

## HOMILY IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 2011 HT-W/XII-PC

The gospel selection for today's feast is a source of endless confusion within the Catholic community. It is the Annunciation. And this event corresponds w/ a conception. Moreover, the conception is that of Christ, who is free from sin, and thus he is immaculate. And so a sizable chunk of Catholics grow up thinking the feast of the Immaculate Conception is about Jesus' conception. But it is not. In fact, it is about the conception of Jesus' mother Mary. The Catholic teaching known as the Immaculate Conception is that Mary was preserved from all sin from the first moment of her conception.

Of course, the conception of Mary is nowhere narrated in Sacred Scripture. The selection today, however, helps us understand why she was conceived w/o sin. Mary is addressed as the one who is "full of grace." Other translations render it "most highly favored daughter." In other words, Mary is one who is singularly blessed by God in view of her unique role in salvation history, namely, her vocation to be the mother of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Before Mary had ever done anything, the Lord preserved her from all sin by a singular grace of Christ. The reason is that she who would conceive and give life to the sinless Son of God should be herself preserved and protected from all taint of transgression.

One important lesson to be drawn from this is particularly relevant in Advent. During this sacred season, we pray for the coming of the Christ. Right in the middle of every Advent, the Church observes the feast of the Immaculate Conception, where we celebrate God's triumphant grace which preserves the Virgin Mary from all sin. We are taught that God sanctifies the places where his glory is to abide--in the Old Testament, his glory filled the Temple at its dedication; in the New Testament, his Spirit descended upon the Virgin who was to become the ark of the new covenant, the bearer of the Christ. As we pray w/ urgent longing for the coming of Christ into our world, we should ask w/ renewed fervor that our own hearts be sanctified as well. May the Lord cleanse us from all sin, that we may welcome the birth of his Son once more. May the sacraments, esp. Penance and Communion, and ardent prayer drive out all darkness from our hearts, that we may rejoice in the light of Christ who is Emmanuel, God with us.