



Invest time each week to expand your vocabulary and deepen your faith.

08 December 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Immaculate Conception

ˈi-ˈmɑ-kyə -lət kən-ˈsep-shən

Dogma of the Catholic Church, since Pope Pius IX officially declared it in 1854, that Mary was “full of grace” and uniquely conceived without the stain (*macula*) of original sin. Not to be confused with the virgin birth of Jesus, a singular event for which Mary’s **Immaculate Conception** prepares.

Pronunciation: <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-immaculate-conception>

CONTEXT

In the spirit of the age (1856) the U.S. bishops chose Mary under the title of her **Immaculate Conception** to be the patroness of their relatively new country. —Elizabeth Johnson

The **Immaculate Conception** shines like a beacon of light for humanity in all the ages. If Christ is the day that never fades, Mary is its dawn, shining with beauty. —Pope John Paul II

WHY IT MATTERS

As Mother of the church, Mary gives birth to our hope and understanding of discipleship. Just as Mary **Immaculate** was prepared before birth to be the Mother of God, we’re rescued from the effects of sin by Baptism into the redemption of Christ and thus made ready for service to God’s mission.

From *Ineffabilis Deus* ("God Ineffable"), papal bull declaring the dogma of **Immaculate Conception**: The Most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Savior of the human race, preserved free from all stain of original sin (29).

RELATED WORDS

Dogma | Virgin Birth | Immaculate Heart of Mary

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Why do Catholics believe in Mary’s Immaculate Conception?

The teaching of Mary’s sinlessness from the moment of her conception assumes the heft of dogma, a Greek term for “what seems right.” A dogma is an infallible teaching, which must be 1) contained in scripture or part of post-biblical tradition; 2) explicitly proposed as a divinely revealed belief; 3) issued as a solemn decree that can be later developed but not deliberately rejected without risk of heresy. This teaching about Mary’s beginnings is essential to Catholic understanding despite any mention in the gospels of Mary’s origins. However, Marian stories are recorded in “post-biblical tradition” texts, such as *The Birth of Mary*, that provide valuable windows into early Christian belief. One thing is clear: The Early Church believed the Incarnation bound Jesus and his mother in a singular, physical infusion of divine grace. The **Immaculate Conception** represents a very early understanding of this most pure bond.

—Alice Camille, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-Immaculate-Conception>

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (DECEMBER 9)

Bonds of love

The **Immaculate Conception**, that is, that Mary was born without original sin, is one of only two doctrines—along with the Assumption of Mary into heaven—proclaimed infallible by a pope. It’s also the patronal feast day of the United States. Why all the attention? Mary’s **Immaculate Conception** shows that it is possible, through God’s grace, to have an unbreakable bond with God. For Mary, it led to her yes to giving birth to Jesus, the savior of the world, who would overcome sin and bring humanity back into communion with God.

READINGS: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689) <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120924.cfm>. “*May it be done to me according to your word.*”

FAITH IN ACTION

Like Mary, we, too, can welcome God into our very selves and strive to strengthen the bonds of love.