

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Full of Grace



By Lorraine Vincent
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The Immaculate Conception

God chose Mary, a virgin, to be the Mother of His only begotten Son, Jesus. The prophets spoke of her: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name Him Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. Only a most pure, immaculate woman could be worthy to bear the Son of God. Our Holy Catholic Church celebrates the feast day of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th.

Full of Grace

Mary was wise and intelligent even at a young age. She knew the Jewish faith thoroughly and the sacred words of the Old Testament; because she was raised and taught in the Temple from the age of three until her engagement to Joseph. Almighty God had well prepared His chosen Virgin so that she was ready for the Annunciation of the Angel, and understood His message.

When the Angel Gabriel came to announce that God had chosen her to be the Mother of His only begotten Son, he addressed her with these words: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). “Full of Grace” therefore means Mary was pure, without sin. It also means that Mary had all the virtues to the full: the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues, that is, faith, hope and charity, wisdom, humility, liberality, chastity, meekness, temperance, brotherly love and diligence.

Raised in the Temple

Mary was the only child of her two elderly parents, Joachim and Anna, of the house of David. It was the custom in those days for the descendants of David to offer their young daughters to God in the Temple. The virgins were raised in the Temple so that at the proper time a holy virgin could be chosen to be the mother of the prophesied Messiah. This custom continued for centuries. At the age of three, the parents of Mary brought her to the Temple and left her there. Our Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin on November 21st.

Having been raised and taught in the Temple with the other virgins at that time, Mary would have grown to be very knowledgeable of the Bible and of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah. She would have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem: “But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:1). She would have known that the Messiah would be preceded by a prophet, a Precursor, to prepare the way: “A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3); and also know that the Mother of the Messiah would suffer grievously seeing Her Son suffer. She would have been familiar with Isaiah’s words of the man of many wounds, suffering for His people for their redemption: “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering, and acquainted with infirmity... there were many who were astonished at him—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance ... Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. ... he poured out himself to death ... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isai 53:3,6,10,12; 52:14).

The Annunciation

After her engagement to Joseph she left her home in the Temple, her teachers and the other virgins, and moved back to her house in Nazareth. The stage was set, so to speak. One could say that Mary was fully prepared to receive the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel. “In the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26,27).

Despite knowing the great responsibility of raising the Son of God and the destiny of great suffering of the Mother of God, Mary wanted to obey the will of God and sacrifice herself for the salvation of souls. She replied to the Angel Gabriel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

At the descent of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in her most pure womb, for the Angel had said to her, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. ... 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” (Luke 1:31,35). When the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, Jesus descended from Heaven into Her immaculate womb—a tabernacle, a little second Heaven. Only the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Full of Grace, could have been worthy of this act of God.

The Visitation

Despite acknowledging the greatness of the gift of God to Her, Mary remained humble and obedient to God—a great example to all of us. Having heard from the Angel that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, Mary hurried to her aid. Mary proclaimed in her Magnificat, “My soul proclaims the

greatness of the Lord; My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has looked upon His handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call Me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for Me, and holy is His name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear Him. He has shown might with His arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry He has filled with good things; the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped Israel His servant, remembering His mercy, according to His promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to His descendants forever" (Luke 1:46-55).

The Birth of Jesus

Jesus was not born in a king's castle. He was born in a stable because He wanted to be poor on earth to set an example for us that spiritual wealth is more important than material wealth. God the Father celebrated His Son's birth by creating a new star in the sky. The three wise men from Persia, Mesopotamia and Ethiopia, saw the new star which appeared at His birth. They made preparations for the long trek to come and worship the Holy Child. The Star led them to a house in Bethlehem. They worshipped the Christ Child, Who was by then about one or two years old. Therefore, the prophesy came to pass: "[T]he wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:5,6). The gifts of the wise men became a great source of the Providence of God to aid the Holy Family in their upcoming flight to Egypt. Joseph was informed by an Angel in a dream to flee to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. In Egypt Joseph had to acquire a home for Mary and Jesus. They remained there for some years until the death of Herod, and then make the long journey back to Nazareth. By then Jesus would have been about five years old. Thanks to the grace of God, the gifts of the wise men also would have helped Joseph re-establish his family in Nazareth.

Mary's Union with Jesus

Mary is the Church's model of obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. She persevered in her union with Jesus on the Cross and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim, born of her. She aided the beginnings of the Church and continues to pray for us. Our Catholic Church maintains that the Blessed Virgin Mary remained a virgin all her life. She has been given the titles Ever-virgin, the New Eve, Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, Mediatrix and Queen of Heaven and Earth.

When Mary's earthly life was completed, she was assumed body and soul into Heaven into the arms of Her dearly beloved Son. United with Jesus, she shares in the glory of her Son and remains forever the Blessed Virgin Mary, Full of Grace.

References: The Holy Bible, the Catholic Encyclopedia, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Dictionary