

# Read

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Luke 1:26-38

# Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 9, 2024



## REFLECTION

This week's Gospel contains the story of Mary's yes to God. Theologians refer to this yes as Mary's *fiat* (Latin for "let it be done"). It is held up as a model for Christians of how we should cooperate with God. When Mary consents to and cooperates with God's will, the most amazing thing happened: God became incarnate, became human, to save us!

What example does Mary set for us today? Mary is open and receptive, but she is not passive. Even though she is afraid, Mary seeks to understand the angel's words. To gain a clearer understanding, she ponders, wonders, and questions the angel, who responds by giving her assurances and evidence of God's power at work. Only then does Mary utter her *fiat*, actively embracing the role God has offered her.

God's will isn't something that merely happens to us; we have to choose to participate in it with our own *fiat*. May we all seek to understand and grow in trust in God's will like Mary!



## ACTION

This week, use the practice of *lectio divina* to open yourself to hearing and embracing God's will for your life. *Lectio divina* is an ancient form of Christian prayer that is grounded on Scripture.

Briefly, here are the four steps for this practice. (You can learn more about it in the link below.)

- 1) *Read* a Scripture passage slowly several times. You may even try reading the verses aloud.
- 2) *Meditate* on the passage. Cultivate inner quiet and openness to God's word. Were there any phrases or ideas that really stood out to you as you read? What feelings and images arose in your mind?
- 3) *Pray* as you read the Scripture again. Take any thoughts, questions, and concerns that arise and offer them to God.
- 4) *Contemplate* this experience, resting in God's presence and allowing him to respond to your heart.



<https://ltp.org/s/lectio-divina>

## QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What stops you from being open to following God's will?
- ❖ Has your faith ever been strengthened by God's action in someone else's life?



December 9, 2024

# SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

## LECTIONARY #689

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Luke 1:26-38

## Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

### Leader's Context

Today we reflect on Mary's thoughtful response to God's message. After the angel's greeting, she pondered what it might mean. To ponder something is to take time to think about and reflect upon something. God had prepared her for this moment by saving her from original sin at the moment of her conception. After considering the angel's words, she responded by trusting and accepting God's will for her. Her response gives us a model for responding to things. The teens are invited to consider the way they respond to God and how they can put their response to God into action.

**Q FOCUS:** Faithful action stems from faithful reflection. Stop and pray, reflect and act.

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

Today is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the patronal feast day of the United States of America and is a holyday of obligation. This feast celebrates the work that God did in Mary, that from the moment of her conception, God preserved her from original sin so that she would be prepared to bear in her womb the perfection of God in the person of Jesus. Mary still had free will; she could choose to

say yes or no and choose the activities she did throughout her life. However, she was not influenced by the temptation to sin like all other human beings are because of the Fall. God removed that tendency to sin; thus, her immaculate conception.

### Church Teaching Connection

"In Christ, God has truly come into the world, he has entered into our history, he has set his dwelling among us, thus fulfilling the deepest desire of human beings that the world may truly become a home worthy of humanity. On the other hand, when God is put aside, the world becomes an inhospitable place for man, and frustrates creation's true vocation to be a space for the covenant, for the 'Yes' to the love between God and humanity who respond to him. Mary did so as the first fruit of believers with her unreserved 'Yes' to the Lord" (Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, March 26, 2012).

## Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

### Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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.

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

Usually, we know how to respond to greetings within the various groups to which we belong. There are greetings we use among our peers, ones we use within our families, ones we use at school, and so on. All of these greetings might be different, but they are familiar to us because we are familiar with the group of people.

In today's Gospel, Mary receives a strange greeting from someone she does not know, the angel Gabriel. The angel says, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." You might be very familiar with these words if you have ever prayed the rosary. But what if it were directed at you as a greeting? How does a person respond to that? Does she say, "Fine"? She definitely does not say, "What's up"! When Mary was faced with this greeting, she answered with silence. The reading says that she "pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

► **What do you think Mary was thinking about in her silent response?**

► **How often do you pause and think before acting or responding to someone? How can pausing be helpful in a situation?**

Mary's response of silence gives her time to digest the angel's words. It allows her to be more open to hear what God is saying to her through the angel. This faithful response by Mary, who is favored and graced by God, is a guide to us today. In a world where every reaction is instantaneous, where news is constantly flowing, and where our social media feeds automatically update, we are invited to join with Mary to stop and reflect on what God is doing. How can we invite God into every moment of our lives?

Gabriel calls Mary "full of grace." Since the moment of her conception, she has been filled with God's grace. Even before Jesus came into the world, God was preparing Mary to respond to the message of the angel. This grace is a total gift of God; Mary did not do anything to earn it. Similarly, the grace of our salvation is a total gift from God, given to us in our baptism. We cannot earn it, but we can ponder it in our hearts and respond to it throughout our lives.

► **What are some ways that we can ponder God's work in our lives?**

► **What are some things we can do to respond to God's gift of salvation?**

Mary teaches us how to respond to God. She did not fully know his plan. She was not aware of all that would come. But that didn't matter. She trusted God. She didn't disagree or complain. She opened up her heart to make space for God and listen to his voice. She said yes to God's plans for her. We can respond

in the same way, by trusting God, making room for him in our hearts and our daily lives, and living out our faith.

## Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 88.

**Mary pondered the angel's message to her.**

**Stopping to reflect and pray helps us make decisions with God.**

**Reflection should lead to action.**

## Act on the Word

### Act Out the Gospel

For this activity, you will need enough copies of today's Gospel reading for each teen to have one. You can also provide the teens with costumes and props if you have some on hand, but these are not necessary.

The goal of this activity is for the teens to use their imaginations to engage deeply in today's Gospel reading and incorporate its message into their lives.

Divide the young people into small groups and give each person a copy of the Gospel reading for today. If you have costumes and props, you can also make those available to the groups. Instruct them to create short skits of their own creative interpretation of the story, paying particular attention to the greeting of the angel and Mary's response, as was discussed earlier in today's session. The teens can set the events in modern times, put the characters in familiar settings, use contemporary language, and

so on. The goal is to create skits that make the story's message more relevant to today's teens.

After the teens have been given ample time to create their skits, have each group perform for the larger group. After all the groups have presented, lead a discussion with the young people reflecting on what they would have done if they were in Mary's position and how they would have responded to Gabriel's message. Reflect on how putting this story in a contemporary setting helped them to better understand the Gospel's message. What did they learn from this experience? Conclude the activity by emphasizing the importance of reflection, trust, obedience, and faith, the qualities Mary exhibited in this passage. Encourage the teens to strive to embody these qualities in their own life.

### Closing Prayer

*In the fullness of time, O God,  
you sent your Son to be born of woman,  
and so enter into our world in a gesture of  
unconditional love.*

*May we, your sons and daughters,  
imitate the humble obedience of Mary  
so all we do will bring glory to your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

### For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.