



## Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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.

**Introductory Prayer:** Lord, you are the author of life and of love. You wish to draw me closer to you, and yet I seem to find so many ways to escape from you. Forgive my dullness and coldness of heart. At least here I am now, hungry to know you and love you more and more.

**Petition:** Heavenly Father, help me to decide once and for all to strive for holiness.

**1. God Makes the First Choice:** When we read the Old Testament, we marvel at the many accounts of people chosen by God to fulfill a certain mission. We are familiar with the calling of the prophets Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 1), Moses (cf. Exodus 3), and so on. Mary is the New Testament prototype of God's calling. In all cases, God is the one who takes the initiative; he sends his messenger to communicate his choice. For Mary, the humble girl of Nazareth, this calling comes unexpectedly and is beyond purely human possibilities. For this reason, she is troubled by the words of the angel Gabriel and wonders about the greeting he gives. Do I keep in mind that God's plan for my life comes of his own initiative? Have I given my answer yet? Lord, help me to cooperate with you fully in putting into action your 'golden' blueprint for my life.

**2. A Case Presented to Confirm Freedom:** God doesn't want Mary to act blindly; he wants a response that involves her whole heart, mind and soul. For this reason, the angel Gabriel answers Mary's questions and concerns, which do not manifest doubt but, rather, humility in seeking to understand God's will. God created Mary free of sin and filled her with grace and goodness. Yet he respects her freedom to choose to do his will. What a mystery that the all-powerful God who created all things and who lovingly cares for us should be so generous in respecting our freedom! Lord, keep me from abusing my freedom in willfully subjecting myself to the slavery of my passions: pride, vanity, sensuality.

**3. Holiness Is Just a "Yes" Away:** After hearing God's messenger, Mary must give her answer. She does so with flying colors. Her generosity perfectly echoes God's. Every moment of the day is a new opportunity for us to imitate Mary's excellent example. She dedicated her life to saying "yes" to everything God asked of her, no matter what it was. She was rewarded with the grace of the Assumption. Only saints get into heaven, so we need to dedicate ourselves to following the path of holiness, too. That means giving a simple, humble "yes" to every opportunity provided by God to become more Christ-like. Lord, give me the courage to offer you my life as a blank sheet of paper, so you can write whatever you wish upon it.

**Conversation with Christ:** Jesus, I know that you are calling me to be more like you today! I know this is not an easy task, but you will give me the grace to achieve such a high ideal. I need to trust you and to see everything as something you send my way to help me achieve my goal of holiness. Grant me the grace, motivation, and continued good examples of others to be generous like Mary, your Mother.

**Resolution:** I will take a moment to encourage another person to strive for holiness, too. In a special way, I will be mindful to encourage young people to be open to the consecrated vocation, should the Lord be calling them.