

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

LECTIONARY #689

READING I Genesis 3:9–15, 20

A reading from the Book of Genesis

After the **man**, Adam, had **eaten** of the **tree**,
the **LORD GOD** called to the man and asked him,
“**Where are you?**”

He answered, “I **heard** you in the garden;
but I was afraid, because I was **naked**,
so I **hid** myself.”

Then he asked, “**Who told you** that you were naked?
You have eaten, then,
from the **tree** of which I had forbidden **you** to eat!”

The man replied, “The woman whom you put here with me—
she gave **me** fruit from the tree, and so I ate it.”

The **LORD** God then asked the woman,
“**Why did you do such a thing?**”

The woman answered, “The **serpent** tricked me into it,
so I ate it.”

Then the **LORD** God said to the **serpent**:

“**Because you have done this, you shall be banned**
from all the animals
and from all the **wild creatures**;
on your belly shall you crawl,
and dirt shall you eat
all the days of your *life*.”

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihs

The congregation must hear fear in your voice.

Proclaim slowly, with authority.

Ask this question slowly, with authority.

Pause.

Transition your tone to reflect God’s anger.

READING I The reading from Genesis is part of a longer narrative that stretches from Genesis 2:25 through 3:24. It begins by stating that the man and his wife were naked, but that they felt no shame. Their nakedness signifies both their innocence and their ignorance. They seem easy prey for the serpent, whose temptation leads them to eat of the forbidden fruit. Today’s reading begins after their eating from the tree, with God’s call to them, “Where are you?” Adam and his wife Eve are hiding, attempting to evade God and hide their nakedness, which they have cov-

ered with fig leaves. They have lost their innocence and their ignorance of sin. God continues to ask questions of the couple: “Who told you that you were naked?” and “Why did you do such a thing?”—queries for which God already knows the answer. The questions provide the opportunity for the man and woman to admit what they have done, even as they attempt to place the blame on someone else, from wife to serpent. Adam even tries to blame God, since God put the woman in the garden with him. The blaming does not fool God, who delineates the consequences for all

the characters in the story, beginning with the serpent. Cursed and banned from being with other animals, the serpent will be forced to crawl on his belly. The punishment suggests that the serpent formerly had legs like other wild creatures, but will now be demeaned, forced to crawl and eat the dirt of the earth. No longer will the serpent be able to tempt the woman, for there will be an eternal enmity between the serpent’s offspring and those of the woman. The punishment meted out to the couple is described in verses just after the reading, including the pain of childbirth for the

enmity = EN-mih-tee (mutual hatred)

Pause and proclaim slowly.

Build energy as you read.

Say this last line in an informative tone.

For meditation and context:

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnz

Your tone throughout this reading is one of joy.

Blessed = BLES-uhd

blessed = blesd

Smile as you proclaim.

I will put **enmity** between you and the **woman**,
and between your **offspring** and hers;
he will strike at **your head**,
while you **strike** at **his heel**."

The **man** called his wife **Eve**,
because **she** became the mother of **all the living**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4 (1)

R. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;

His right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed
his justice.

He has remembered his kindness and
his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

READING II Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in **Christ**
with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavens,
as he chose us **in him, before** the foundation of the **world**,
to be holy and without blemish before him.

In love he destined us **for adoption** to himself
through **Jesus Christ**,
in accord with the **favor** of his will,
for the praise of the glory of his **grace**
that he granted **us** in the beloved. >>

woman, and being ruled by her husband. The punishment for the man is his toiling over land that is cursed—filled with thorns and thistles. And both of them are expelled from the garden.

This ancient story describes original relationships fractured by sin, and the ongoing consequences. Questions and answers, along with consequences of sin, are intended to draw readers into the story. The questions are addressed to everyone who hears the account: "Where are you?" "Why did you (you who hear this story) do such a thing?" Admission of guilt, accepting

the consequences, and hope for newness are part of our human story, beginning with this account from Genesis.

READING II It is appropriate that this reading from Ephesians be used in the liturgy, since its original use was likely liturgical, proclaimed when the nascent Christian communities gathered for worship or Baptism. Such blessings of God, called *berakah*, were hymns of extended praise in the Jewish tradition (for example, Psalms 41:13; 72:18, 19). The early Church adapted these praises, transform-

ing them by emphasizing God's salvific work in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 1:3-12). In this blessing, we praise God who has extended blessings to embrace all who are "in Christ," a shorthand phrase to refer to the baptized. Paul's use of "us" and "we" as recipients of God's saving blessings connects his own life with the community of believers.

The focus of the hymn is on blessings given through the myriad actions of God that reach through all times and places, as far as the heavens and begun before the foundation of the world. "Every spiritual

Take your time as you read. Articulate your words. You are giving praise to God!

Take your time with this well-loved Gospel passage. Articulate your words.

The angel speaks gently. Use vocal variety and eye contact to convey the dialogue.

Pause. Build energy with the angel's words.

In him we were **also** chosen,
destined in accord with the purpose of the One
who accomplishes all **things** according to the **intention**
of **his will**,
so that we **might exist for the praise of his glory**,
we who first hoped in Christ.

GOSPEL Luke 1:26–38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

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?**”

“blessing” is best understood as the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in each of the blessings. The first blessing is God's choosing of us, announced two times in the reading. Associated with God's choice or election in Christ is that of being destined in accord with God's purpose. Predestination occurs in other places in Paul's writings as well (for example, 1 Corinthians 2:7 and Romans 8:29–30), and has given rise to the notion of some people being predestined for salvation and others for damnation. Paul's view of predestination, however, is that blessing, not condem-

nation, has been God's plan from the beginning, a plan flowing from his love. The intention of choosing us is to make us holy so we may live as God's beloved adopted children, beloved as Christ himself is. Being chosen, or elected, by God is not based on any prior good deeds, but simply because of God's abiding love. The final words of the reading highlight the very purpose of our existence: that we who have hoped in Christ might praise God's glory. This liturgical hymn thus begins and ends with praise of God, as do all of our liturgical gatherings.

GOSPEL In the first reading we heard a story of the first acts of disobedience, followed by a proclamation of God's blessings given in love. Here in the Gospel we hear a contrasting story of perfect obedience and the fulfillment of God's promise of divine blessings, now bestowed on God's chosen one, the mother of Jesus. Her portrait is beautifully and skillfully drawn. She is a virgin named Mary, or Miriam, after her Jewish ancestor. All that she does and says in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel show her as a woman steeped in the Jewish tradition.