



Question: What Is the *Immaculate Conception*?

Few doctrines of the Catholic Church are as misunderstood as the dogma of the *Immaculate Conception*. Many people, including Catholics today, think that it refers to the conception of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That event, though—the Incarnation of Christ—is celebrated on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord (March 25, nine months before Christmas). So, what is the *Immaculate Conception*?

The Immaculate Conception refers to the human and spiritual condition of the Blessed Virgin Mary; which was free from Original Sin from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother, Saint Anne. We also celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8; nine months before is December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

In 1854, in his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, Pope Pius IX wrote that "*We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.*"

Another misconception people seem to commonly have, is that Mary's Immaculate Conception was necessary to ensure that Original Sin would not be passed on to Christ. This has never been a part of the teaching on the Immaculate Conception; rather, the Immaculate Conception represents Christ's saving grace operating in Mary in anticipation of His redemption of man and in God's foreknowledge of Mary's acceptance of His Will for her.

In other words, the Immaculate Conception was not a *precondition* for Christ's act of redemption but the result of it. It is the concrete expression of God's love for Mary, who gave herself fully, completely, and without hesitation to His service.

May each of us, this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, thank God for the gift of His grace to humanity; the gift of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and of course, His gift of Christ, His Son.