it.

*St. John the Evangelist*

*≈140<sup>th</sup> Jubilee ≈*

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