

# 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.** »

Take your time with this familiar narrative.  
Open slowly and deliberately to allow your  
listeners to savor the story as it progresses.

Emphasize the words that show the shift  
in the dialogue from God to Adam, Adam  
to God, God to Eve, and Eve to God.

It is not necessary to add a feeling of  
surprise to God’s questions. God already  
knows what they have done.

Pause slightly between God’s conversation  
with Adam and Eve and God’s punishment  
of the serpent. The focus is on the hostility  
between the offspring of the woman and  
the serpent.

### READING I

The Book of Genesis reflects theologically on the origin of things. Genesis 1–11, known as the “primeval history” (a time before history), draws on the received ancestral story, human experience, and intuition to explain nature and human reality. Following the account of God creating an essentially good creation (Genesis 1–2), Genesis 3 is situated in the garden and reflects on the origin of evil. In contrast to the prevailing pagan idea that evil is a metaphysical force or being, Genesis argues that evil comes through the moral actions of human beings.

In today’s reflection, God’s vision of the idyllic world of the garden (Genesis 2:15–25) is displaced by what has become a new human reality: life after sin. The narrative is filled with indications of a radical change: the man and woman hide themselves, they are afraid, they shift blame, and, most importantly, their cognizance of being naked rather than clothed indicates that they previously lacked self-awareness.

The rest of the primeval history in Genesis displays the depths and consequences of the evil unleashed by the man and the woman, but even at this early

stage, they face consequences. Having lost their innocence, they now become responsible for their actions, and God proceeds to dole out punishment. Today’s reading only includes the punishment of the serpent. The serpent, who earlier in Genesis was identified as the cleverest (*āṛûm* in Hebrew), is now the most cursed (*āṛûr* in Hebrew, translated here as “you shall be banned”). Its manner of self-propulsion, thought originally to have been walking on two feet, is debased such that the serpent now moves on its belly. The relationship the serpent has with human beings, the crown of

enmity = EN-mih-tee

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**.

For meditation and context:

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**.

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnz

Start your proclamation with a clear and  
compelling tone.

blessed = BLES-uhd

blessed = blesd

Highlight the words "destined" and "adoption"  
at the beginning of this sentence and the  
words "praise" and "grace" at the end.

beloved (noun) = bee-LUHV-uhd  
or buh-LUHV-uhd

God's creation, is now defined by enmity  
and hostility.

Skipping over the punishment for the  
woman and the man, today's reading  
concludes with the man (based on the  
Hebrew word *'ādām*, being the one created  
from the dirt, *'ādāmā*) naming his wife Eve  
(*hāvvah*). This name is a play on the verb "to  
live" (*hāyyah*). Thus, this "mother of all the  
living" is positively characterized, even if  
she and her husband have unleashed evil  
and set the stage for God's divine plan to  
respond to it.

#### READING II

Colossians and Ephesians  
are often studied together,  
and they have much in common. Both have  
questionable Pauline authorship, even  
though each may in fact come from the pen  
of an aging Paul. Both focus intensely on  
God's plan of salvation. However, whereas  
Colossians focuses on that plan through  
the role of Christ, Ephesians emphasizes  
the role of the Church, the body of Christ,  
in making the plan known.

Written to a mostly Gentile audience  
(circa AD 60–90), Ephesians follows the let-  
ter format. Today's reading comes from a

feature unique to Jewish letters: the bless-  
ing (Ephesians 1:3–14). It also possesses  
many features found in liturgical prayer,  
such as the use of synonyms and redun-  
dancy. Eight times in the overall blessing  
(and five times in today's reading), Christ is  
specifically identified as the one through  
whom God accomplishes the salvific plan,  
using such expressions as "in Christ"; "in  
him"; "through Jesus Christ"; and "in the  
beloved." Still, it is important to note that  
God (the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ")  
is the primary actor. Through his actions,  
God forms the identity of the community.

Christ is the “beloved.” Help listeners make this connection by calling attention to that word, followed by the word “him” that opens the final sentence.

Proclaim this beautiful narrative as you would a familiar tale that you’ve read many times but that never grows old. Take your time!

This line is not only part of the story but is also the starting point of our most famous Marian prayer. The angel’s words illustrate a powerful theology of grace, so stress that grace and the Lord’s presence.

Mary’s question shows her confusion and desire to understand God’s plan for her. Avoid glossing over these human sentiments and speak her response as deliberately as you do the rest of the reading.

They are a people who are blessed, chosen “to be holy and without blemish before him,” “destined . . . for adoption,” and have been granted God’s grace.

When we consider this passage against the backdrop of today’s first reading from Genesis, we can see that God’s choosing of the community “in him [Christ], before the foundation of the world” is the undoing of the evil unleashed in the garden. Through and in Christ, adoption restores the broken relationships, redemption is anticipated, and holiness and wholeness

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**.

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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?**” >>

are restored. It is the Church’s task to make that message known.

**GOSPEL** In today’s Gospel reading, we hear the story of the annunciation. In this familiar passage, several Lucan characteristics are featured. First, Luke creates a parallel of events between John the Baptist and Jesus. Second, Luke focuses on the fulfillment of God’s plan for salvation. Third, Luke’s account makes sense to a Hellenistic audience. And fourth, women play an important role in Luke.

As to the first and second characteristics, Luke 1—2 is a unique Lucan account populated by Jewish men and women awaiting God’s promised salvation. Among them are Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. The Gospel begins with an annunciation to Zechariah by Gabriel, announcing the promised salvation and the role of John in it (Luke 1:5–25). After visiting Zechariah, Gabriel then goes to Mary. If John will be great, then Jesus will be even greater. While Elizabeth has conceived a child in her old age (think of Sarah

Mary's "May it be done to me" gives us a model for our own response to God's word. Speak her final sentence with a bold voice and a stately pace.

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.

and Abraham), Mary will conceive a child without the aid of a father.

The third characteristic can be seen in the format of the reading, that of a birth announcement, which was well known in Hellenistic and Jewish circles. The births of famous persons were often preceded by a divine visitation (for example, Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, and Samuel). Such divine visitation was usually followed by fear, which led to reassurance and a message. In response to the objection, a sign was promised before the divine visitor departed, and then the message began to unfold.

Finally, the importance of women in Luke's Gospel is exemplified by Mary herself. Luke uses the annunciation to Mary to emphasize Mary's superior quality. She is a virgin who is betrothed (that is, already considered bound by marriage). The words of the angelic greeting—"Hail, full of grace!"—are rooted in the Greek word for grace (*charis*), of which the greeting (*chaire kecharitōmenē* in Greek) is primarily composed. Furthermore, her graced condition is justified because, as Gabriel notes, the Lord is with her. Her child is the fulfillment of God's plan: he will be the Son of the

Most High who will rule on David's throne over an eternal kingdom. Mary has already been described as graced; her words, "May it be done to me according to your word," confirm that the Lord will be with her in the form of her child. As the new Eve, Mary assumes her role in salvation history, cooperating with God to bring to life the salvation of the world, Jesus Christ. S.L.