

The Immaculate Conception

Luke 1:38. Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.



Anna Marie McNew is a wife, mother of two, assists with the Blue Army Cadets and volunteers in the PREP (Parish Religious Education Program) office. She is a lector at both weekend and weekday liturgies, has taken the Natural Family Planning course, the Familia Program. She is also part of the St. Catherine Labouré Guild of the Altar Society. Anna and her family assist the parish in many annual activities, including Vacation Bible School and the Annual Life Saver Drive for Right to Life.

This verse is packed with so much meaning! The first thing that came to my mind was the First Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. When we pray the rosary we engage ourselves in that memorable event. A priest I know, Fr. John Corapi says that when we pray the rosary, we pray the Gospels.

The title for this feast is the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Many Catholics may confuse it with the conception of Jesus. God's plan was so important that he prepared Mary in a special way.

Many women of the Old Testament pre-figure Mary in their words and actions. Women are involved in bringing the Israelites into safety at some turning points in the Old Testament for the Hebrew people. Mary is hinted at in the Old Testament and then appears in the New Testament, just like Jesus.

This verse tells us that God's promise in the book of Genesis is fulfilled. It took all that time for it to happen. It was through a woman that humanity fell, but it is through a woman that the Redeemer is born. Mary becomes the new Eve. All this occurs in God's time, not ours. God decided when the time was right for his son to enter the world. Mary's "yes," her "fiat," fulfilled that promise.

Mary held man's eternal destiny in her heart, in her voice, in her entire being. Everything was hanging in the balance. When I think of this I always wonder what heaven was like. Were the angels wondering: "What will she say?" Her answer could have been "Yes" or "No."

Our redemption would not have been possible if she hadn't opened herself to the will of God with her entire body, mind and spirit. She conformed her will perfectly to God's will and because of that she is a perfect example for us to follow.

I always pray for Mary's help. I have been through the St. Louis de Montford method of consecration to the Blessed Mother, the same thing that our late pope, John Paul II used shortly after an attempt was made on his life. So now all the

good that I do and all things that I offer up are through our Holy Mother. Mary can be an instrument to make anything I do an appropriate offering before God.

Mary has endured everything that humanity experiences, with the grace of God to guide her. Surely she understands what it's like to get up in the night with a sick child. She knows what its like to fulfill the needs of children and maintain a good family life. She also knows suffering. She was there at the foot of the cross when her Son died. Mary was there in the upper room when the Church was born, receiving the Holy Spirit with the apostles. In times of stress, trouble and joy, she is a model to emulate.

Mary has been through all the challenges of every day life. It must have been wonderful to watch Jesus take his first step, to soothe him as he cut his first tooth and to rejoice when he was found in the Temple three days after he was lost. Mary opened her heart and her body to God. She made a total gift of herself. It was an act of total trust at a very young age. When you think of it, her very act of saying "Yes" was punishable by death, because she was an unwed mother. Her cooperation with God's will reveals the importance and the dignity of women.

Mary was a person of faith who loved God. She wanted to do the right thing. The message of Mary is totally opposite with the message of feminism that the world gives us. We do not need to be just like men to be accepted. Mary shows us that we can simply be who we are and there is dignity in that. After all, He chose a woman to cooperate in his plan.

Although there were many mothers before Mary came along, Mary elevated motherhood, making women the heart of the home. We are told in Genesis that Satan will always be in opposition with Mary and Jesus. Satan is still trying to destroy family life by attacking the heart of the home.

I would not have been able to reflect very well on this verse of Scripture fifteen or twenty years ago. I have experienced a longing in my life to know God and I realize that I am responsible for handing on the faith to my family, especially my husband and my children. It's something that must be taken seriously. Delving into our faith opens so many doors. When Jesus knocks and we open the door, he will lead you to places you never expected. Parents must take on the responsibility to give their children the tools necessary to carry on the faith.

Many doors have been opened because I have said my own "fiat," my own "yes," to God. I have accomplished many things that must have been through God's hand, because I know I never could have done them on my own. One example is the book that the Blue Army Cadets now use.

I used to work in mechanical design. That was my talent. One day I was given a project. I was designing a book that would show the skeleton of a van, beginning with one part, and ending with the entire skeleton. This book would be used to

teach young engineers how this was done. I hated that project, because I thought my talents could be better used elsewhere, but as I got into it, I enjoyed it and eventually it was finished.

As I look back, that project helped me design a new book for the Blue Army Cadets. Previously their books were black and white and the pictures weren't very clear. I met with Fr. Andrew, who advised me on content and some legal aspects. Julie, the music minister, offered advice on copyright laws. I used my experience of producing that book to design a new, full-color book for the children. My previous experience was put to good use for the Church. Now I thank God for that experience. God is always working in our lives. While I was preparing that book for my job, I didn't know that God would use those same skills for his glory.

Children of the parish are invited to be involved in the Blue Army Cadets. Please contact the parish office at 653-2377.

Our parish staff can also give you more information about Natural Family Planning or the Familia Program sessions.

All the women of the parish are members of the St. John Altar Society. Meetings are held in the parish family center on the first Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. All are welcome!