

# Read

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

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

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Luke 1:26-38

## LIVING THE WORD

# Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 8, 2020



## REFLECTION

In his 2017 *Angelus* message on the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis explains that to be “full of grace” is to be “filled with the presence of God.” What an incredible image! Mary’s faithful response in today’s Gospel is just one moment in a life clearly filled with the presence of God. Can we say the same thing about our own lives? Do our interactions with our parents and siblings reflect a life filled with the presence of God? Do the ways we reach out to lonely or struggling classmates reflect a life filled with the presence of God? Do our choices on and off the field or court reflect a life filled with the presence of God? May we find inspiration from Mary’s life and witness.

## ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What do you think it means to be “full of grace”?
- ❖ What does today’s solemnity reveal to us about God?



## ACTION

Create a social media post to share the message of today’s Gospel. Be sure to choose text and images that you find interesting and relatable. It is amazing how social media can be such an important way to share your faith with others. Continue this practice once or twice a week (or even daily!) throughout the season of Advent.





December 8, 2020

# 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 celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast day refers to the immaculate conception of *Mary*; please make note of this to your students. Many times, people think that this solemnity centers around the conception of Jesus, especially because we hear of that event in today's Gospel reading. Rather, today celebrates the conception of Mary, who was conceived without sin. Mary is conceived without sin so that she can freely offer God her "yes" and be the perfect instrument of God's work of salvation, which is fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus.

**Q FOCUS:** *Mary was conceived free from the stain of sin, so that she could become the mother of Jesus.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

The Church celebrates important moments throughout the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary because of her role in salvation history. She helps others encounter Christ, quite literally as the Mother of God, bringing Christ into the world, but also as a model of discipleship. All of her actions point us to the power, grace, love, and mercy of God. Find the different Marian feasts throughout the year on your liturgical calendar.

Some of these include Mary, Mother of God (January 1), the Annunciation of the Lord (March 25—this is a solemnity of the Lord but also celebrates Mary's faithful obedience to God), the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15), and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8). What other Marian feasts do you celebrate?

### Church Teaching Connection

"Today the Feast of the Immaculate Conception leads us to contemplate Our Lady who, by unique privilege, was preserved from original sin from the very moment of her conception. Even living in a world marked by sin, she was not touched by it: Mary is our sister in suffering, but not in evil or in sin. . . . The Immaculate Conception signifies that Mary is the first one to be saved by the infinite mercy of the Father, which is the first fruit of salvation which God wills to give to every man and woman, in Christ" (Pope Francis, *Angelus* Message, December 8, 2015).

## 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:*

► **Mary is described in so many ways in our tradition. What are some words you would use to describe Mary?**

Many times, we think of her as holy, meek, and mild, but Mary was also extremely courageous. She found herself in a very difficult situation: she was a very young woman, probably about your age. She was not

yet married. She should not have found herself pregnant. She was engaged to a man, who was not the father of her child. She could have been punished for her situation, and she was almost cast aside by Joseph, her intended husband. Yet she found the courage within herself to say "yes" to God. She looked deep inside of herself and overcame the fear that was facing her. She said "yes" even when she might have been worried about the outcome and nervous about what others might think of her—the scandal of the situation.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is in reference to *Mary's own conception*, not her conception of Jesus. From the moment of her conception, God kept Mary free from the stain of sin throughout her entire life. It is because of this that Mary was able to fully and completely say "yes" to the angel's message. This special grace allowed Mary to follow God's will and trust him completely, even in the face of such a life-changing event. She is a model for us of courageous discipleship.

► **Would you call yourself courageous? What does courage mean to you?**

Courage involves facing a fear that is troubling you and overcoming it. Courage is trusting that you are capable and strong enough to overcome any obstacle. Courage can come in so many shapes and sizes, and in Mary's case, it was a simple "yes." That "yes" took her down an amazing path full of miracles and joys, triumphs and sorrows as well. Even though we were not born free from original sin as Mary was, we receive this grace through the Sacrament of Baptism. This gives us courage to face any obstacle. When we rely on God's grace, we can face any challenges, knowing that he is there guiding us through.

► **How might a little dose of courage alter your path?**

God can provide you with the ingredients that you need in order to be more courageous in your life. Perhaps there is a difficult conversation you have been avoiding, and you need courage to face the other person finally. Maybe you have put off a difficult decision, and you are in need of strength and courage to make the decision and be confident in the decision. Take courage in Mary's example of faith and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

## 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 80.

God set Mary apart from all others by keeping her free from original sin, so that she could bear Jesus.

Mary is an example of courageous discipleship.

We can trust in God's promise and rely on him for all our needs.

## Act on the Word

### Models of Courage

Bring in some books on saints, Bibles, or allow the students use of smartphones and tablets during class.

The history of the Christian faith is full of faithful and courageous witnesses of God's love and mercy. Divide the teens into small groups. Have each group choose one person from history to research and reflect on their courageous witness of faith. These people can include biblical figures, such as Moses, Esther, Ruth, David, or Stephen, the first martyr. They could also choose to research saints, such as Ignatius of Loyola, Joan of Arc, Maximilian Kolbe, or Edith Stein. As the teens research their chosen saint or biblical figure, have them consider the following questions for discussion.

- \* What difficult decisions did this person have to make?
- \* How did they rely on God to persevere in their decisions?
- \* How did they share their faith with others?

Finish the activity by having the groups share what they found out about their figure and why he or she makes a good role model for living a life of discipleship.

### Closing Prayer

Lord God,  
you kept the Virgin Mary sinless from the first moment of her conception,  
that she might be a worthy vessel for your Son, Jesus Christ, the author of forgiveness and redemption.

As we celebrate the unique grace you worked in her, may we give thanks that you have set us free by our Baptism.

We ask this 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.